

LUKAS FOSS

***Song of Anguish* (1953)**

***Elegy for Anne Frank* (1989)**

***Lammdeni* (1974)**

Adon Olam

ROBERT BEASER (b. 1954)

***The Heavenly Feast* (1994)**

Lukas Foss is regarded not only as a leading figure among 20th-century American composers, but as a major force on the American musical scene in general, having also earned distinction as a conductor, pianist and music director. While bearing his own individual imprint, his works reflect a highly personal eclecticism involving a wide range of styles, techniques and approaches, from Copland-style Americana to neoclassicism, from aleatoric and graphic to precisely notated music, from tonality to rigorous serial techniques, and from his own brand of minimalism to the so-called postmodern composite variety. In some of his later works, he combines experimental aspects with more traditional elements, exemplifying the tension between tradition and innovation that characterizes much of his output.

Foss emigrated from Germany to the United States with his parents at age 15. Following work at the Curtis Institute of Music, he studied composition with Hindemith at Yale and conducting with Koussevitzky at Tanglewood; he also regarded Aaron Copland as a mentor. Throughout his creative life, Lukas Foss has dedicated himself to championing new music and to introducing the public to a broader range of contemporary compositions. He pursued these efforts as music director of California's Ojai Festival, the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Milwaukee Symphony, and the Brooklyn Philharmonia (now the Brooklyn Philharmonic), where during his two-decade tenure he was especially hailed for his inventive programming. Artistically, he has always considered his American and Jewish roots far more important than his European origins; he has written a significant number of specifically Judaic or Judaically related pieces, four of which are heard on this Milken Archive disc.

Foss's haunting *Elegy for Anne Frank* is scored for piano and chamber orchestra and was commissioned for a concert at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine commemorating the 60th anniversary of Anne Frank's birth. The work is a tribute to the 13-year-old Jewish girl who, during the two years she lived in hiding in an Amsterdam attic with her own and one other family in an inevitably futile attempt to avoid deportation to the Nazi death camps, kept a diary that described their attempt to live a "normal" life and explored interpersonal relationships. Anne was eventually arrested and sent to Bergen-Belsen, where she perished of typhus shortly before the camp's liberation in 1945. With the publication of her

diary in 1947 (it has since been translated into more than 50 languages), and subsequent plays, books and films, Anne Frank became, in the words of Milken Archive Artistic Director Neil Levin, “the most palpable symbol of the collective German atrocity against European Jewry...and for the world at large, a symbol of the wider potential dangers of ethnic, religious, racial, or national bigotry, prejudice, and hatred.” Furthermore, no other individual has inspired as many Holocaust-related musical responses.

The three remaining Lukas Foss works on this disc are all heard in their world premiere recordings. ***Song of Anguish***, a cantata for baritone and orchestra, is based on the composer’s own selection of verses from the biblical book of Isaiah, which he adapted and freely reordered according to his own artistic concept. The text expresses Isaiah’s castigation of the total corruption, decadence and wickedness into which the Jewish people in the Kingdom of Judah had fallen, and addresses the people’s perversion of moral values, arrogance, and outright malevolence. In Foss’s reordering, these denunciations are punctuated by predictions and promises of Divine retribution against *all* perpetrators of evil—whether in Judah or other nations. Collectively, these verses portray a deep, penetrating anguish—the prophet’s, the people’s, and even God’s own emotional anguish. Premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the composer’s direction, this dramatic and vividly orchestrated work is cast as a single movement with six distinct sections.

Lammdeni, an aleatoric piece for mixed choir and a group of percussion or quasi-percussive-sounding instruments—all preferably amplified—to be selected by the conductor, was written in 1973 for an Israeli music festival. While serving as conductor of the Israel Radio Orchestra in Jerusalem, Foss learned of the existence of the two oldest-known Hebrew manuscript fragments containing musically notated prayer texts, or chants. Believed to date to the 12th century, these manuscripts constitute our oldest written or musically notated evidence of Judaic music of any type. Authorities have now confirmed the attribution of their inscription to a medieval convert to Judaism known as Obadiah the Proselyte. Foss was fascinated with the antiquity of these manuscripts, as well as with their historical and spiritual ramifications. Modern transcriptions inspired him to fashion a contemporary, highly personal, and imaginative work around them, rich in echo effects and fascinating rhythmic figurations that wind around the chant-like vocal parts.

The final Lukas Foss work on this CD is a majestic, reflective setting for tenor, choir and organ of ***Adon Olam***, which is most commonly used as a closing hymn for formal Sabbath and Holy Day services and is often seen as a musical “finale” suitable for extensive musical treatment. Foss’s only foray into Hebrew liturgical music, it was written for New York’s Park Avenue Synagogue as part of its program of commissioning new music to expand and enhance the repertoire for Jewish worship.

Boston-born composer **Robert Beaser**, who is often considered among the “new tonalist” composers, has had his works performed and commissioned by such major American orchestras and chamber groups as the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, and Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Scored for soprano soloist and

orchestra, his *Heavenly Feast* was commissioned by David Zinman and the Baltimore Symphony for soprano Dawn Upshaw. The composer has described the work as “essentially an interior monologue at the gravesite of Simone Weil,” the eccentric and enigmatic French philosopher, anti-Fascist activist, and mystic who in 1943, at the age of 34, starved herself to death in a sanitarium in England, under the delusion that the food she rejected could be provided instead to her comrades in the French Resistance behind enemy lines in German-occupied France. Born into a non-observant Parisian Jewish family, Weil was an avowed leftist. Throughout her life she seemed obsessed with purposeless asceticism, a desire for persecution, and self-affliction as vehicles toward social redemption and philosophical truth. Based on a poem by Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Beaser’s composition responds to its imagery and emotional content with simple tonal language and expressive instrumentation.

**THE MILKEN ARCHIVE OF AMERICAN JEWISH MUSIC on
NAXOS AMERICAN CLASSICS**

LUKAS FOSS (b. 1922)

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SONG OF ANGUISH (1953)

(Sung in English)

James Maddalena, baritone

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Gerard Schwarz, conductor

ELEGY FOR ANNE FRANK (1989)

Kevin McCutcheon, piano

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Christopher Wilkins, conductor

LAMMDENI (1974)

I. Barukh haggever

II. Va’ eda ma

III. Mi al har horev

Percussion Ensemble; Laudibus

Michael Brewer, conductor

ADON OLAM

Mark Wilde, tenor; Laudibus; Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, organ

Michael Brewer, conductor

ROBERT BEASER (b. 1954)

THE HEAVENLY FEAST (1994)

(Sung in English)

Constance Hauman, soprano

Seattle Symphony, Gerard Schwarz, conductor