



## Walt and Pete in the Family Hour

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### THOMAS HAMPSON RECORDING OF WHITMAN SONGS

EMI Classics has recently released a CD recording of twenty-two Whitman songs by American and British composers. The songs are performed by the renowned baritone Thomas Hampson, accompanied by pianist Craig Rutenberg. Hampson, a great admirer of Whitman's work, began research into Whitman music in the early 1990s, eventually unearthing hundreds of songs in six different languages. The composers featured on this disc, entitled *To the Soul*, include Leonard Bernstein, Ned Rorem, Gerald Busby, Michael Tilson Thomas, Robert Strassburg, Paul Hindemith, Charles Ives, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Kurt Weill. Hampson offers a particularly moving rendition of the seldom-heard "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," by the African-American composer H. T. Burleigh. On the disc, Hampson also recites several Whitman poems.

### TREASURES OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Beginning May 1, 1997, the Library of Congress will offer a permanent exhibition of what it calls its "rarest and most significant items relating to America's past." Funded by a grant from Xerox Corporation, the exhibit marks the official reopening of the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building, which has been undergoing renovation since 1984. The exhibit features some 200 items, including Whitman's hand-corrected copy of "O Captain! My Captain!" Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; the Jefferson Building is at 10 First Street, S.E., Washington, D.C.

### WALT AND PETE IN THE FAMILY HOUR

On April 5, 1997, CBS-TV's "Doctor Quinn, Medicine Woman," a family show with a "TVG" (General Audience) rating which airs during prime time on Saturdays, concerned a fictitious visit by Walt Whitman to the Colorado town where the show's Dr. Micaela Quinn practices. According to the script, Whitman, following his stroke, has come west hoping to improve his health. He is offered a week's lodging by the owner of the town's hotel in exchange for a poetry reading. The hotel owner's enthusiasm is dampened, however, by information imparted by a male doctor who is a Harvard graduate. The doctor's roommate at college had a cousin who knew of Whitman's "peculiar" preference for "the company of men." At this news the photo of Whitman intended for display in the hotel gallery is removed, and the poetry reading cancelled.

As word spreads through the town, Dr. Quinn finds herself Whitman's sole supporter. (A character named Grace—a black woman raised in New Orleans where, she says, there were "all kinds"—in turn supports Dr. Quinn.) Hope-

ful of finding some cure for his disabled arm and leg, and eager to raise his spirits, the doctor encourages Walt to bring his “beloved” from Washington, D.C., to join him in the West. When he takes her advice, however, she is nonplussed when the “beloved” turns out to be Peter Doyle. Still, she offers the use of a room in her clinic when Pete is not allowed to stay at the hotel with Walt. The doctor continues her support despite her uneasiness about a love she considers “not natural,” and her fears for Walt’s friendship with her twelve-year-old son. When her appreciation of “Song of the Open Road” is altered by her new perception, her husband points out that the words are the same, as is the poet she has long admired. This—and proof that Walt has no designs on her son beyond encouraging his budding literary talents—leads her to arrange a reading to be given in an open field where all may attend. The program concludes with some half-dozen listeners as Whitman reads a medley of lines from various poems.

The story line suggests that the writer did some research, not only of Whitman’s 1879 western trip, which included a short stay in Colorado, but also of versions of such poems as “There Was A Child Went Forth” as they appeared prior to the 1892 edition. Most remarkable was the straightforward portrayal of the love between Walt and Pete, treatment of which was sensitive and sympathetic, though historically such same sex attachments probably did not call forth the kinds of reactions portrayed in the story (the townspeople mock Walt and Pete as “Nancy boys”). Inclusion of this subject, and in so sympathetic a manner, in a series that has been recognized for its contributions to family-style television should prove helpful to parents and teachers who may seek answers to those who would question their desire to introduce children to Whitman’s poems.

—*Joann P. Krieg*