

# S o n g o f A s c e n t (1959-60)

Commentary including quotations by the composer

All the works Boskovich composed during the last five years of his life contain a poetic idea, and reflect mystic- symbolic elements transformed into music. His commentary to the "Song of Ascent" for orchestra is a clear example of this: *"The book of Psalms, the chapters of "Song of Ascent", in particular chapter 122: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the House of the Lord", are the source of inspiration of this composition. It is my feeling, that these psalms express the yearning to ascend to Zion, to the House of the Lord, and on a more abstract level, the ascent of the spirit and the soul to the divine- the ascent which has no end, and is timeless. The longing, as well as the ascent, are eternal."*

Composed between the years 1959-60 this work was awarded the First Prize as part of a competition sponsored by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra. It was premiered in 1961 under the baton of maestro Gary Bertini.

This composition is cast into one segment consisting of three movements that are delineated by three distinctive interludes of a peaceful, poetic atmosphere. The rhythmic , melodic structure of "Song of Ascent" has its source in the idea of the Talea used in Motets of the 14<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries . The Talea employs a reiterated scheme of time values leading to repetitions of the melody ( cantus firmus ) in different rhythmical patterns like augmentation and diminution . In every movement the music is rising to its peak while the third and last one reaches the highest and the steep one ,to the zenith " ....like an emotional

*tide, constantly rising to its steep height , the zenith, with a few rests of tranquility".*

The first movement **Andante moderato** opens with the basic pattern of the Talea performed by a Bassoon and Cello . The melodic pattern consists of 7 tones:

**D -A- H- C- D- H- A**

which moves to the meter of 2+3+2 quarters. This melodic-rhythmic pattern is the nucleus from which the whole music develops. The other melodic- rhythmic themes are actually variants of the Talea

After a short opening the " Theme of Longing "is heard performed by flutes and violas .This theme is an inversion of the origin talea as a mekodic-rhithmic variant,The origin theme is the counterpoint of the "theme of longng". This part ends suddenly by an accord, called by Boskovich the "mystic accord" which will be heard several times during this work .

The second movement **Allegro con brio** is an episode of development by – variations on the first pattern. The theme symbolizes the verse from Psalm 122.,the book of Psalms: "*I rejoysed when they said onto me : Let us go unto the house of the LORD*". The descending fourth Re – La of the Taleas pattern is augmented to the sixth F # - La .At the peak of the second episode we hear again the theme in a mood of melodiosi and in **ff**.

**The** third movement – **piu mosso** -the music develops towards the last stage of ascending and reaches its full peak with thrilling intensity and extatic gladness "*Let us go to the House of the LORD* ", with the accumulation of the percussion instruments

The form is build by 7 taleas and each one contains of 7 measures . With each talea the orchestration gains intensity until the whole orchestra joins to perform a part of the theme: "*I was glad when they told onto me , let us go to the House of the LORD.*" The **fff** is ending with the "Mistic Chord"

which is fading into **pp** and passing into the coda. 'With the p sound and the tranquil atmosphere the oboe plays the theme".... *when they said unto me let us go to the House of the LORD*", while the violins play the Longing Theme. The work is ending in an atmosphere of quietude with three tones fading and ascending skywards.

According to Gematrix each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value. The name of the composer's son is David, in Hebrew its letters are equivalent to the numbers 4-6-4. By breaking down this pattern's time value into half 2-3-2 quarters, Boskovich incorporates his son's name into the Talea's rhythmic structure of "Song of Ascent ". The number of **7** passes through this work like a golden thread through its embroidery : **7** tones of a melodic pattern ,the meter **of 7/8** and as the component of sentences and structure of parts.

This composition forms a bridge between the past and the future. It closes the period of the East- Mediterranean Style, when Boskovich's musical language takes a new direction, adapting his artistic expression to the essential change of reality in the State of Israel, as well as to the cultural and artistic scenery in Europe of the 1960s.

Although it was not his mother tongue, Boskovich was in love with the Hebrew language. He studied and analyzed it with endless energy and dedication all throughout his life. After the period of the East Mediterranean Style and its "Folklore Imaginaire", he created a unique relationship between serial technique and the Hebrew language, by transferring its melos, intonations, accentuations and rhythm into musical sound. The Hebrew language, both archaic and new, is a common denominator underlying his last major compositions.

1 "Song of Ascent ", (Shir Hama'a lot) 1959/60.

1. Daughter of Israel (Bat Israel), 1960. Cantata for Tenor, mixed choir and orchestra.
2. Concerto da Camera, 1962-3. Violin Solo and ten instruments.
3. Ornaments (Adayim), 1964. Flute Solo and orchestra.
4. Names (Shemot), Genesis, chapter 36, 1964. Mixed choir, two pianos, percussion instruments. (Uncompleted.)

All of the major works were awarded prestigious prizes and performed under the batons of maestros like Issay Dobroven, Eduared Van Beinum, Sir John Babirolli, Charles Munch, Gary Bertini, Sergiu Celibidache, Gennady Rozhdestwensky and Ilan Volkov.

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