

New CDs

ANDRE HAJDU: RETRO-PORTRAIT (2005)

This CD, published by the composer, presents recordings of several vocal and instrumental works. The disc opens with *Insomnia Noctis (Shadows and Echoes)* for double-bass and chamber ensemble (2004; IMI 7622), performed by Ron Merhavi and an ensemble conducted by Chris Hill. The pianist Ora Rotem-Nelken plays two works for solo piano – *Plasmas* (1957) and *Limpid Waters* for piano without pedal (2002) – and joins the composer for a performance of *Morning Thoughts (Pensées d'Aurore): Five Inventions* for piano duo (1983). The pianist Zecharia Plavin plays *Journey around my piano (Voyage autour de mon piano)* (1963; IMI 404). The contralto Mira Zakai, with pianist Yonathan Zak, perform two songs from *Bestiary* (1994; IMI 7094), setting poems by Ted Hughes. To purchase this CD, visit the **Audio CD Catalogue** on the IMI website.



YEHEZKEL BRAUN: PSALTERION (GRAMOLA 98766, 2004)



This CD presents three works by Yehezkel Braun: *Psalterion* for santur and piano trio (2000); *Day and Day*, a song cycle for soprano, cello and piano, setting poems by Yocheved Bat-Miriam (1998; IMI 7159); and *Piano Trio No. 4* (2002). Members of the Amber Piano Trio, Jerusalem (pianist Lior Kretzer, violinist Uri Dror and cellist Michael Croitoru-Weissman) – who already recorded Braun's first three piano trios (Beit Hatefutsoth CC-005-0, 2000) – are

joined by the mezzo Edna Prochnik and the santur player Eli Sassoon. For purchase information and other details on this CD, visit the **Produktionen** section on Gramola's website (<http://www.gramola.at>).

Awards

The composer **Ron Weidberg** won the 2005 Yoel Engel Prize for original composition for *Returning to Tel Aviv*, a series of song cycles setting poems by Mordechai Geldman. Weidberg's song cycles were recorded for IMI (IMI-CD-06, 2002) and are available through the **Audio CD Catalogue** on the IMI website.

The Yoel Engel Prize for the Study of Hebrew Music was awarded to **Eliyahu Hachohen**, for his lifetime achievements in the study of Hebrew song, and to **Noga Tamir** for her study of musicological and ideological aspects in the work of Abraham Zvi Idelsohn. The jury for the 2005 Engel Prizes consisted of Prof. Tomer Lev (Director of the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Tel Aviv University), the cellist Michael Haran (Israel Philharmonic Orchestra) and the composer Ruben Seroussi (Tel Aviv University). The ceremony was held on November 28, 2005, at Enav Centre, Tel Aviv.

The following composers won the ACUM prizes for 2005: **Ron Weidberg** was awarded a prize for his life's work; **Boris Pigovat** was awarded the Menachem Avidom Prize for his work *Song of the Sea*; **Elena Sokolovski** won a prize for promotion and publication of a new work for her work *Requiem – Yizkor*. The jury for the serious music prizes consisted of the composers Nahum Amir and Ami Maayani and the conductor Doron Salomon. Further details, including quotations from the jury's decisions, are available in Hebrew on the **News & Information** section of ACUM's website (www.acum.org.il).



The composers **Josef Bardanashvili** and **Ella Milch-Sheriff** were among the recipients of the 2005 Gottlieb and Hana Rosenblum Prizes for the Performing Arts, awarded by the Municipality of Tel Aviv. Milch-Sheriff received the award together with the writer **Nava Semel** for the creation of a new and unique opera (*The Rat Laughs*). Bardanashvili received the award for outstanding author and composer; the jury's decision focused on his opera *Journey to the End of the Millennium*. The jury consisted of Ben-Ami Enav, Ilana Elyakim (the Kibbutzim College of Education), Peter Harris (Tel Aviv University), Doron Rosenblum and Hanoeh Ron. The ceremony was held on December 20, 2005, at Enav Centre, Tel Aviv. The two award-winning operas were premiered in 2005; see also the articles on both works in *IMI News* 2005/2 and on the IMI website.

IMI Presents

ALEXANDER URIYAH BOSKOVICH: VIOLIN CONCERTO (1942-1949)

MICHAEL WOLPE

As a child, I read in Peter Emanuel Gradenwitz's *The World of the Symphony* about Alexander Uriyah Boskovich's Oboe and Violin Concerti. Gradenwitz spares no praises in his account of the *Oboe Concerto* (1943/1960, IMI 6077), "the first concerto of Eretz-Israel". He was also expansive in his account of the *Violin Concerto*, which he described as "more lyrical [...] connecting the language of the land with the soul of the Bible". Despite my curiosity, many years passed before I had the privilege of listening to the *Oboe Concerto*. As for the *Violin Concerto* – I came to realise that there were no scores and no recordings of this work. Unlike *The Golden Chain* (1937, IMI 5) and the *Semitic Suite* (1947/1959, IMI 6072), which have piano versions, the two concerti remained an intriguing mystery.

I must have been about ten years old when I first heard a broadcast of the *Oboe Concerto*'s second movement. I will never forget those magical moments of mysterious melodic beauty; it was one of my formative experiences as an artist. Later I was able to listen to the *Oboe Concerto* several times in its entirety, as well as to the piano and violin version of the *Violin Concerto*'s second movement (published under the title *Psalm*, IMI 497), which was played on the radio on several occasions. It was clear to me that in the future I would need to find the time to solve the mystery of the *Violin Concerto*.

Alexander Uriyah Boskovich was undoubtedly one of the most original and impressive composers in the generation which founded Israeli art music. He was not only a composer, but also an influential thinker and an admired teacher, who forged new stylistic directions, unique our country, from the moment of his immigration to Eretz Israel in 1938. His *Violin Concerto* is one of the most famous works for the reader – and the least known to the listener. On the one hand, it won the 1942 Huberman Prize, and the subsequent world-premiere performance, in April 1944, received enthusiastic accolades. Max Brod, Gershon Sweet, David Rosolio, Olya Silbermann and Uri Caesari all praised the moving, innovative yet communicative work, the masterly orchestration, the fluent and effective writing for solo violin. They also praised Lorand Fenyves' playing and George Singer's skilful and committed direction of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Later, it was the subject of several articles, and was frequently cited as a milestone in Boskovich's stylistic development, and as a work which influenced a whole generation.

On the other hand, it was never performed in its complete original version, written within a few days in a burst of inspiration. The complete work has not been performed since the premiere performances in April and November 1944, and even these performances presented a version which did not fully reflect the composer's intentions (as I will explain below). From the articles I have read and from my conversations with veteran players from the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, I learned that soon after winning the prize there began a long editorial process, with alternating additions

and deletions, leading to the creation of multiple versions and, finally, to Boskovich's decision to set the work aside, delaying the preparation of a definitive version to an unspecified future date. At the time of Boskovich's death in 1964, at the tragically early age of 57, this final revision had not yet been realised.

I have read a lot by and about Boskovich, but nothing I've read has impressed me more than the short English article he wrote towards the *Violin Concerto's* world premiere:

The Credo of the composer is that art in all times and particularly today is not an end in itself but a means of adding significance and value to life. Music should be an expression of ethical values we find in the Bible. The intensity of the human drama of our times [at the time of writing, the horrific scale of the Holocaust was already known to the public] makes an idea such as 'art for art's sake' the religion of those aesthetes – who only regarded and saw themselves – appear ridiculous and out of time. In the great moments of history, music always takes up a certain stand or attitude which is considerably more than technicalities of craft, nuances and polemics. When the Israeli composer does not enclose himself in an ivory tower and does not refuse to see the tragedy of his people, he must assist in showing the remnants of his people the way to courage and resurrection. This *Violin Concerto* was composed in this spirit. Its aim is to express by musical means the experience of our land and our soul, the Bible. There are two candles which will burn so long as one Jew remains on the earth. If when listening to this concerto the hearer can sympathise with these ideas, then the composer is well rewarded.

In 1995, the Israeli publishers Carmel published Jehoash Hirshberg's and Herzl Shmueli's book *Alexander Uriyah Boskovich: His Life, his Work and his Thought*. In this book, Hirshberg devotes almost an entire chapter to the *Violin Concerto*. Following this publication, I decided that the time has come to track down the work's manuscript and to examine the viability of producing a definitive version of the work. At the archive of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, I found several files containing different versions and sketches. I received valuable assistance from Library's staff, Dr. Gila Flamm and Daria Israeli, who made the source materials available to me. Miriam Boskovich, the composer's widow, also helped willingly, and lovingly followed the final stages of the editorial process.

Even during my initial evaluation of the sources, I was impressed by the uniqueness of the *Violin Concerto*. According to Hirshberg,

Even after a series of performances the work did not satisfy the composer. He shelved it and refused to allow further performances. He planned to continue working on it, but the significant changes in his aesthetics after 1946 prevented him from returning to the work. According to his wife, Miriam, he regarded the composition of the *Concerto da Camera* the culmination of his work on the *Violin Concerto*. (*Alexander Uriyah Boskovich*, p. 50)

I do not share this judgement. The *Concerto da Camera* (1962, IMI 29) is one of the most fascinating Israeli works known to me.* Boskovich in 1962, however, was not the same composer as Boskovich in 1942; and the two works are therefore fundamentally different. As my research into these sources continued, I realised that the *Violin Concerto* is an impressive, masterly work, distinguished by the quality of its message, its bold combination of Oriental materials with Western technique, its unique understanding of the violin's technical possibilities (both Western- and Eastern-inspired), and its highly-charged emotional intensity. I resolved to study the various versions systematically in order to produce an edition which would come as close as possible to the final version which Boskovich himself did not complete.

As my editorial work progressed, I learned that the work exists in four versions. The **first version** was written for the 1942 Huberman Competition and won the award. The **second version** was copied from the first version several months later, and contains a few changes in the orchestration of the first and third movements, and a new second movement which bears only scant resemblance to its counterpart in the first version. The **third version** is the one which was actually performed in the work's premiere in April 1944. I had to decipher that version from the comments, erasures, stitches and orchestral parts which Miriam Boskovich obtained for me. It turns out that many passages were omitted

in this performance. Some of these omissions resulted, in my view, from insufficient rehearsal time, or from a failure to understand Boskovich's bold, pseudo-oriental musical language, which might well have seemed alien to performers at the time. The **fourth version** probably dates from 1946, or perhaps a bit later. It is heavily abridged, containing only the second movement and a truncated version of the third; several verbal comments in the margins of the score suggest that it was intended for the Israel Philharmonic's overseas tour. Boskovich gave this version the title *Tehilim* (*Psalms*).

The version I edited tries to track Boskovich's thought processes, to decipher his motives for the alterations, omissions, additions and replacements which distinguish one version from the next. Although I took the work's first, award-winning version as my starting-point, my edition is based primarily on the second version, which in my estimation represents the composer's own revision of the work towards its premiere. In this version, Boskovich improved the orchestration, thinned out some of the heavily-scored sections, emphasised primary melodic lines, and adjusted the balance in several passages to ensure that the solo violin part will not be submerged by the orchestra. He also added another development section to the first movement and, as noted above, replaced the first version's second movement with a different movement. After careful consideration and hesitation, I chose to include the second version of this movement in my edition, even though I found moments of considerable beauty in the first version as well. My reason for this choice was that the latter version of the second movement is based on the *Concerto's* Coda, which appears at the end of the third movement. This contributes to the work's motivic unity, and I felt compelled to respect the creative process that led to the creation of this version.



I also incorporated some small corrections, subtle changes in orchestration and several short passages (each consisting of just a few bars) from the third and fourth versions. On the whole, however, it is clear to me that these versions are not the products of the composer's independent creative process; instead, they reflect compromises that Boskovich was forced to accept after pressures from the performers and the conductor. Many of the comments, additions and deletions in these versions are clearly not in Boskovich's handwriting; I assume they came from

the soloist, Lorand Fenyes, or from the conductor, George Singer. The abridged version named *Tehilim* is, perhaps, the result of pressure on the composer to create a condensed version, just several minutes long, to serve as a curtain-raiser for a concert; as a composer, I am all too familiar with the demands of orchestral managers and concert programmers for abridgements and concision.

In preparing the solo violin part, I also consulted Lorand Fenyes' manuscript copy, which contains the solo parts of the first and third movement as well as a set of cadenzas for the concerto. In my edition, I incorporated these cadenzas in the first movement, in the transition between the first and second movements, and in the third movement, just before the Coda. For the second movement, I consulted the manuscript of the piano and violin version of *Tehilim*. This manuscript is not in Boskovich's hand, and contains Fenyes' bowings and fingerings.

I will never know for sure how much my version coincided with what Alexander Uriyah Boskovich himself had in mind. Nor will I ever be confident that he would have welcomed my efforts, since in his later years his style and his aesthetic concepts underwent a dramatic change. I already pointed out that the Boskovich who composed the Oboe and Violin Concerti, *The Golden Chain* and the *Semitic Suite*, differs markedly from the Boskovich who composed *Concerto da Camera* and *Ornaments* (1964, IMI 6100). In order to prepare my edition, I felt that I should do my best to engage in a dialogue with Boskovich as he was before his stylistic and aesthetic sea-change – as far as this is possible from my vantage point, sixty years later. My aim was to enable audiences today to experience a renewed premiere of the first complete violin concerto to be written in this land.

Alexander Uriyah Boskovich's *Violin Concerto* is one of the most ambitious large-scale works written in Israel in the 1930s and 1940s. In my view, it belongs with Erich Walter Sternberg's *The Twelve Tribes of Israel* (1941, IMI 160); Paul Ben-Haim's two symphonies (1940, IMI 7353; 1945, IMI 7354) and *Piano Concerto* (1949, IMI 7305); Oedoen Partos' *In Memoriam* (1947, IMI 6102); Marc Lavry's first *Symphony* (1945) and first *Piano Concerto* (1946, IMI 6766); Josef Tal's first *Piano Concerto* (1944); Hanoch Jacoby's *Concertino* for viola and orchestra (1940); and

* See also Igal Myrtenbaum's article "*Concerto da camera*: Composition in the Shade of its Genealogy" in *IMI News* 97/2-98/1 (<http://www.imi.org.il/presents/myrtenba.htm>). The article also appears in the liner notes to a Music In Israel CD (IMI-CD-26) which presents Boskovich's *Concerto da Camera* alongside Ben-Zion Orgad's *Septet*; for details, see the *Audio CD Catalogue* section on the IMI website.

of course Boskovich's own *Oboe Concerto*, *The Golden Chain* and *Semitic Suite*. This is only a partial list of orchestral and *concertante* works written in the 1930s and 1940s which shaped the symphonic style of Eretz Israel. During the 1950s, these composers were joined by other creative spirits, including Mordecai Seter, Haim Alexander, Menachem Avidom, Shlomo Yoffe, Joseph Kaminski, and many other composers whose names cannot be enumerated within the space of this article. All these composers expanded and developed the new musical style and language. The school they created had its share of differences and controversies, but in historical retrospect, six decades later, they do seem to have fashioned, collectively, a uniquely Israeli musical voice.

Boskovich's *Violin Concerto* is one of the most important works in this repertoire. Its first movement is based on two contrasting thematic ideas, in the manner of a traditional sonata form. The first idea is fast and energetic; the second is a lyrical, rhythmically-flexible *cantabile* theme. In their different ways, both of these ideas reflect the composer's wish to express the local language. The faster materials are based on dances like the Eretz-Israeli hora; the melodic, *cantabile* sections resemble the Arab *mawal*. Boskovich creates a unique symphonic language through a combination of colourful, impressionistic orchestration and polyphonic or heterophonic moments influenced by Oriental/Eastern textures.

A cadenza for soloist leads to the second movement – a romance-like *Andante commodo* in modal harmony, almost devoid of thirds. The movement's principal theme – a moving and beautiful melody, yearning and tragic – is reminiscent of Boskovich's setting of Psalm 23, *The Lord is my Shepherd* (1946, IMI 397), composed for the singer Bracha Zefira.

The *Concerto's* third movement is based on a "Bedouin melody", to use the composer's own description in the program notes for the premiere concert. This finale begins, appropriately enough for the genre, as a fast and virtuosic movement, and quotes several thematic ideas from the first movement. The ending, however, deviates from the romantic tradition: it consists primarily of an extended quotation from the second movement, and the work disappears gradually, leaving us in an introverted, wistful atmosphere.

Like Paul Ben-Haim in his *Evocation (Yizkor)* for violin and orchestra, which won the second prize in the same competition (1942, IMI 7313); like Marc Lavry in his *By the Rivers of Babylon* for string orchestra (1936), like Oedoen Partos in his *In Memoriam* for viola and orchestra, and like Josef Tal in his *Piano Sonata* (1950, IMI 6626), Alexander Uriyah Boskovich expresses the mood and spirit of the times in his *Violin Concerto*. The words he wrote at the time of the premiere seem to echo the words that the Jewish Czech composer Viktor Ullman wrote at the same time in Ghetto Theresienstadt:

we certainly did not sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep, [...] our desire for culture was matched by our desire for life; and I am convinced that all those who have striven, in life and in art, to wrest form from resistant matter will bear me out.

These words seem all the more poignant when we realise that they were written in April 1944. Ullman was working at the time on his last *Piano Sonata*; a few weeks later he would be sent to his death in Auschwitz. Boskovich, who found refuge in composition during that terrible period,

wrote his program notes at around the same time. His firm belief that music and art should serve as "a means of adding significance and value to life" and point "the way to courage and resurrection" resonates movingly with Ullman's words.

Boskovich's *Violin Concerto* received its renewed premiere on December 21, 2005, at the Weis Auditorium in Giv'at-Ram, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and on December 22, 2005, at the opening of the 8th *Sounds in the Desert* Festival at the Ben-Gurion Centre in Kibbutz Sde-Boker. The violinist Vera Vaidman played the solo violin part, with members of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance Chamber Orchestra and of the Israel Sinfonietta Beer-Sheva conducted by maestro Doron Salomon. The whole concert was dedicated to Boskovich's music (see the *Calendar* section in this issue for details).

I regard these concerts as the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream. I am confident that this music still has the power to move listeners' hearts, and I hope and believe that the *Violin Concerto's* renewed premiere will be just the beginning – the rebirth of one of the most important works composed in this country.



Vera Vaidman (violin) and members of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance Chamber Orchestra and of the Israel Sinfonietta Beer-Sheva conducted by Doron Salomon, in a performance of Alexander Uriyah Boskovich's *Violin Concerto*, Sde-Boker, December 22, 2005. Photograph reproduced by kind permission of the *Sounds in the Desert* Festival, Sde-Boker.

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English translation: Uri Golomb



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