Cover Art

WEISGALL

A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE FOUNDER

Dispersed over the centuries to all corners of the earth, the Jewish people absorbed elements of its host cultures while, miraculously, maintaining its own. As many Jews reconnected in America, escaping persecution and seeking to take part in a visionary democratic society, their experiences found voice in their music. The sacred and secular body of work that has developed over the three centuries since Jews first arrived on these shores provides a powerful means of expressing the multilayered saga of American Jewry.

While much of this music had become a vital force in American and world culture, even more music of specifically Jewish content had been created, perhaps performed, and then lost to current and future generations. Believing that there was a unique opportunity to rediscover, preserve and transmit the collective memory contained within this music, I founded the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music in 1990.

The passionate collaboration of many distinguished artists, ensembles and recording producers over the past fourteen years has created a vast repository of musical resources to educate, entertain and inspire people of all faiths and cultures. The Milken Archive of American Jewish Music is a living project; one that we hope will cultivate and nourish musicians and enthusiasts of this richly varied musical repertoire.

Lowell Milken

A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The quality, quantity, and amazing diversity of sacred as well as secular music written for or inspired by Jewish life in America is one of the least acknowledged achievements of modern Western culture. The time is ripe for a wider awareness and appreciation of these various repertoires—which may be designated appropriately as an aggregate "American Jewish music." The Milken Archive is a musical voyage of discovery encompassing more than 600 original pieces by some 200 composers—symphonies, operas, cantorial masterpieces, complete synagogue services, concertos, Yiddish theater, and folk and popular music. The music in the Archive—all born of the American Jewish experience or fashioned for uniquely American institutions—has been created by native American or immigrant composers. The repertoire is chosen by a panel of leading musical and Judaic authorities who have selected works based on or inspired by traditional Jewish melodies or modes, liturgical and life-cycle functions and celebrations, sacred texts, and Jewish history and secular literature—with intrinsic artistic value always of paramount consideration for each genre. These CDs will be supplemented later by rare historic reference recordings.

The Milken Archive is music of **AMERICA**—a part of American culture in all its diversity; it is **JEWISH**, as an expression of Jewish tradition and culture enhanced and enriched by the American environment; and perhaps above all, it is **MUSIC**—music that transcends its boundaries of origin and invites sharing, music that has the power to speak to all of us.

Neil W. Levin

Neil W. Levin is an internationally recognized scholar and authority on Jewish music history, a professor of Jewish music at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, music director of Schola Hebraeica, and author of various articles, books, and monographs on Jewish music.

About the Composer

Although he wrote a substantial body of music for a number of media, **HUGO WEISGALL** (1912–97) is probably best remembered as one of America's most important composers of opera and large-scale song cycles, reflecting his intense lifelong interest in both western and Judaic literature. "I am attracted by the verbal, I am sucked aside by words," he once said, "and I want to deal ideologically *and* musically with difficult problems." The literary merit of his compositions, their original vocal style, and their serious attention to musical and dramatic detail all mark a significant contribution to American music.

The scion of a highly cultured family that boasts several generations of cantors in the Bohemian-Austrian orbit (and the nephew of the illustrious Zionist leader and producer Meyer Weisgal), Weisgall lent his artistic gifts on many occasions to the expression of historical, literary, biblical, and liturgical Jewish themes and subjects. In a class by himself, he belongs among the highest ranks of the American musical establishment, but he also championed the perpetuation of authentic Jewish musical tradition and of the Central European cantorial legacy. Among serious American Jewish composers, his singularity extended even further to the practical realm. Not only was he fully conversant with the entire range of American *and* European synagogue choral repertoire, which he taught to cantorial students for more than forty years, but he knew the intricacies of the modal formulaic system of Ashkenazi liturgical rendition known as *nusaḥ hat'filla*, and he functioned as an authoritative *ba'al t'filla* (lay cantor or precentor) well into his retirement.

Weisgall was born in Eibenschitz (Ivancice), a town in Moravia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now the Czech Republic), where he claimed to have begun singing in a synagogue choir at the age of three or four. His father, Abba Yosef [Adolph Joseph] Weisgall (who added the second *l* to his name in America, though his brother Meyer did not), was both a cantor at the local synagogue and a classical lieder and light operatic singer. From childhood, Hugo Weisgall absorbed the Central European liturgical traditions and the western lieder and operatic canons from his father, whom he also accompanied on the piano. The family immigrated to America in 1920 and soon afterward settled in Baltimore, where Abba Yosef served for more than four decades at one of the city's oldest and most prestigious synagogues—Chizuk Amuno Congregation. From his earliest years in Baltimore, Hugo Weisgall became intimately involved

in the musical life of that congregation. For many years he conducted its choir; and he also organized and directed a mixed chorus, based there and known as the Chizuk Amuno Choral Society, which performed concert works as well and—with the esteemed cantor Jacob Barkin—issued one of the most artistic LP recordings of classic and contemporary cantorial-choral repertoire.

Apart from some consultations abroad (he went to Europe shortly before the Second World War hoping to study with Bartók, who was unwilling to take on further students), Weisgall received all of his formal education in America. He studied at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, and then intermittently with Roger Sessions. At the Curtis Institute he studied with Fritz Reiner and Rosario Scalero and earned diplomas in conducting and composition, but his variegated interests led him to pursue a doctorate in other academic areas, and in 1940 Johns Hopkins University awarded him a Ph.D. for his dissertation on primitivism in 17th-century German poetry.

Weisgall's operatic sensibilities and his gravitation to that medium were fueled not only by his natural love for the human singing voice but also by his inherent love of theater. That lifelong love affair dates to his youth. As a child of eleven, he once organized a "production" of a play he had stitched together himself about the "Knights of the Round Table," pressing into service the children in the neighborhood for the various roles. (To no one's surprise, the young Hugo played King Arthur.) Later, while pursuing his musical studies, he acted in small repertory theaters. From the time he began composing operas, he was always intensely involved in a working collaboration with his librettist.

During the Second World War, Weisgall served in the armed forces and for a time was an aide-de-camp to General George F. Patton. His fluency in languages eventually led to assignments of sensitive diplomatic responsibilities. While he was an assistant military attaché in London, and then a cultural attaché in postwar Prague, he conducted concerts by some of Europe's leading orchestras, in which he promoted American music and featured American works. He also managed to compose in those difficult surroundings. In London his discovery of an anthology of war poetry inspired his song cycle *Soldier Songs* (1944–46), considered his first important work. In an air-raid shelter in Brussels after the Battle of the Bulge, he began writing *The Dying Airmen*, to words that had been published anonymously but which Weisgall maintained was actually a Spanish Civil War work by W. H. Auden. And upon viewing the hospital conditions at Terezin, the former German-built ghetto and concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, he commenced music for the Wilfred Owen poem "Futility," about the earth's ability to regenerate itself but the impossibility of regenerating a lost human life.

Behind the scenes during the immediate postwar years, Weisgall quietly used his military-diplomatic position to help many refugees and German concentration camp survivors. Without the required approval of his superior officer (who later congratulated him secretly), and at the risk of serious reprimand or worse, he took it upon himself to order a delay in the sealing of certain Czech border areas so that as many people as possible would not be permanently trapped behind the communist lines once the iron curtain descended.

After the war, Weisgall declined several offers for permanent conducting posts in Europe. Following his return to the United States, he founded and directed the Chamber Society of Baltimore and the Hilltop Opera Company; directed the Baltimore Institute of Musical Arts; and taught at Johns Hopkins University

from 1951 until 1957—all the while continuing his work with synagogue choirs. But dearest to his heart was his forty-four-year involvement with the Jewish Theological Seminary. He established and stewarded the foremost curriculum in America for education and training in cantorial art. From its opening in 1952 until his own retirement in 1996, Weisgall was chairman of the faculty at the Seminary's Cantors Institute and Seminary College of Jewish Music (now the H. L. Miller Cantorial School). In that capacity he functioned as a de facto codirector of the school—especially vis-à-vis its musical (as opposed to Judaica) parameters. He devoted a major portion of his energies to that role, bringing both his broad worldview of Jewish music and his exacting western musical standards to bear upon the Seminary's approach to cantorial studies. He also taught graduate level composition and was the doctoral dissertation advisor for such important American composers as Herman Berlinski and Miriam Gideon. His legacy at the Seminary is permanently etched.

In 1961 he simultaneously became a professor of music at Queens College in New York, retiring in 1983 as Distinguished Professor. And he taught for thirteen years at The Juilliard School.

Apart from the music on this recording, many of Weisgall's other works were inspired by his strong sense of Jewish identity. His fifth mature opera, *Athaliah* (1964), on a libretto adapted from Racine's biblical tragedy, includes texts drawn from the Book of Psalms, and a synagogue chant is used as a cantus firmus toward the end. His next opera, *Nine Rivers from Jordan* (1968), deals with issues pertaining to the Holocaust, collective guilt, the collapse of the European order, Zionism and the State of Israel, and theological conceptions. That score, which drew upon the whole range of Weisgall's personal, musical, and religious experience, incorporates such divergent elements as a well-known Passover melody and his own mock-German song.

In *The Golden Peacock* (1980), a setting of seven mostly familiar Yiddish folksongs, Weisgall used the original melodies as starting points to flesh out a sophisticated art song cycle that presents a genuine Yiddish folk melos within a 20th-century frame of reference. The chromatic piano parts with inventive sonorities are derived from motivic details of the tunes; and the vocal lines are treated ingeniously in order to retain their basic substance, with subtle alterations and extended material in the context of contemporary musical vocabulary and expressionist dissonance. The work, which was recorded by soprano Judith Raskin, has been called a Jewish counterpart to Bartók's Hungarian songs and Benjamin Britten's English songs.

In an open-ended series of perhaps a dozen short chamber pieces that he called *Graven Images*, Weisgall used fragments of music he had written for the 1966 CBS documentary *Of Heaven and Earth*, which dealt with ancient artwork by Jewish artisans. Among the individual pieces are jaunty "Holiday Dances" that refer to Jewish festivals and are scored for a number of instrumental combinations. And one is a charming Stravinskian setting of Psalm 29, in Hebrew, for solo voice (or chorus) and piano.

Although he occasionally wrote liturgical settings when he first directed synagogue choirs in Baltimore, it was not until the 1980s that Weisgall was commissioned to write a complete formal synagogue service. That work, *Evening Liturgies*, is a Reform Friday evening (Sabbath eve) service according to the *Union Prayer Book*, scored for baritone cantor, mixed chorus, and organ. Prior to the premier of the entire work, two orchestrated

movements, under the title *Sacred Fragments*, were performed at an international conference in New York. Bernard Holland, in his review in *The New York Times*, observed: "Here, the love of soaring stentorian singing and sweeping string sound served to soften Weisgall's acid, penetrating harmonies." Another of his important Judaically related works is *Love's Wounded*, a setting of poetry by Yehuda Halevi (ca. 1075–1121) for baritone and orchestra, premiered by the Baltimore Symphony conducted by David Zinman.

Probably the greatest critical success and, on certain levels, the crowning achievement of Weisgall's artistic career came late in his life, with the New York City Opera's 1993 premiere of his tenth opera, *Esther*. Based on the biblical Book of Esther, whose narrative underlies the Jewish festival of Purim, it generated accolades unprecedented in Weisgall's experience. "The composer's triumph could not have been more complete," wrote *New York Times* critic Edward Rothstein; "its power is unmistakable." Another referred to it as the most important American opera in decades. *Opera News* magazine acknowledged that "the work's seriousness of purpose … won the 81-year-old composer nothing but admiration." "You would have thought that Verdi had risen from the dead," wrote Anthony Tommasini sometime later, also in *The New York Times*, describing the ovation for Weisgall at the premiere.

No proper consideration of Weisgall can ignore some of his operas outside the Judaic realm—especially *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1956), based on the Pirandello play. Probably more than any other, that work first catapulted him to international attention in the opera world. Among his other important operas are *The Tenor* (1950), based on Frank Wedekind's expressionist one-act play, *Der Kammersänger*; *The Stronger* (1952), written expressly for his Hilltop Opera Company and based on Strindberg's psychological monodrama; and *Purgatory* (1958) to William Butler Yeats's allegorical verse play, in which Weisgall adapted twelve-tone techniques for the first time. His instrumental works include orchestral pieces, a piano sonata, incidental music, chamber music, and several ballets.

Weisgall was an intellectual of broad, high-minded interests. He published articles on American Impressionist painting and on contemporary music and composers, and he lectured widely on Jewish and general musical topics. He was president of the American Music Center (1963–73) and of the League of Composers-ISCM, and he was a composer-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1966. Among his numerous prizes, awards, and honors were three Guggenheim fellowships, the Lifetime Achievement Award from Opera America (1994), the Gold Medal for music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1994), the William Schuman prize from Columbia University, the first award in the arts from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and several honorary doctorates. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1975, and he served as its president from 1990 until 1993. He also directed the inaugural term of the composer-in-residence program of Lyric Opera of Chicago (1988–97).

Projects on Weisgall's desk at the time of his death included the beginnings of a second set of settings of Yiddish folk melodies; operatic versions of two plays by Jean Anouilh, several scenes of which were sketched out to libretti by Charles Kondek, the librettist for *Esther*; and a new opera based on John Hersey's novel *The Wall*, about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (according to Kondek, they had almost finished a draft of the complete libretto), which was to have been produced by New York City Opera. He

was also sketching out a group of liturgical settings for the typical format in Conservative synagogues.

Weisgall's earlier style has been appraised as a fusion of nontonal neoclassicism with certain influences of the Second Viennese School of composers, such as Alban Berg, colored by the general opulence of that period. But his later music more closely approaches that Second Viennese School, especially its most lyrical aspects. Even at its most rigorous-sounding moments, however, it is generally more a matter of strident, even severe chromaticism than actual atonality—although Weisgall himself was never comfortable with such classifications.

In 1958 the eminent American composer George Rochberg described Weisgall's music as leaning "towards free tonality; he is never quite atonal." But nearly twenty years later Weisgall assessed his own approach from another perspective: "Generally my music is considered complex," he said. "It is texturally thick and multifarious; rhythmically disparate; and [it] has harmonic lines that move along on their own. It is what is *commonly called atonal*, but it is not nonmelodic."

Rochberg also astutely summarized Weisgall's basic artistic credo at that time: "Among American composers he is one of the few who remain heedless of the musical clichés which superficialize and debilitate American music. There is strength and hope in such an independent attitude." Weisgall remained steadfast to those principles for nearly forty years more. He never succumbed to popular tastes or the lure of wider acceptance; and he never strayed from his own artistic integrity.

—Neil W. Levin and Bruce Saylor

Bruce Saylor was Hugo Weisgall's longtime protégé and his most successful student, and he has written extensively about his mentor.

Program Notes

T'KIATOT: RITUALS FOR ROSH HASHANA

Composed in 1985, *T'kiatot: Rituals for Rosh Hashana*, one of Weisgall's few purely orchestral compositions, was given its premiere in New York City the following year. The work was commissioned by the 92nd Street YMHA, an important New York cultural institution that sponsored the Y Chamber Symphony. For more than ten years, beginning in 1977, that orchestra, conducted by Gerard Schwarz, its founder, premiered a number of new works, including this one, which Weisgall dedicated to the memory of his parents.

T'kiatot is not, however, absolute music. And for all its purely instrumental makeup, it may be one of Weisgall's most manifestly Jewish pieces on a religious plane. The Judaic aspect does not apply so much to the overall sonority or style, which conform rigorously to the abstract, atonal affinities Weisgall shared with Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern—his musical and aesthetic models from the so-called Second Viennese School. Rather, its Judaic connection derives from its framing structural idea, which is based on a major section of the Rosh Hashana liturgy; from its integral absorption of a canonized Ashkenazi Rosh Hashana synagogue tune of medieval origin into the very fabric of the musical flow; and from its introduction of the ancient Temple-era instrument, the shofar, which, though used in antiquity for a variety of both religious and secular (including military) occasions, is today most emblematic of the High Holy Days. The shofar functions in *T'kiatot* as a "placing" and punctuating element, sonically as well as motivically.

The title, *T'kiatot*, refers to a central tripartite section of the Rosh Hashana *mussaf* liturgy, which this music expresses and interprets instrumentally according to its

evocations for the composer. (*T'ki'atot* is the presumed plural of the Aramaic *t'ki'ata*, the term signifying each of those three parts.) *Mussaf* (lit., additional service) is the required service appended to the morning service on Sabbaths, Festivals, and High Holy Days, originating from—and reflecting—the "additional sacrifice" required in antiquity after the morning sacrificial ritual in the Temple in Jerusalem on those occasions (i.e., in addition to the usual weekday service). The term *mussaf*, however, can be misleading, since it is not optional or "extra" in that sense. For all practical purposes, it amounts to an integral extension of those morning services. Especially on the High Holy Days, the *mussaf* contains many poetic and dramatic texts that are unique to it. Over the centuries, the Rosh Hashana *mussaf* liturgy in the Ashkenazi rite has acquired a rich musical tradition specific to it—a number of melodies as well as particular modal formulas and constructions (*the nusaḥ hat'filla*) that apply exclusively to that service. Moreover, the *mussaf* for Rosh Hashana (as for Yom Kippur and the Three Festivals) contains some of the canonized seasonal leitmotifs known as *missinai* tunes, which date to the Middle Ages and are universal throughout Ashkenazi practice. The one for the *t'ki'atot* section, for the introductory text—*aleinu l'shabbe'aḥ la'adon hakol* (We adore the Lord of all …)—serves as a binding element in this orchestral work. It is believed to date at least to the 12th century.

The *t'ki'atot* section of the liturgy comprises three divisions: *malkhuyyot* (Divine sovereignty); *zikhronot* (remembrance); and *shofarot* (trumpet-like or shofar sounds heralding Divine revelation and fulfillment of the Divine promise for ultimate messianic redemption and liberation). Each division concerns and illustrates one of the three central theological themes of Rosh Hashana: 1) God's absolute Kingship of the universe (*malkhuyyot*) and the ramifications of that supreme authority, in connection with which Rosh Hashana is also known as *yom hadin*—the Day of Judgment; 2) God as the Divine recorder of all acts and deeds (*zikhronot*), who therefore remembers all promises and covenants, in connection with which Rosh Hashana is known as *yom hazikaron*—the Day of Remembrance; and 3) God as the Revealer of Himself—through His Teaching, the Torah, and ultimately through Israel's redemption from exile and its return to Zion, as well as the redemption of all humanity. In this connection Rosh Hashana is known by yet a third name: *yom t'ru'a*—the Day of the Shofar Blasts, which heralded God's revelation on Mount Sinai when the Torah was given to the people through Moses, and which will also herald the ultimate redemption.

In modern contexts these three themes can translate to God as the primeval source of all existence itself—i.e., God as Creator of the universe and everything in it, and of nature itself; God in terms of history, and in Israel's collective memory; and God the ultimate Revealer of truth and wisdom.

Each of these three liturgical divisions contains ten biblical quotations that pertain to and support its theme: three from the Torah followed by three from Psalms and then three from the Prophets, concluding with yet another from the Torah. This ritual and order is traceable at least to the 2nd century C.E., since it is mentioned in the Mishna (*Rosh Hashana* iv, 5–6), which dates to that period. At the conclusion of each division, the shofar is sounded according to a prescribed set of articulations, or "shofar blasts." This practice, too, is cited in that same 2nd-century Mishna.

Each of the ten sets of biblical quotations is also preceded by a prologue and followed by a prayer and its related benediction. The insertion of these texts is attributed to the 3rd-century scholar Rav, who founded the Sura academy in Babylonia.

The great medieval sage and scholar Moses Maimonides interpreted the shofar blasts on Rosh Hashana (which also occur at other points in the service) as proclaiming: "You who are asleep, awaken! Search your deeds and repent! You who indulge all year in trifles, examine your souls and alter your ways. Let each one renounce his evil course."

The composer provided the following notes in the program booklet at the premiere:

> The [*aleinu*] melody begins with a descending major triad followed by an upward octave leap [continuing back downward—initially in stepwise motion]. I have used this motive in my first movement, which is an extended and generally slow fantasia. At the end of this movement, the shofar is sounded very far offstage.
>
> The fantasia is characterized by majestic dotted rhythms; juxtapositions of the separate orchestral choirs, with special emphasis on the brass; and many statements of the triadic, diatonic synagogue motive [the *missinai aleinu* tune] by the solo French horn … accompanied by dissonant harmonies in the brass. Additional musical material includes elaborate, cantillation-like figuration and rapid repeated notes, recalling shofar calls. [These are notated in Weisgall's preface to the score.]

The second movement is basically a scherzo, which brings an optimistic mood to the remembrance theme. The third and final movement is built largely on motifs that are based on the various prescribed shofar blasts, or "calls":

> They are sounded in turn first by all the brass instruments, and then by the woodwinds and the strings. In this movement, the shofar is made part of the orchestral fabric of the score, and is sounded, still offstage, but [this time] very close to the audience.

Weisgall presented the shofar calls here in a different order from the prescribed one, but as in the synagogue service, the movement concludes with the *t'ki'a g'dola*—the long, sustained shofar blast, while the orchestral music grows slower and softer.

—Neil W. Levin

PSALM OF THE DISTANT DOVE

In Weisgall's last years, his work dealt increasingly with Jewish life and Jewish subjects and issues. His last opera, *Esther*, concerned a biblical subject; his last choral work was a large-scale sacred service; and his last long song cycle was *Psalm of the Distant Dove: Canticle in Homage to Sephardi Culture*. This was commissioned by the Friends of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, where it was premiered in 1992. Raymond P. Scheindlin, a professor there of medieval Hebrew literature and one of the foremost authorities on the subject (as well as on Arabic poetry), selected and translated the poetry; and his wife, mezzo-soprano Janice Meyerson, sang in that performance, with Brian Zeger at the piano.

The literary and religious issue of *Psalm of the Distant Dove* is the complicated, age-old relationship between God and His loving but suffering people Israel, poetically represented here by the image of the dove. Throughout Mediterranean literature—and especially Arabic poetry—doves are associated with lovers. They do not abandon their life partners. Weisgall's cycle alternates three short selections—which he calls preludes—from the biblical Song of Songs and from Midrash Raba (rabbinic commentaries on the Holy

Scriptures, often by way of allegory and metaphor, dating to the 5th–6th centuries C.E.) with poetry from the so-called Golden Age of Spanish Jewry in the era of Moslem rule on the Iberian Peninsula. That poetry is drawn from verse by three poets: Shmuel Ha'Naggid [Ismail ibn Nagrela, ca. 993–1055], statesman and leader of Spanish Jewry, military commander, vizier of Granada, and poet and Hebraic scholar; Yehuda [Judah] Halevi, probably the most widely recognized and familiar Hebrew poet and philosopher from that era; and an anonymous poet.

Specific literary connections lead the listener from one section of the cycle to the next, and it concludes with aching cries for the redemption of Israel, as the poet painfully recalls the more joyful passing of seasons from the first prelude from Song of Songs. In the prelude and its pendant excerpt from Midrash Raba 1:15, for example, Weisgall symbolizes the joy of friends or lovers—or the steadfast loyalty God reserves for His "mate" Israel—with rearranged fourth chords that yield quasi-diatonic tonal areas. By contrast, the bittersweet, biting harmonies of the spring song, "Days of Cold Are Past"; the plaint of the injured lover, "Distant Dove"; and the prelude from Midrash Raba, "Birds Struggle in the Hand of the Slaughterer," owe more to the type of half-step intervallic units found in *Esther*. There seems to be an overall harmonic motion from open, optimistic, even Coplandesque chords and melodies to more craggy, dissonant structures toward the end. The final song concludes with a very dissonant seven-note chord, which is a denser version of the one heard at the opening of the cycle ("My Lover Called …").

Two thirds of the way into the work, there is a solo piano "Elegy," in three intimate, spare melodic voices, subtitled "In Memoriam W[illiam] S[chuman]. February 15th, 1992" in tribute to a colleague and one of the most significant 20th-century American composers. (This marked the last in a years-long series of short piano pieces that Weisgall composed upon the deaths of friends: Sessions, Randolph Rothschild, and others.) In fact, the entire cycle exhibits a concentrated, rather austere style of piano writing that avoids sumptuous pianistic sonorities and coloristic exploitation of the pedal. This, together with deliberate avoidance of the extreme registers on the piano, serves the composer's focus on the vocal line and the sternness of the message contained in the aggregate text.

—Bruce Saylor

[Editor's Note: The final song is excerpted from an anonymous Sephardi dirge or elegy (*kina*) traditionally sung on *Tisha Ba'av*—the ninth of the Hebrew month of *av*—which commemorates the destruction of both ancient Temples in Jerusalem in 566 B.C.E. and 72 C.E. and also, for Sephardi Jewry, the expulsion from Spain in 1492. In fact, this poem, *borei ad ana*, is one of the best known of all the Sephardi *kinot*. Its acrostic spells out the name *Binyamin* (Benjamin), presumably the anonymous unidentified poet. The poem appears to have been written with specific reference to the wave of Christian persecutions against Jews in Spain between 1391 and 1412. It contains various biblical references and quotations, and its original text also contained a reference to the Christian concept of the Trinity: "The worshippers of three gods—father, son, and spirit …" That passage was later modified, either by outside censors or by Jewish authorities, to read "Cruel aliens [strangers] weakened her …" There are various modifications of that line in extant compilations. —N.W.L.]

FOUR CHORAL ETUDES

Four Choral Etudes comprises four a cappella SATB settings of well-known Hebrew texts. These pieces were written individually between 1935 and 1956 and were revised between 1950 and 1960 and then published under the present collective title.

The earliest piece is a setting of a passage from the liturgy, *yihyu l'ratzon* (May the words of my mouth…). [Editor's note: These words are recited at the conclusion of the silently said prayers known as the *sh'mone esrei* (the eighteen benedictions originally contained in the unabbreviated, i.e., weekday, version of this supplicatory core section of the service), or as the *amida* (lit., "standing," since these benedictions must be recited in that posture). The overall mood of the text is akin to a summary meditation—as a coda to the preceding liturgy—asking that the set of prayers just communicated to God, both as quietly verbalized utterances and as meditations "of the heart," be acceptable to Him. The tempo and spirit here correspond to the feeling of personal, private communion and communication evoked by the text. —N.W.L.]

Yihyu l'ratzon begins in F minor, but after only three beats the choral voice-leading yields surprising chord changes. Lyrical, verselike phrases are unfolded in tiny intervallic units: falling or rising seconds or Weisgall's favorite falling thirds.

Faster tempi are attached to the other three settings. All feature diatonic, folklike tunes in the soprano lines, accompanied by swiftly moving chromatic harmonies in the lower voices. *Hodu ladonai* (Psalm 118:1–4), is an expression of praise for God that forms part of the *hallel* liturgy recited on Festivals and other festive occasions. This piece derives its Stravinskian energy from the rhythms inherent in the Hebrew. This, together with the quicksilver harmonic changes, gives the pulsating semiquaver accents an almost percussive quality.

The melody of *B'tzet yisrael* (Psalm 114:1–8, also excerpted from the *hallel* liturgy) evokes a vaguely Near Eastern folksong flavor, although it is original. The jaunty tune is harmonized differently upon successive repetitions. As in the *Hodu ladonai*, Weisgall has built the ritardando into the piece by writing it out in the rhythmic notation. The complex harmonies are streamlined at the conclusion.

The final piece, *Ki lo na'e* (beautiful praise befits the Lord), addresses one of the hymns traditionally sung by Ashkenazi Jews at the conclusion of the Passover seder—the elaborate family home ritual conducted at the table before and after the festive evening meal on the first two nights of that weeklong Festival. [*Editor's note:* This poem is from an anonymous medieval source and is known to have been appended to the Ashkenazi seder ritual as early as the 13th century. It is based on a passage in the Midrash that offers commentary on a verse from Psalms (74:16). Like other seder hymn texts, it has acquired many distinct tunes over the centuries. —N.W.L.] The tune here was a favorite version at Weisgall family seders. While preserving its strophic repetitions, Weisgall has altered the quirky tune for this elaborate concert work, radically supercharging the underlying harmonies and infusing the choral textures with imitation and with motivic development in the three lower voices.

Although these four texts are all from the liturgy, these pieces are not intended for functional liturgical use. The sheer pace at which the moving parts fly, the

chromatic nature of the harmonic language, and the registral and dynamic vocal demands place *Four Choral Etudes* firmly in a concert context. Their considerable if richly rewarding musical and choral challenges surely deserve the title *Etudes*—"studies"—for a virtuoso ensemble.

—Bruce Saylor

A GARDEN EASTWARD

A Garden Eastward, written between August and November 1952, is subtitled *Cantata for High Voice and Orchestra*. At its 1953 premiere, however, sung by Brenda Lewis with the Baltimore Symphony conducted by Massimo Freccia, the work was subtitled *Three Symphonic Songs*. Indeed its structure of three contrasting movements—Fantasia, Scherzo, and Free Variations—qualify it as the closest thing to a symphony for voice and orchestra among all of Weisgall's works. Certainly it is one of his most rhapsodic orchestral conceptions, and this composer of so much craggy, chromatic music remarked more than once that he thought it his "most beautiful" piece.

A Garden Eastward is a setting of Milton Feist's English versions of medieval poetry by the great Spanish Hebrew poet and philosopher Moses ben Jacob Ibn Ezra [a.k.a. Abu Harun; ca. 1055–1135]. The Fantasia opens with two spare intertwining strands of stratospherically high pianissimo counterpoint for the violins, whose tonal and rhythmic vagueness portray the poet's dreamlike reverie on how the wonders of the created universe declare the Eternal One's greatness (Ibn Ezra's poem is a visionary meditation on Psalm 8:4). Weisgall's free melodic lines are lyrical but nonrepetitive, constructed from small melodic or intervallic cells. Eventually the enigmatic chromaticism blazes out into more diatonic vocal melody, polytonally superimposed upon orchestral chords at the words "Yonder shines the sun!" The reverie slowly fades into mists of sumptuous open harmonies as the movement closes.

The scherzo became Weisgall's favorite form early on in his compositions. Its brisk exciting pace, its inherent capacity for irregular regroupings of beats and measures, and its formal adaptability made it an indispensable organizing technique for sections of operas, vocal chamber works, and orchestral pieces. Weisgall's reading of Ibn Ezra's vision of a luxurious Moorish garden in Moslem Spain (or is it the Garden of Eden or the backdrop to the Song of Songs?) is vigorous and almost brash, as if the mock anger of the opening words, "Call the man traitor," never settles into rapture.

The concluding Free Variations are based on a traditional German Ashkenazi synagogue melody Weisgall's father had known and sung at his pulpit in Moravia, which was ingrained in Central European liturgical repertoires. (In 1950 it was published in the privately issued *Shirei hayyim ve'emuna; Songs of Life and Faith*.) The tune is one of many that were known in western and Central Europe for the text *adon olam*, a majestic hymn of praise for God. The poem is most commonly sung at the conclusion of the *mussaf* service on Sabbaths, High Holy Days, and Festivals and at the conclusion of evening services on those occasions. (It also occurs within the weekday morning liturgy, but it would not normally be sung to a tune of this type.) Weisgall's recollection was that this particular melody was reserved in his father's tradition for the evening services on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The solo trumpet hints at the tune's melodic content in a chorale-like and highly dissonant brass introduction.

The soprano then intones the theme, accompanied by flowing, nontonal lines drawn from fragments of the original melody. These ever-present fragments, which vary and combine with new material in the orchestra and in the soloist's cantillation-like lines, correspond to the poet's words of ancient wisdom that endlessly adorn and inspire him in old age as he "scales the heights" toward eternity. Characteristically for Weisgall, this ethereal work ends in a kind of cadential, "consonant" resolution.

If the synagogue tune in the last movement seems to disappear as the movement progresses, that is in the long tradition of the great variations of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and others, in which the theme is a point of departure for new invention that assumes the foreground. Rarely performed but admired by cognoscenti, *A Garden Eastward* stands next to other great works of this genre by Berlioz, Mahler, Ravel, Weisgall's teacher Roger Sessions, and his student Dominick Argento.

—Bruce Saylor

Texts

PSALM OF THE DISTANT DOVE

A Canticle in Homage to Sephardi Culture

Sung in English

PRELUDE : MY LOVER CALLED

Song of Songs 2:10

My lover called: rise up my love,
rise up my love and come with me.
Rise up my love and come with me.
The rains have passed, the trees are in bud,
the doves have come again, the doves have come again!

DAYS OF COLD ARE PAST

Shmuel Hannagid

Days of cold are past,
and spring has buried winter's rain.
Doves are sighted in the land,
flocking to every bough.

O friends, be true.
Come quickly, do not fail a friend.
Come into my garden:
there pluck the rose.

There, amid the buds and birds
that flock to sing the summer's praise,
drink with me,
drink with me
wine, red as the blush on lovers' cheeks,
wine, red as the tears for friends that are gone.

THE DOVE KNOWS HER MATE
Midrash Raba, Song of Songs 1:15

The dove knows her mate and never changes him for another.
Israel knows God as her mate forever.

DISTANT DOVE
Yehuda Halevi

Distant dove wandered to a wood,
stumbled there and lay lame,
flitted, flailed, and flustered,
circling her love's head.

Her lover hurt her, left her;
she might have died.
She swore she'd never breathe his name again—
But in her heart it burned like fire.

Why so hostile to her?
Her mouth is ever open to your rain.
She keeps her faith, does not despair.
Whether in Your name her lot is shame or glory.
Come God now, and come not softly
but raging mid storms and wild flames.

ELEGY
In memoriam W. S., Feb. 15, 1992
Solo piano

PRELUDE: BIRDS STRUGGLE
Midrash Raba, Song of Songs 1:15

Birds struggle in the hands of the slaughterer,
but the dove puts out its neck to be slaughtered.
Like Israel, as it is written for your sake.
We are slaughtered all the day.

AVI, AVI (My Father, My Father)
Anonymous

O God, how long will You leave Your dove,
will You leave Your dove in the trap, in the snare—
there to remain far from her young,
crying, "My father, my father!"

Your dove wandered away from her nest
in the frost of the night, in the heat of the day.
She shudders to think of the steel of the sword, of the lion's fang.
You left her, God, in the hands of the beast.
He parted her neck bone; he fed on her throat.

Summers and winters have come and gone.
I bend to his yoke.
If only she could have the eagle's wing
to fly over mountains, to soar over hills,
to come with her love to his chamber alone,
I would forget my pain.

Texts compiled and translated: Raymond P. Scheindlin

FOUR CHORAL ETUDES
Sung in Hebrew

YIHYU L'RATZON
Psalm 19:14
May the words of my mouth
and the prayer of my heart
be acceptable to You,
O Lord, my rock and redeemer. Amen.

HODU LADONAI

Psalm 118:1–4

Praise the Lord, for He is good,
His steadfast love is eternal.
Let Israel declare,
"His steadfast love is eternal."
Let the house of Aaron declare,
"His steadfast love is eternal."
Let those who fear the Lord declare,
"His steadfast love is eternal."

B'TZET YISRAEL

Psalm 114:1–8

When Israel went forth from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,
Judah became His holy one,
Israel, His dominion.
The sea saw them and fled,
Jordan ran backward,
mountains skipped like rams,
hills like sheep.
What alarmed you, O sea, that you fled,
Jordan, that you ran backward,
mountains, that you skipped like rams,
hills, like sheep?
Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turned the rock into a pool of water,
the flinty rock into a fountain.

Translations: JPS Tanakh 1999

KI LO NA'E

Passover Seder Hymn

Beautiful praise befits the Lord,
Mighty in His kingship, justly chosen.
His followers sing: You, O Lord,
You alone reign in Your majestic kingdom.
Beautiful praise befits the Lord.

He is known for His glorious rule:
the faithful sing to Him: You, O Lord,
You alone reign in Your majestic kingdom.
Beautiful praise befits the Lord.

Perfect in His kingship, justly strong,
His angels sing to Him: You, O Lord,
You alone reign in Your majestic kingdom.
Beautiful praise befits the Lord.

Alone He reigns, in righteous power,
His scholars sing to Him: You, O Lord,
You alone reign in Your majestic kingdom.
Beautiful praise befits the Lord.

He commands in His kingdom, revered by all,
those near Him sing: You, O Lord,
You alone reign in Your majestic kingdom.
Beautiful praise befits the Lord.

Translation: Jeremy Hyman,
from The Diaspora Haggadah,
Yaniv Enterprises, Tel Aviv, 1988

A GARDEN EASTWARD

Sung in English
Texts: Moses Ibn Ezra

FANTASIA

My dreams rouse me
That I may behold Thee in visions.
Before mine inmost sight
They display Thy majesty.

They teach me to tell of Thy wonders
Each time I look to the heavens
The work that Thy fingers have wrought.
The circling spheres take their destined course
That spins them round as does the potter's
turning wheel.
Better than lips, their way to tell Thy glory.
In their midst the earth hangs unmoved,
Held fast by the cords of Thy love.
Yonder shines the potent sun!
With light to spare, it endows the moon.
The stars unfold in a blossoming garden.
Through such as these we come to know
How deep Thy plan.

SCHERZO

Call the man traitor who rejects
The discourse of the nightingale
Proclaiming from his branch,
"Drink deep this time of roses
Turn from the way of the heavy in spirit."

We came on gardens of myrtle,
And there we rested, carefree, in their shade.
Then the trees of the garden began to rustle,
And to our ears there came
The clamor of many birds.

Behold, the cloud gives suck to the garden
And beats down its furrows of fine dust.
So do the mouths of the blossoms smile
While the eyes of heaven are weeping.

A woman's face, a garden, and a cup of wine,
The cry of birds, the murmur of flowing waters,
Such things are balm to desire, a joy to the
careworn,
A song to the wanderer,
Healing to the sick, and wealth to the poor.

FREE VARIATIONS

I have chosen as my portion
The wisdom of those who passed before us,
And their words are a balm for the pangs of my
grief.
With them I take sweet counsel
Because they are the treasure of the faithful.

Floating within the sea of their deep thoughts,
I gather pearls for the adornment of my throat.
Mine eyes and my heart shall find delight in them.
My lips shall make response to them in joy.
They brighten mine eyes, and are a song in my
ears.
Their flavor is honey in my mouth;
Like cinnamon, their fragrance in my nostrils.

Through them, through them I scale the heights.
They are my glory!
Therefore I mediate upon them all the days I live.
From them flow the ever living waters.

Translation: Milton Feist

About the Performers

Founded in 1903 by violinist-conductor Harry West, the **SEATTLE SYMPHONY** is the oldest and largest cultural institution in the Pacific Northwest. Recognized for its bold and innovative programming, it is also one of the world's most recorded orchestras, with more than eighty discs and ten Grammy nominations to its credit. In addition to its regular concerts, the Seattle Symphony presents a broad spectrum of other series, including Basically Baroque, Light Classics, Seattle Pops, Discover Music!, Tiny Tots, Distinguished Artists, and Music of Our Time. Gerard Schwarz, music director since 1985, has brought the orchestra to new international acclaim. It now makes its home in Benaroya Hall, which was inaugurated in 1998 and has been praised for its architectural and acoustical beauty.

GERARD SCHWARZ, one of the leading present-day American conducters, was born in Weehawken, New Jersey, in 1947. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at The Juilliard School, during which time he also played with the American Brass Quintet and then joined the New York Philharmonic, succeeding his former teacher, William Vacchiano, as co–principal trumpet.

Increasingly attracted to conducting, he resigned from the Philharmonic in 1977 to pursue a full-time podium career. In 1977 he cofounded the New York Chamber Symphony (originally the "Y" Chamber Symphony), serving as its music director for twenty-five seasons. From 1978 to 1985 he was music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and in 1981 he established the Music Today contemporary music series in New York, serving as its music director until 1989. In 1982, he became director of Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, and in 2002 he became its emeritus conductor.

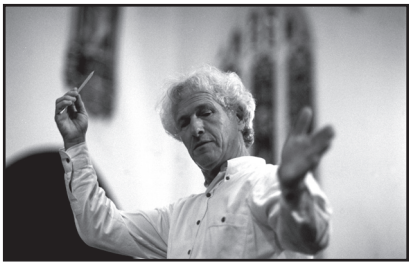
In 1983 Schwarz was appointed music adviser of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, and he was named principal conductor the following year, and music director in1985. In 2001 he also became music director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, one of the world's oldest orchestras. He made his Seattle Opera debut in 1986 conducting Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and since then he has led performances with the San Francisco Opera, the Juilliard Opera Theater, and St. Petersburg's Kirov Opera.

His many honors include the Ditson Conductors Award from Columbia University, and honorary doctorates from The Juilliard School, Fairleigh Dickinson University, the University of Puget Sound, and Seattle University. In 2000 he was made an honorary fellow of John Moores University in Liverpool, and in 2002 he received the ASCAP award for his outstanding contribution to American contemporary music. Schwarz was a founding member of Music of Remembrance, an organization dedicated to remembering Holocaust victim musicians.

Soprano **ANA MARÍA MARTÍNEZ** was born in Puerto Rico, daughter of the opera singer Evangelína Colón, from whom she had her earliest lessons. She studied at The Juilliard School in New York, graduating in 1993. Her breakthrough came two years later as a prizewinner at Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition, and in 1996 she joined the Spanish tenor for concert appearances in Madrid, Palm Beach, and Buenos Aires. Her critically acclaimed debut with the Washington Opera came in 1997 as Soleá in Penella's *El Gato Montés*. It was followed by a series of triumphant debuts at leading European and American houses. Martínez has sung with the Vienna State Opera, the Washington Opera, the Deutsche Oper, and the Houston Grand Opera, among others. She was featured in the world premiere tour and recording of Philip Glass's opera *La Belle et la Bête*, and she created the role of the Mother in the world premiere of Menotti's *The Singing Child* at the Spoleto Festival U.S.A. Her orchestral engagements have included concerts with Andrea Bocelli and Plácido Domingo. On recordings, she can also be heard in Bacalov's *Misa Tango* under Myung Whun-Chung; Philip Glass's Symphony No. 5 under Dennis Russell Davies; the Houston Grand Opera production of Bright Sheng's *The Song of Majnun*; and opposite Domingo in Albéniz's opera *Merlin*.

Pianist **KRISTIN OKERLUND** studied at the University of Illinois and the conservatories of St. Louis and Vienna. Since 1993 she has been a répétiteur at the Vienna State Opera, working with conductors including Sir Georg Solti, Zubin Mehta, Giuseppe Sinopoli, and Christoph von Dohnányi. Okerlund has appeared in solo and chamber music recitals in the United States, Russia, Japan, Nigeria, France, Spain, Germany, and Austria. In 2000 she joined the faculty of the Vienna Conservatory.

For more than seventy-five years the **BBC SINGERS**, Great Britain's only full-time professional chamber choir, has commissioned, premiered, and recorded new works by many of the 20th century's leading composers and worked with some of its most distinguished conductors. Soon after the company's organization in 1924, the BBC recognized the need for a permanent choir. The ensemble's pioneering daily live broadcasts of religious services, with much of the music delivered only minutes before broadcast time, helped develop its acclaimed musicianship and sight-reading skill. World renowned for technical virtuosity, versatility, and tonal beauty, the BBC Singers broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Television and has a busy schedule of concert performances in the British Isles and abroad. Though the chorus's repertoire includes many liturgical and religiously inspired masterpieces and it has participated in a festival of Jewish music in London, the Milken Archive/World of American Jewish Music project has introduced the BBC Singers to an entirely new repertoire of Judaic works, both liturgical and secular.



AVNER ITAI has been Israel's foremost choral conductor for more than four decades, a status paralleled in his long tenure at the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University, where he heads the department of choral activities. Born on the kibbutz Kfar Giladi in Upper Galilee, he was deeply influenced as a child by its rich musical activity, which retained a continuity with the choral traditions brought by earlier settlers from Europe and further developed on the ideological and cultural soil of Jewish Palestine and Israel. Itai began his professional life playing the oboe, but the American conductor Robert Shaw inspired him to focus his activities on choral music and conducting. Returning to his kibbutz at twenty-five, Itai became conductor of the United Kibbutz Choir (Kibbutz Ham'yuchad). He founded the Camaran Singers (the first semiprofessional Israeli choir) and was conductor of the Ihud Choir for more than thirty years, touring to great acclaim throughout the world. His Collegium Tel-Aviv, established more recently, made its debut at the Musica Sacra festival in Nazareth. He is particularly dedicated to his "Songs for Peace" concerts, which tour Europe and feature sacred works of three religions as well as an Arabic choir from Israel.

The American soprano **PHYLLIS BRYN-JULSON** was born in Bowdon, North Dakota, and trained as a pianist at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Encouraged by Gunther Schuller, she undertook vocal study at Tanglewood, later studying at Syracuse University. In 1966 she made an acclaimed debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Berg's *Lulu* Suite. This success was followed by engagements with major orchestras throughout the United States, including the New York Philharmonic under Pierre Boulez, with whom she became a regular collaborator. Although she has sung a wide repertoire, the purity of her voice, a three-octave range, and perfect pitch have made her internationally renowned as an interpreter of 20th-century music. She has toured throughout the world with the Ensemble Intercontemporain under Boulez and given recitals at the Salzburg and Warsaw festivals. Many of her recordings have received awards. Bryn-Julson is professor of voice at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1988 she became the first American ever to give a master class at the Moscow Conservatory.

The **BARCELONA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA/NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF CATALONIA** (Orquestra Simfónica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya) was founded in 1944, and under the leadership of the Catalan composer-conductor Eduard Toldrá it became an integral part of the city's cultural life. Since that time, the orchestra, which aspires to promote classical music—and the works of Spanish and Catalan composers in particular—has presented an annual cycle of concerts and performed with many internationally renowned soloists. Lawrence Foster was appointed music director in 1995. Since April 1999 its home has been the modern concert hall l'Auditori.

The American conductor **JORGE MESTER** was born in Mexico City in 1935 to parents who had emigrated from Hungary. He studied conducting with Jean Morel at The Juilliard School in New York, also working with Leonard Bernstein at the Berkshire Music Center. In 1955 he made his debut conducting the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico. Since then he has conducted many of the world's leading ensembles, including the Boston Symphony and the Philadelphia, St. Paul Chamber, BBC Symphony, and Royal Philharmonic orchestras. As an opera conductor, he has made numerous appearances with the New York City Opera and the Sydney Opera. In 1967 he became music director of the Louisville Orchestra, and from 1969 to 1990 he was music director of the Aspen Festival, later becoming its conductor laureate. In 1998 he became music director of the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra. A noted teacher, he was on the faculty of The Juilliard School for most of the period between 1958 and 1988.

Credits

HUGO WEISGALL (1912–97)

T'kiatot: Rituals for Rosh Hashana
Publisher: Theodore Presser Co.
Recording: Benaroya Hall, Seattle, WA, June 1998
Recording Producer: Adam Stern
Recording Engineer: Al Swanson
Recording Product Manager: Neil Levin

Psalm of the Distant Dove
Publisher: Theodore Presser Co.
Recording: Hey-U Studios, Vienna, Austria, December 2000
Recording Producer and Engineer: Simon Weir
Recording Product Managers: Paul Schwendener, Neil Levin

Four Choral Etudes
Publisher: Theodore Presser Co.
Recording: St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge , London, UK, November 1999
Recording Producer: BBC/Simon Weir
Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes
Recording Product Manager: Paul Schwendener

A Garden Eastward
Publisher: Theodore Presser Co.
Recording: Centre Cultural de Sant Cugat, Barcelona, July 1999
Recording Producer: Simon Weir
Recording Engineer: Bertram Kornacher
Recording Product Manager: Paul Schwendener

Photo credits: Page 3, Larry Sandberg. Page 17, Yuen Lui Studios. Page 18, Tom Specht. Page 19 (right), Mary Noble Ours. Page 20, Christian Steiner

Credits

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