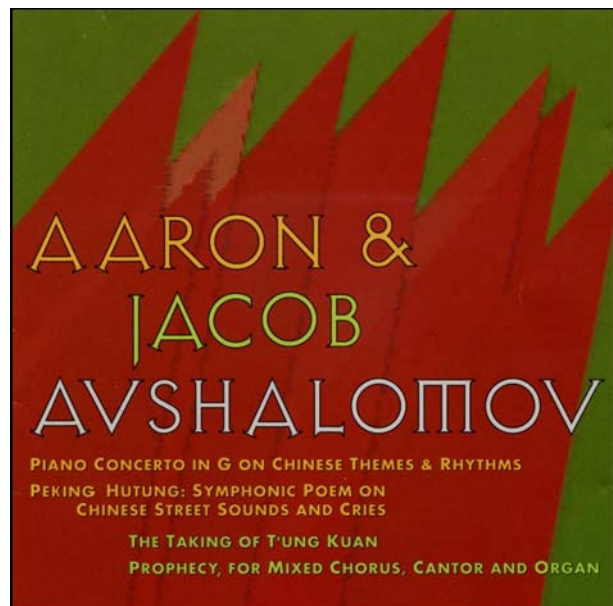


Aaron & Jacob Avshalomov



Aaron Avshalomov

- Piano Concerto in G on Chinese Themes and Rhythms* (1935) (27:23)
1. II. Allegro non troppo (12:38)
 2. II Adagio (7:08)
 3. III Finale: Allegro moderato (7:35)

Margaret Moore, piano

4. *Peking Hutungs: Symphonic Poem on Chinese Street Sounds and Cries* (1931) (9:44)
- Portland Youth Philharmonic; Jacob Avshalomov, conductor

Jacob Avshalomov

5. *The Taking of T'ung Kuan* (1943, rev. 1947) (7:35)
- Oslo Philharmonic; Igor Buketoff, conductor
6. *Prophecy*, for mixed Chorus, Cantor and Organ (1948) (6:01)
- Charles Matheson, tenor; Mid-America Chorale; Larry Smith, organ; John Dexter, conductor

Total playing time: 51:09

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Notes

Aaron Avshalomov (*b* Nikolayevsk, Siberia, 1894; *d* New York City, 1965) was a name to conjure with among collectors of exotic concert music during the late 1930s, for among the many unusual albums that Columbia Records released during that period as part of the exchange agreement with the Pathé-Marconi firm of France was *Piano Concerto in G on Chinese Themes and Rhythms* played by one Gregory Singer with the singularly unlikely accompaniment of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, the composer conducting (his sixteen-year-old son, Jacob—conductor for the present CRI disc—played the celesta part in the Shanghai recording as an emergency substitute). Indeed, Aaron Avshalomov's *Peking Hutungs* was recorded during the same period, but was available only on the imported Pathé pressings. In any event, Columbia album M-286 was for most American record collectors a first inkling that Western musical performance traditions had an established place in the major cosmopolitan cities of the Far East.

While later composers, such as Henry Cowell, Colin McPhee, Alan Hovhaness, John Cage, and Lou Harrison have sought for a synthesis of Oriental and Western musics within a between-the-wars contemporary stylistic context, Aaron Avshalomov in Shanghai rooted his work in the Russian romantic tradition.

Born and raised in Siberia, Aaron Avshalomov as a boy was fascinated by the music and theater that flourished among the Chinese in the cities where he lived. Although he intended taking up residence in the U.S. as early as 1917—staying here for a year then, and for three-and-a-half years during the mid-twenties, Avshalomov made his home for the better part of thirty years in China, steeping himself in its native music. Only in 1947 did he finally come to America for good,

following the outbreak of the civil war that led to the establishment of the communist Chinese People's Republic.

Largely self-taught as a composer, Aaron Avshalomov made his main livelihood in books during the China years, first in Peking and Tientsin, and finally in Shanghai where for fifteen years he was head librarian of the Shanghai Municipal Library. Besides the works recorded here, his catalogue includes several ballets on Chinese themes, two operas, a violin concerto, a flute concerto, songs, and four symphonies, three of them written during his later years in America.

The *Piano Concerto in G* was written during the summer of 1935 at Hangchow, a renowned beauty spot, of which the Chinese say, "Above there is heaven; below there is Hangchow and Soochow." Living in a peasant cottage and using a small harmonium, Avshalomov completed the composition in six weeks, doing the orchestration subsequently in Shanghai. Gregory Singer, to whom the score is dedicated, gave the premiere in Shanghai with great success. On that occasion the slow movement was played twice, once as on this disc, and a second time in special orchestration for Chinese instruments. The Pathé recording was done a year later.

Despite its title, the Concerto uses borrowed thematic material only in the nocturne-like slow movement, whose principal theme is an ancient Chinese melody. The end movements follow the virtuoso romantic concerto form common to the Western tradition: a big sonata-allegro with an elaborate cadenza and a lively rondo.

Peking Hutungs (which could be rendered as "Peking byway") was composed in 1931 and is a tonal evocation of street sounds from dawn to dusk. There are early-morning street cries, bits of Chinese opera, and temple and popular

music, as well as a funeral procession with its deafening panoply of drums to drive away the evil spirits. After reaching a final climax, the music ends in the same tranquil mood with which it began.

The world premiere of *Peking Hutungs* took place in Shanghai on February 7, 1933, and it was recorded there in 1935, in which year Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra gave the music its American premiere.

—Notes prepared by David Hall, 1966

Jacob Avshalomov was born in 1919 in Tsingtao, China of an American mother and a Siberian-born father, the composer Aaron Avshalomov. The young Avshalomov received early musical instruction from his father, and was educated at American and British schools in China before working in factories in Tientsin, Shanghai, and Peking. In 1937 he returned to the United States with his mother. He subsequently studied in Los Angeles with Ernst Toch, and spent two years in Portland, Oregon at Reed College in the Junior Symphony (now the Portland Youth Philharmonic) and studied with its conductor, Jacques Gersikovitch. He subsequently studied composition and orchestration at the Eastman School with Bernard Rogers.

During World War II, an assignment at the China desk of the O.S.S. in Washington brought him into contact with another Chinese-born American composer, Vladimir Ussachevsky. Following the war, he received an Alice M. Ditson Fellowship and joined the music faculty of Columbia University, where he taught from 1946 to 1954. While at Columbia, he conducted the American premieres of Bruckner's Mass in D and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*. Among his awards and honors, Avshalomov received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1951 and the New York Critics Circle award in 1953 for his choral work *Tom o' Bedlam*. He wrote the Symphony "The Oregon" in 1959 on a commission for the state's centennial.

Avshalomov currently celebrates his fortieth anniversary as conductor of the Portland Youth Philharmonic, the nation's

oldest youth orchestra. With the orchestra, he has toured internationally and commissioned and premiered numerous works by American composers. Two discs are available on CRI of Avshalomov conducting the Portland Youth Philharmonic in performance of music of his own and by Bergsma, Bloch, Diamond, Lees, and Harris.

William Bergsma wrote of Jacob Avshalomov's music in the *Bulletin* of the American Composers Alliance: "Here, then, is the music of Avshalomov: lyric, harmonically aware of worlds which are not the usual ones; the vocal music—more than half his output—grasping the fascinating potentialities of the American language freely and with imagination. These are qualities native to him."

The Taking of T'ung Kuan was composed in 1943, revised in 1947, and 1953. The title refers to the fall of T'ung Kuan Pass in 755 A.D., the year of the An Lushan rebellion in China. The pass was vital to the defense of the ancient capital, Chang-an, where the court of the emperor Hsuan Tsung was located. During this period of the dawn of medieval European civilization, China had reached the noontide of her ripe culture; literature was the most highly developed of her arts and Li-Po her most respected poet. It was these lines from a poem by Li-Po which inspired Avshalomov: "came the barbarian horde with the autumn; / out went the army of the House of Han ..."

The Taking of T'ung Kuan was performed for the first time in November 1953, in Detroit with Leopold Stokowski conducting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Jacob Avshalomov's *Prophecy* was composed in 1948 for the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York and was premiered there in May of 1948. The music bears a dedication "To the memory of Moise Ash," and the use of text from the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Isaiah suggests undoubted inspiration from the foundation of the State of Israel, which took place in 1948.

Production Notes

Publishers:

Aaron Avshalomov (BMI):

Piano Concerto in G – American Composers Alliance, NYC.,

Peking Hutungs – Franco Columbo, Inc. NYC.

Jacob Avshalomov (BMI):

The Taking o T'ung Kuan – American Composers Alliance, NYC.