

*"My music was composed in an attempt to create a musical structure and style, that can express-at least in the composer's view- the dialectics of the "where" and "when" in the collective spirit of our people's history...it is an individual interpretation of the essential features of this unique world of Israel" **

Alexander Uriyah Boskovich (1907-1964)

The relationship of Alexander Uriyah Boskovich to his art and the surrounding world molded him as a composer, writer, thinker, educator and music critic, and as one of the founding fathers of Israeli art music.

Born in Cluj, the capital of Transylvania, on August 16th 1907, Alexander Uriyah Boskovich was brought up in a milieu of Jewish tradition and European culture. After a year in Vienna (1924) Boskovich continued his professional musical education in Paris (1925-29). He studied piano with Alfred Cortot, composition with Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger, and specialized in choral music at the Scola Cantorum. Back in his hometown (1929) he was active as a composer, concert pianist and conductor of the National Opera and the Goldmark Symphony Orchestra, which he founded in 1936. Although European culture and humanism were an integral part of his personality, he followed a powerful inner drive to find links with his Jewish heritage, and clarify his identity.

In 1938 he was invited by the Palestine Symphony Orchestra (now Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra) to attend **the premiere** of his work "The Golden Chain", a suite based on seven East-European Jewish folksongs, under the baton of Maestro Issay Dobrowen. He came as a visitor, but decided to stay in the land of Israel and make it his home. The encounter with a new reality-culture and society, language and landscape- so different from the European

* All the quotations in this article are by the composer.

one, was not an easy one. But Boskovich identified absolutely with the historical "here" and "now", and was intensely involved in the cultural renaissance of the Jewish people in their ancient- new homeland. The gathering of the Jews from different corners of the world turned the country into a cultural melting pot of enormous dynamism.

Boskovich was an idealist with a deep sense of historic responsibility. *"...in great moments of history, music always adopts a definite stand and attitude.."*

He continually strove to create a musical language, which would be an integral part and expression of the new reality , by attaining a synthesis of the archaic and the new, an amalgam of the spiritual and musical tradition of his people, of oriental elements and western compositional techniques. The absolute conviction in this way and goal were of tremendous importance and rapidly metamorphosed his musical language.

Amongst others, the Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (1942), and the Semitic Suite (1945/9) with all its versions, are considered as initiating "The East- Mediterranean Style", a concept coined by Boskovich. These works are recognized as important landmarks in the history of Israeli art music. The composer's many articles and essays, as well as his book "Israeli Music- Its Authenticity, origins and problems" (1953-56), elucidate his credo and his ideology as an Israeli composer.

The tradition, the music and the dances of the various oriental Jewish communities, especially the artistic and rich folklore of the Yemenite Jews, yielded unfathomable treasures to Boskovich. His acquaintance with the indigenous music and instruments of the Arab and Druse population enriched this cultural human mosaic. The Bible, especially the poetic texts of the Psalms and Song of Songs, the Biblical cantillations, and the Hebrew language- all of which were for him a constant source of inspiration, and a fertile soil from which emerges the composer's new musical idiom.

Boskovich was an idealist with a deep sense of historic responsibility: *"...in great moments of history music always adopts a definite stand and attitude"* (composer). He dedicated himself, entirely, to the creation of a musical language, which would be an integral part of the new reality, and continuously

strove to attain a synthesis of the archaic and the new, an amalgam of the spiritual and musical traditions of his people, of oriental elements and western compositional techniques.

The absolute conviction that such a synthesis was of tremendous importance rapidly metamorphosed his musical language. The Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra (1992), the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1943), the Semitic Suit for piano (1945), for orchestra (1946), two pianos (1954) and piano four hands (1959) as well as many other works, are examples of compositions born of the struggle to elaborate a new musical idiom. Especially The Oboe Concerto and the "Semitic Suite" can be considered as initiating the style which Boskovich termed the "Eastern Mediterranean Style", and are recognized as one of the main pillars of new Israeli art music.

“My music was composed in an attempt to create a musical structure and style, that can express- at least ion the view of the composer- the dialectic of the "where" and "when" in the collective spirit of our people's history...it is a most individual interpretation of the essential features of this unique world of Israel, in which the composer creates a synthesis of Biblical cantillation, liturgical ethos and dance impulses, especially dance gestures and the speech intonations of the Yemenite community.”

His essays and his book "Israeli Music- Its Authenticity, Origins and Problematics" (Hebrew, 1953-56) elucidate the composer's credo.

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.”

This composition forms a bridge between the past and the future. It closes the period of the Eastern 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. 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. 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 prizes, and performed under the batons of maestros like Van Beinum, Sir John Babirotli, Charles Munch, Celibidache, Gary Bertini and Rozhdestwensky.

Alexander Uriyah Boskovich died on November 5th, 1964, in Tel- Aviv.

Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra

The concerto was composed in 1942, and premiered in 1944 by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, with Bram Blez as soloist. It was awarded the Tel- Aviv Engel Prize, and performed in Australia, South and North America, and Europe by soloists like Heinz Holliger, McKerras and Lady Rothwell-Barbirotli.

In the words of the composer: "This was a first attempt to merge Oriental and European musical elements. Striving to create an original Israeli musical style...when refraining from the European cantabile espressivo style the sound of the oboe reminds one of the vowels and nuances of Semitic languages... I feel that the sound of the oboe is very Eastern Mediterranean, and is part of the acoustic tonescape of this region."

By choosing the oboe Boskovich imagined the sound-color of the Arabic zurna.

Allegro Giocoso and Vigoroso

The first movement is written in the Sonata Allegro form. The diverse thematic motives of this movement stem from the first theme, and undergo variations and contrapunctal changes, moving in a tonal framework, that leans towards the myxolydian mode.

Andantino

The second movement is structured in Lied form. The 7/8 metre of the static ostinato pattern in the orchestral part contrasts with the melodic motion of the oboe, and lends a mysterious tension to the music.

"One feels a constant movement, like wandering in a nocturnal oriental landscape" (composer).

The heterophonic style (an oriental mode of ensemble playing) of the middle section is interwoven with the ostinato pattern, which recurs with great persistence in the recapitulation.

As in the cadenza of the first movement, the psalmodic archaic style of biblical cantillations, and the melogenic embellishment, performed by the oboe, heighten the intensity of the music. A short coda concludes this movement in a dreamlike pianissimo.

Rondo

The third movement- - abounds with dancelike vitality- an outburst of pure joie de vivre. It is

inspired by the melodic patterns of the Iraqi Jewish prayer of “Adon Olam”, and of the Yemenite biblical cantillation of the “Song of the Sea” (Pentateuch, chapter 15).

A closer analysis reveals, that all three movements are interrelated by the basic musical idea of the tetrachord, with thematic transformations of the material.

The staccato style of the orchestra brings to mind the sound color of oriental plucked instruments, like the Oud, the Kanoun and the Santour.

Song of Ascent

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

The composition is cast in one movement, and is delineated into three distinct parts. The rhythmic melodic structure of "Song of Ascent" has its source in the idea of the Talea used in motets of the 14th century. Characteristic statements of the Talea may employ a reiterated scheme of time values, leading to repetitions of the melody (cantus firmus) in different rhythmical patterns.

In the Hebrew alphabet each letter 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 the time value of this pattern into half 2+3+2 quarters, Boskovich incorporates his son's name into the Talea rhythmic structure of the "Song of Ascent".

Andante Moderato

The opening theme, performed by bassoons and cellos, starts with a descending fourth: D-A. Inverted, the ascending fourth turns into the "theme of yearning". Played by violas and flutes, and elaborated by variations of the Talea by the piano and the violins.

The rising fourth is like a driving force of chain reactions, and symbolizes "the mounting tide of emotions" (composer).

Allegro con Brio

The second part is a joyous outburst of “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the House of the Lord” (Psalms, chapter 122), scored for string and wind instruments.

Piu Mosso

The third part is ecstatic in mood. The accumulating tension erupts in a forceful climax of fff- an oriental style toccata, performed by percussion instruments.

With a sudden pianissimo the music dissolves into an echolike sonority of peaceful quietude.

Daughter of Israel (Bat Israel)- Cantata for Tenor, Mixed Choir & Orchestra

In 1960, as part of a competition, several Israeli composers were commissioned to write a vocal work, based on the poem "Daughter of Israel" by Chaim Nachman Bialik, one of Israel's greatest poets. This work was composed to commemorate the 100th birthday of Henrietta Szold. Boskovich's composition won the Henrietta Szold Prize. Darius Milhaud, Aaron Copland and Frank Pelleg were the jurors. Bat

Israel was first performed in 1961, at the 25th anniversary concert of the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, with Ronald Dowd- tenor, and the "Rinat" choir, under the baton of Mo Gary Bertini.

The text by Bialik is sung by the tenor. The melodic pattern heard throughout the Cantata consists of a row of five tones A-B-E-C-D. The composer uses serial technique in a free way, explaining that: "...The source of serialism in this work is the human intonation. This is contrary to the formal approach, which sees the basic acoustic rule of the series as predetermined organized tone pattern." The rhythmic structure of the melody is complex, and performed in a declamatory style. The contemporary musical language of the orchestral part merges with that of the tenor. Simultaneously, the choir sings verses from the Song of Songs and the Sabbath Prayers, music that moves in a tonal- modal framework, symbolizing archaic times and tradition. The verse where the poet describes his mother lighting seven Sabbath candles is represented by seven different instruments- harp, vibraphone, crotal, celesta, glockenspiel, triangle and violin. Two violins- the seventh candle- play a very high sounding organpoint, symbolizing the quietude of the Sabbath.

By blending two opposites- the archaic and the new- into an organic unit, Boskovich expresses, in musical terms, the continuity of tradition throughout thousands of years of Jewish history.

"Ornaments" ("Adayim") for Flute and Orchestra

His last work, "Ornaments", was composed in 1964. It is a contemporary musical interpretation of the text of the "Song of the Sea" (Pentateuch, Numbers, Chapter 15), and the Jewish Yemenite Biblical cantillations of this chapter. The verbal rhythmical structures are the silken thread, through which the embroidery of "Ornaments" is woven: the ornaments of time, sound, color and pitch.

Boskovich comments very precisely on how to perform this composition: "The music of "Ornaments" moves in two different and contrary times: "Proportional"- metric time, and "Differential"- ametric, flexible time, asking for an improvisational freedom of the soloist and orchestra players, in coordination with the conductor. To follow the concept of improvisation in oriental music... the soloist, as well as the orchestra players, are invited to choose their own "tone form series". When no instructions are given, percussionists are free to use different means and ways of playing, and enrich the sound color of their instruments- all according to the performers imagination."

"The orchestra of 48 players is divided into four chamberorchestras of 12 players each, in the style of an oriental ensemble:

Group 1: Piano, celesta, vibraphone, flute in G, english horn, bassclarinet, 3 violins, 2 violas, 1 contrabass.

Group 2: 5 violins, 2 violas, 3 violincelli, 2 contrabass.

Group 3: Harp, guitar, xylophone, marimba, piccolo, 2 clarinets, oboe, 2 fagoots (bassoons), 2 horns.

Group 4: 4 percussion players, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, contrabass.

Each group should be placed according to the acoustic conditions of the concert hall, without consideration of the traditional staging"

“Ornaments” is an artistic and organic fusion of serial technique, orchestral sound color, and a kind of an aleatoric style, integrating the structure and rhythm of the Hebrew language into pure instrumental music.

It was premiered in 1965, at the Israel festival, by the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra, with soloist Uri Toeplitz, conducted by Maestro Gary Bertini.