

SEMITIC SUITE for orchestra (1946/59)

"The name of this work presents without any doubt that this music is based on musical principals, that are characteristic of the Semitic people. This music is a most individual reinterpretation of the essential features of Israel in which the composer creates a synthesis of biblical cantillations, liturgical ethos, dance impulses of specific gestures and speech intonations of the Jewish Yemenite community." (Alexander Uriyah Boskovich)

The "Semitic Suite" is one of the most original works in Israeli art music and of the East Mediterranean style. After years of intensive research Boskovich distilled his style and wrote the nucleus version of the suite for piano as well as for orchestra (1945/6). During the 1950s he added the two piano (1954) and the four hands piano versions (1957) and revised the first versions of the orchestral score as well as the piano solo (1958/9) version. The different versions include changes in the number of movements, phrase structure, texture and rhythmic patterns, but retain the work's specific style and features. These changes can be described as *"relating to the process of composing as being a constant improvisation [...] from this point of view one can define the different versions of the **Semitic Suite** like a constant variation on the Maqam of the Semitic Suite"*. (from an article by Yehoash Hirschberg).

Semitic Suite consists of a series of six dance-like movements:

1. **Prelude–Toccata** – in the style of a Taqsim- an improvised piece, prelude, in Arabic music.
2. **Meditation** – lyric and poetic in atmosphere; this movement is included in the orchestral and piano solo versions only.

3. **Amamiyah** – in a folk dance style.
4. **Nofyah** – scenery in a pastoral mood.
5. **Toccatina** – this movement is included in the orchestral, piano solo and two piano versions only.
6. **Hodayah** – Praise, a festive and jubilant Rondo.

The composer Ben-Zion Orgad (1926 – 2006) highlighted the second toccata:

"This movement of the 'Semitic Suite ' is the most 'oriental' and one of the most Arabic in Israeli music. The special combinations of the rich orchestral hue is different from anything known in symphonic music" (A Guide to Israeli Music –Publ. Ministry of Education and Culture)

The eastern sonorities are derived from the following components:

1. A fusion of different modes and maqam patterns, often sharing a common center.
2. Short melodic patterns with perpetual variations (mostly tetrachordic) recurring in an asymmetric and heterometric frame.
3. The texture is interwoven with humming bourdons, chromatic alterations, ornamented heterophony, ostinato and unisono patterns.
4. The predominance of intervals like seconds, fourth, fifth and seventh.
5. Sharp rhythms and altering meters.

The "Semitic Suite's" output is imbued with rhythmical energy based on tetrachordic melodic patterns and clarity of form. The orchestral version is notable for its colorful and unusual style of instrumentation inspired

by the sonority of Middle Eastern instruments like the oud, santour, kanoun (plucked instruments) and the melodious Arabic shepherd flute accompanied by the darbouka (percussion).

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