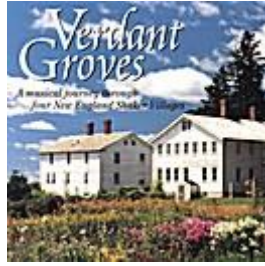


# Mp3 Debra Spencer, Shelley Phillips, Lars Johannesson - Verdant Groves



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Shaker music sung with flute and Celtic harp: recorded live at four New England Shaker Villages. 24 MP3 Songs FOLK: Traditional Folk, CLASSICAL: Traditional Details: Shaker music sung with flute and Celtic harp: recorded live at four New England Shaker Villages. All proceeds benefit the Community Music School of Santa Cruz. Recorded live at the Shaker village historic meeting houses. The school received a grant to do this recording. Here are Debra's impressions of the trip back East: Shaker Tour, Summer 97, by Debra Spencer On this recording tour I learned there is no such thing as silence. Even what we call silence is really the sound of air moving against the space we're in. Every room has its own silence. I know this because after each recording session Barry had to tape a few minutes of silence in that meeting house, so that he'd be able to splice it before after the songs we'd recorded there. No other silence would do except the silence of that room. Silence in these Shaker villages was hard to come by. We spent from 9 pm to about 3 am taping in Watervliet, our first village. The meeting house is as big empty as a gymnasium, with wood floor walls beautiful paned windows where we could watch first dusk gathering then night. Barry picked a spot in the center of the meeting house to set up the microphones, ran the cords through into the hallway so he could close the sliding doors. He likes to be able to hear only through the earphones not live, so he can make sure that what's getting on tape is good enough. He doesn't want to be distracted by the live performance. Many years ago the Watervliet Shakers sold their adjoining fields to the city of Albany. Now, across the busy highway from the meeting house, lies Albany airport. All day all night planes take off fly right over the building. The room had a lot of reverb at first we couldn't hear each other very well; we followed echoes instead of original sounds; we lagged behind or sped ahead, guessing. Then after awhile (we did some rehearsing when there were too many planes to

record) our ears became accustomed to the reverb it became clearer which was the sound which the echo how far apart they were. We started with the solemn song, an unaccompanied solo, easier to tape than a song involving all three of us. I stood in the center of the meeting hall waited for a quiet count of five to start singing. No sooner would I get one begin, when a plane would take off I'd have to stop. Or a big truck would roll by on the highway. Or a bus would come into the Shaker parking lot. After awhile it became clear that major repairs were going on at the airport, large machinery would start up from time to time. Then I'd have to stop wait. Then start again. Then stop. I'd get most of the way through the song hear the dull rumble of an airplane. The rumble would grow as the plane came down the runway, rising to a sort of low-pitched scream as the plane left the ground. It would pass directly overhead then its noise would recede into the distance. Then I would try again. When the fleet of helicopters began to hover nearby, we gave up took a break. I called the airport noise line to see if we could find out how long the helicopters intended to be there. The man said even if he knew, he wouldn't be able to tell me. So we had to wait a couple of hours until they went away. With just airplanes, trucks, buses to worry about, we recorded the two 10-verse songs the shorter ones. - And all the time planes kept taking off. The only unfortunate thing about Hancock Shaker Village, is that it's bisected by Route 20, a very busy two-lane highway that connects Pittsfield to the rest of the Berkshires. At night the traffic calms down considerably, but the meeting house, where we recorded, is so close to the road that it was very hard to get a clear three minutes for a take with no cars. Accordingly, Shelley had planned to record only three songs at Hancock: a solemn song for voice only, two flute pieces for Lars--one solo one with Shelley. Barry built his recording nest on the second floor. Lars warmed up Shelley I looked at the night sky. I thought I saw the faint haze of the Milky Way, but it had been so long since I'd seen it that I wasn't sure. Then we went in tried to record my song. The Hancock meeting house is about one-fourth the size of Watervliet's. It has benches where during the day an audience sat to listen to us. I stood in front of the benches sang my solemn song. It doesn't matter what you look like when you record, so I sang barefoot. I got to stand on floors made of trees grown, felled, milled, installed, hammered into place by Shakers. It's amazing how noisy a quiet place can be. We could hear the cars coming from far away, we'd wait silently while they passed by. I'd start my song, we'd hear another one, I'd stop wait. After awhile I thought I could feel the air in the meeting house quiver with approaching cars, even before they were audible. "At least there are no planes," Lars said. When we heard the airplane, later the helicopter, we had to take a break so we

could laugh. My song, Lars Shelley's march, took many takes. But Lars did his solo in one. He did a couple more just for insurance, but he'd hit it on the first, with no cars. When we finished it was 2 am we stood in the silent meeting house, too tired to move. Barry said, "I have a thought." Fearing it was some idea that would require us to record some more, I said, "Uh oh." We laughed. Lars said, "I thought I smelled something burning," we laughed even more. We were very tired. When we came out Shelley said she'd been watching the moon. "It had this alien cloud near it," she said. The Milky Way was clearly visible. We stood looking up at the sky for awhile, then we loaded the car. At Canterbury Shaker Village the meeting house is full of Shaker chairs benches. When we looked out at all the chairs benches as we were recording, it felt like an audience was there, the old Shakers back to hear the familiar songs. Canterbury is in the middle of Nowhere, New Hampshire, with just one country road running through it, so there were many fewer cars, no planes to speak of. That was a relief. We played our songs, Barry would issue from his back room with a pad of paper to give us notes on our performance, like a doctor with test results. Then once we were done with the three-person songs, I did the long ballad. Darryl Thompson, the Shaker expert who gave us the words, said this song hadn't been sung since Marguerite Frost, a Canterbury Shaker, died in 1971. I thought it might be eerie singing it in the meeting house after all that time, but the spirits sitting in the chairs benches felt very friendly. When we finished taping we went over to the Trustees' House opened a bottle of champagne. After we'd been drinking awhile Lars picked up a clothespin made it attack Barry, moving its jaws inching it closer to him through the air. Barry feigned terror. The clothespin stopped in its assault turned toward Jane Shelley moved its jaws in a laugh: "Ha! Ha! Ha!" It nibbled at the edges of Barry's sleeve then went straight for the collar. Barry pantomimed a scream (it was way after midnight), gave a few twitches, lay dead in his chair. The clothespin gloated preened itself. Jane Shelley went to bed once the champagne was gone, I called home. While I talked, Barry Lars perfected the clothespin game. Barry found a clothespin of his own, they found a pen drew faces teeth on the tops of the clothespins spent the whole ten minutes of my phone call attacking each other with them, making the clothespins' jaws work threateningly, almost falling off their chairs. When I tried to give Jim a brief description, Lars came over made his clothespin attack me. There was a lot of excitement at Enfield Shaker Village when we got there: the Great Stone Dwelling, an immense building that has changed hands many times over the years, had just come back into the hands of the people who run the Shaker Museum there. We were able to record in the building--the electricity had just been turned

back on. There was almost no furniture in the meeting room, things were very dusty (the floor felt gritty when I took off my shoes) but it was live very nice to sing in. Best of all, the stone walls were thick the road far away, when the windows were shuttered we couldn't hear many cars. This was the most sustained silence of any of the places we'd been. We seemed to get through our seven pieces, plus a piece Mary Ann Haagen sang, in record time--9:30 to 1 am. When we were all done Jane came in with the video camera said, "Well, how does it feel to be done taping?" She pointed the camera at Lars, Shelley me. Barry came in looking puzzled. "Taping?" he said. "Was I supposed to put blank tapes in? I've just been back there listening to my own tapes. Cream, Led Zeppelin . . ." I said, "Robert Plant sings Shaker tunes," Barry did a very good impression of Robert Plant singing Simple Gifts.

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