Amazon Warrior as Musical Healer (Sojourner, April 1981)

Martha Thurber

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Amazon Warrior as Musical Healer

by Martha J. Thurber

Kay Gardner is a woman of many and diverse musical talents. Her first solo album, Mooncircles, came out in 1974, one of the very first women's music albums. One side was the combination of voice and guitar; the other was a marvelous blend of soothing instrumental compositions. Her second album, Emerging (1978) was more avant garde, more electronic, more experimental. Her latest work is Moods and Rituals (available only on cassette), a collection of flute solos aimed, Kay says, at people involved in the "new age lifestyle . . . the lifestyle of wholistic healing, natural fibres and foods, self-sufficient and simplified living," for whom music is an integral part of physical and spiritual soothing and healing.

Kay recently ventured from her isolated home in Stonington, Maine, (the Sea Gnomes Home) to do some fundraising in Boston for her latest project, A Rainbow Path. We talked about that project and other interests that have occupied Kay's time and energy over the past few years.

SOJOURNER: It's been quite some time since you appeared in Boston. What have you been doing?

GARDNER: I've been composing, and looking for conducting work and having no luck. I've been writing compositional and improvisational music. I do have three premieres coming up. One is in Cincinnati in March — it's called A Creed for Free Women, and the text is by Elsa Gidlow. That will be done with the Cincinnati Women's Chorus and Chamber Ensemble at a Midwest women's spirituality conference. In April my Seven Modal Improvisations is going to be premiered at the University of Maine. And I've written a short opera that's going to be premiered in Albuquerque by the Southwest Chamber Opera in May. It's based on a Gertrude Stein text — that's why my hair is so short. It's my first opera and I'll be conducting it, as well as an opera Icarus, by Joanne Forman, in the same performance.

I'll be in residence in the Southwest for about seven weeks; for five of those weeks I'll be teaching music and healing seminars at the Santa Fe College of Natural Medicine. I've been doing a lot of research on music and healing — that's the direction my music is going in.

SOJOURNER: You've been doing some touring as well?

Yes. I did about ten concerts in the fall and I hope to do a few more. Galaxia [Women's Enterprises, a women's recording company] has been helping me out on that and with the new New England Women's Symphony album which I'm very pleased with.

Galaxia did a beautiful job with that.

What happened with the Symphony?

It went broke. The Symphony was a wing and a prayer situation . . . I think it was a wonderful idea and we did some wonderful things. But after the first year it wasn't unique any more. The first year it was kind of "a thing," you know. I don't think the momentum kept going. Our best concert was the least attended — the first concert of the second season. After that we realized what our financial situation was . . . and then said we just couldn't continue.

When I realized how much money was owed, I went nuts! I just hate owing women money. They put all this energy into these projects and if they don't pay off it just seems unfair. So I was sitting in the bathtub one night and I thought, well, we've got tapes of all the concerts; let's pick out the best and put them on a record and use that as a fundraiser. I wrote to Galaxia because being Boston-based I thought they might be more interested than any other and they said — the first concert of the second season. After that we realized what our financial situation was . . . and then said we just couldn't continue.

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GARDNER
continued from page 18
women's recording company. They loved the idea. . . .
There's only one other album of women's orchestral music in the world, that
know of, and it's conducted by a man, and put out by a
male-run company. So this is a
first. And every piece of music
on the record has never been
recorded before. Women's music is rare enough; why rec­
cord something that's already
been recorded? And to get
Antonia Brucico's conducting
was great. A very large piece of
the profits from the album will
gonna pay off the Symphony's debt. I hope that
will be going to pay off the
Symphony's debt. I hope that
you can't... . We are asleep at
will be paid off and we can re­
within a couple of years that
project. The primary
ject for the fall of 1982.
operand the with local musi­
cards and local healers
next winter I will do all the
writing of it. It's a massive
undertaking, but I love this
project. It's the culmination
of many years of work. It'll have
been eight years since the con­
ception of it.
You've been involved with
women's music for a long
ime. What do you think is the
future of women's music, or, is
there a future for women's
music?
Not the way it was in the '70s. The '70s were basically a
call to arms in the women's
movement... . Some of the
artists are basically just doing the
same thing. We have to
move forward. We have to
take risks. Women's music in
the '70s reminds me of the
Tarot deck. The first card is
the fool: it shows this androg­
yous character with a head
way up in the air and a flower
in the hand, just about to walk
over a cliff. I felt that was how
we were in the last ten years.
The card that comes right after
that is the magician. That is
the person who knows the
tools, and how to use them,
and that's where I think we are
now... .
I'm thrilled to see that in­
strumental music is beginning
to be appreciated, because I'd
felt like I was single-handedly
fighting that battle for years.
Instrumental music is moving
in some ways. Your thoughts
are not directed by the
words, so they can go any­
where. And if the music is
truly inspired it can take you
to places in yourself that
you've never been before.
Are you now doing what you
want to be doing? Yes. Basically my first inter­
est is composing, writing beau­
tiful music, music that heals,
and doing all the research that
I have to do in order to do
that. I am changing all the
peripheral activities that are
involved in that. And running
the label... . It's become
more mellow than I was. I'm not
fighting anymore. I have al­
dreds felt like this all my life:
now I feel like I'm living it... . I'm an old Amazon
warrior. I have also turned 40.
That does it, turning 40. It
turns one's head around.
I'm an old Amazon
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And right now we need all the
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