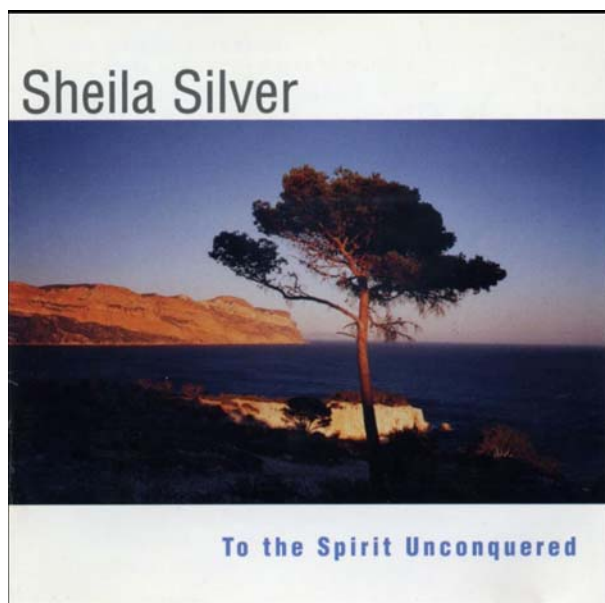


NWCR708

# Sheila Silver

## To the Spirit Unconquered



- To the Spirit Unconquered* for violin,  
cello and piano (1992) ..... (23:26)
- I. With great intensity — strained,  
sometimes violent ..... (5:38)
  - II. As if in a dream ..... (4:47)
  - III. Very fast, rhythmic, and precise;  
suddenly mysterious ..... (6:28)

- IV. Calm and stately ..... (6:26)  
The Guild Trio: Janet Orenstein, violin; Brooks  
Whitehouse, cello; Patricia Tao, piano
- Six préludes pour piano d'après poèmes  
de Baudelaire* (1991) ..... (21:56)
1. La mer à Cassis (The Sea at Cassis) ..... (5:22)
  2. La pendule (The Pendulum Clock) ..... (2:15)
  3. La descente vers l'enfers  
(Descent into Hell) ..... (2:23)
  4. Dans une forêt demie-brûlée  
(In the Half-Burned Forest) ..... (6:29)
  5. Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, luxe,  
calme et volupté (There, All is Perfection  
and Beauty, Luxury, Calm and Delight) ... (2:15)
  6. Vers le paradis de mes rêves  
(Toward the Paradise for my Dreams) ..... (2:46)  
Gilbert Kalish, piano
11. *Dynamis* for solo horn (1978) ..... (7:23)  
William Purvis, French horn
  12. *Dance Converging* for viola, horn, piano,  
and percussion (1987) ..... (18:07)  
Lois Martin, viola; William Purvis, French horn;  
Lisa Moore, piano; Thad Wheeler, percussion

Total playing time: 71:32

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## Notes

My piano trio, *To the Spirit Unconquered*, is about the ability of the human spirit to transcend the most devastating of circumstances, to survive, and to bear witness. It was inspired, in part, by Nobel laureate Primo Levi's writings on the Holocaust.

The first movement, "With great intensity—strained, sometimes violent," represents fear, both controlled and uncontrolled, the internal as well as the external cry. Primo Levi wrote that when new arrivals to the concentration camps disembarked from the trains, they were struck with uncontrollable fear. Those who survived had to control that fear; those who succumbed to the fear lasted only a few days. The music, characterized by pounding bass chords in the piano and fast tremolos in the strings, alternates between violent outbursts and controlled, subdued lines. At times the pianist plays inside the piano to augment the dramatic tension.

The second movement, "As if in a dream," is played *attaca* (without pause), and represents sweet memories of times past—memories which, Levi wrote, were essential to survival in the camps. This movement is characterized by the opening muted violin melody, its floating piano accompaniment, and the arpeggios which begin with the cello's first utterance. Towards the end, a new child-like melody is introduced in the piano. This tune reappears as the main theme of the fourth movement.

There is no break between the third and fourth movements—instead, they are linked by a transition. The third movement,

"Very fast, rhythmic, and precise," is a "Scherzo barbare." My idea was that by seeing the barbarism of the guard, the prisoner can spiritually rise above, maintaining an inner human dignity. The scherzo has a simple A-B-A form: the A section starts with a fast-moving melody in the strings accompanied by piano chords (a transformation of the chords from the first movement), after which the melody is taken up by the piano, accompanied by string pizzicato chords; the B section has rhythmic staccato chords in both strings and piano. On the return of the A section, the angular quality of the line is softened and the harshness begins to recede.

A rhythmically driving coda leads to the transition to the fourth movement, "Suddenly mysterious." This is followed by a return of the opening violin music from the second movement, now heard in cello harmonics. The finale begins with a statement of the child-like tune from the end of the second movement—this time played "Slow and stately." A succession of quasi-variations proceeds to the end of the piece. Even at the very end, the low chords from the first movement are present, but this time softened—transformed, transcended.

*To the Spirit Unconquered* was commissioned by the Guild Trio with funding from the Chamber Music America/Lila Wallace Commissioning Project and the Port Jefferson Arts Council. It received its premiere in June, 1992.

I wrote *Six préludes pour piano, d'après poèmes de Baudelaire* in 1990 while in residence at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, a small picturesque Mediterranean fishing village nestled under a magnificent cliff, Cap Canaille (which is the image I chose for the cover of this CD). The preludes were commissioned by the Heckscher Museum in Huntington, New York, for Gilbert Kalish to perform at a concert celebrating the October 1993 art exhibit, "Baudelaire: The Poet and his Painters," which featured paintings, drawings, and etchings by famous artists from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries that either inspired Baudelaire or were inspired by his poetry. Though Baudelaire's poetry is often dark, during my composing I was living in an environment surrounded by extraordinary light and beauty. These extremes are reflected in the preludes.

The first prelude, *La mer à Cassis* (The Sea at Cassis), was inspired by Baudelaire's poem "La musique" in which the poet's experience of listening to music is likened to a sail boat carried by the wind on the sea: "Music often takes me like the sea! Towards my pale star, under a foggy sky or in a vast ether, I set sail." The prelude is water music — sometimes gently lapping, sometimes stormy.

The second prelude, *La pendule* (The Pendulum Clock), comes from the poem, "Rêve parisienne" (Parisian Dream) in which the poet describes his dream of a city built of marble, metal and crystal—brilliant and surreal. As the clock strikes noon, he gradually wakes from his dream, peers around his tawdry garret apartment, and reflects with disillusionment upon his life. The prelude begins with festive carnival-like music, during which the clock striking noon is heard as interruptive chords. The music between these chords is gradually transformed, symbolizing the change of the poet's emotions, as he moves from his exhilarating dream to his dismal waking state.

The third prelude, *La descent vers l'enfer* (Decent into Hell), comes from the poem "L'irremédiable." In it the poet describes a descent into hell, down a long spiral staircase, with goblins and strange creatures jeering at him at every turn. At the end comes "Judgment."

The fourth prelude, *Dans une forêt demie-brûlée* (In the Half-burned Forest), takes its title from my experiences walking in a pine forest which had recently suffered a devastating fire. As I walked, I noticed bits of green which had survived and parts of trees and undergrowth which were not charred. With a few months, a new growth of green carpeted the forest floor and wildflowers began to emerge. Baudelaire's poem, "Bohemiens en voyage" describes a similar image: "La tribu prophétique" (The Prophetic Tribe) wandering in the desert.

The fifth prelude, *Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, luxe, calme, et volupté* (There All is Perfection and Beauty, Luxury, Calm and Delight), is the refrain from one of Baudelaire's most famous poems, "L'invitation au voyage." The refrain reflects the poet's dream of escaping to an exotic tropical island (although some critics claim he was actually dreaming of Holland) where all is bliss and perfection. The opening melody of the prelude is an instrumental setting of this refrain, and evokes the simplicity and calmness of the poet's fantasy island.

The last prelude, *Vers le paradis de mes rêves*, (Toward the Paradise of My Dreams) comes from the poem "Le vin des amants" (Lovers' Wine) and invites the reader to join in a drunken flight of escape—to lose one's sorrows in wine and soar the heavens on winged horses, leaving all coarse and troubles behind.

The form of the prelude has always fascinated me and after writing this group of six for piano, I composed *Three Preludes for Orchestra*, for the American Composers Orchestra in 1992.

*Dynamis*, (first syllable pronounced "do" as in "you") meaning "life-force" in Greek, was written in the summer of 1978 while I was living on the Greek island of Sifnos. I was constantly fascinated by the ever present sound of the wind—sometimes violent, sometimes gentle, but always dramatic. This, along with the awesome sea views, stark landscapes, and the tranquil solitude of the mountain tops, inspired *Dynamis*. The piece is a "windscape" of warring elements; the aggressive with the lyrical, the high with the low, the fast with the slow. The natural harmonic of the 7th, which is slightly flat, is used as a timbral element throughout. The full range of the horn is displayed. William Purvis claims that the piece has the largest slur in the horn repertoire, from (written) low E-flat (below the bass clef) to high D-flat (above the treble clef). The piece is extremely virtuosic and demanding, especially the many high Cs at the end, and Bill plays it with a flare and ease that is astounding. *Dynamis* was originally written for David Hoose and was premiered at the American Academy in Rome in June of 1979 during my tenure there as a Rome Prize fellow.

*Dance Converging* is a "rondo"—the alternation of a main theme with new and contrasting ones. I took the liberty of expanding substantially on the basic form, but the theme and its subsequent returns constitute the basic idea of the piece. The main theme is a spirited dance-like idea (in 3/4 but felt in one) which is characterized by three aspects: a loud bass chord in the piano; a tune in the horn, viola and percussion; and a fast-moving piano figuration as accompaniment. Each time the theme returns it is slightly varied—sometimes more radically than others.

Following the main tune, which evolves into a whirling dance with changing meter, is the second theme, a lyrical, almost tango-like tune. In the center of the piece, the main theme is transformed into a slow eerie melody played in viola harmonics, which ushers in a languorous dance in 6/4.

The title pays tribute to the idea of the different dance spirits intermingling or "converging" as a result of the rondo, which is one of the oldest musical forms in Western music. The rondo form continued to interest me as a means of structuring a one movement piece, and I worked with it again in a piece for chamber orchestra, *Dance of Wild Angels*, which I wrote for the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group in 1990.

Originally written for violist John Graham, William Purvis, and Speculum Musicae, the bulk of *Dance Converging* was composed in the summer of 1987 while I was in residence at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. The piece was premiered on a Speculum Musicae concert in New York in October of 1987.

—Sheila Silver

The musical language of **Sheila Silver** is a unique synthesis of the tonal and atonal worlds, coupled with a rhythmic complexity which is both masterful and compelling. "Silver speaks a musical language of her own, one rich in sonority, lyrical intensity and poetic feeling," says John von Rhein of the *Chicago Tribune*. Although one hears influences of many of the great twentieth-century composers, her work defies categorization. According to the *American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters*, "Her music is vital with a conviction that obliterates fashion."

She has composed an impressive body of solo, choral, chamber, and orchestral music as well as one opera and two feature film scores. Her piano trio, *To the Spirit Unconquered*, has received over fifty performances by the Guild Trio throughout the U.S. and Europe. Critics have praised its originality and powerful emotional content, as well as its

accessibility: "To the Spirit Unconquered is one of those rare compositions that grabs you emotionally and will not let you go. It is a stunning modern masterpiece, a work of profound musical and emotional depth," Cary Smith, *Bellevue/Seattle Journal American*.

Sheila Silver's compositions have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists including the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, the RAI Orchestra of Rome, the Chicago String Ensemble, the Gregg Smith Singers, the Muir String Quartet, Alexander Paley, Gilbert Kalish, and Timothy Eddy. She has won many prizes including the Prix de Paris, the Rome Prize, a Bunting Institute Fellowship, and awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the NEA, the Rockefeller Foundation (Bellagio Residency), the Camargo Foundation, and the Barlow Foundation.

Born in Seattle, Silver received her doctorate from Brandeis University where she studied with Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero, and Seymour Shifrin. She also studied in Germany with Erhard Karkoschka and György Ligeti.

Silver lives in New York City with her husband, film writer, and director John Feldman, and is associate professor of music at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Her music is published by MMB Music, St. Louis, Missouri. Among other recordings of Silver's music is a CRI CD sponsored by the American Academy of Arts & Letters featuring her Sonata for Cello and Piano performed by Timothy Eddy, cello, and Gilbert Kalish, piano.

**The Guild Trio** is a trio of the future in every sense. Not only are they keepers of the highest standard of technique, interpretation and ensemble playing, but they are also dedicated to the advancement of the piano trio repertoire. The Trio's most recent premieres include works of Harvey Sollberger, Bradley Lubman, and Roger Smalley and it has toured widely with its commissioned work, Sheila Silver's *To the Spirit Unconquered*. Since their formation in 1988 at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, they have received critical acclaim both at home and abroad, appearing throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia. Only three months after forming, The Guild Trio won the prestigious USIA Artistic Ambassador Competition and the following year was awarded the position of Trio in Residence at Tanglewood Music Center. In 1991, they won first prize in the Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition, and in the same year were one of the four groups nationwide to receive a matching grant from Chamber Music America for their unique residency program at the Stony Brook University Medical Center. They are currently Artists in Residence at the Guild Hall in East Hampton. The Guild Trio is represented by Joanne Rile Artists Management of Philadelphia.

Well known for his dedication to contemporary music, pianist **Gilbert Kalish** has garnered three Grammy nominations during his extensive career as a soloist and recording artist. Notable discs include his five-volume traversal of Haydn Sonatas (Nonesuch) and his many award-winning recordings with Jan DeGaetani (Nonesuch, Arabesque, Bridge). Mr.

Kalish directs the chamber music and keyboard programs at Tanglewood, where he also chairs the faculty. He is a professor of music at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

**William Purvis** is internationally recognized as one of today's finest French horn players. He is an active member of the New York Woodwind Quintet, the Orpheus Ensemble and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. He has performed at the Tanglewood, Norfolk Chamber Music, Caramoor, Salzburg, and Kahmo Festivals, among others. Among his recordings are Mozart Horn Concertos for Deutsche Grammophon, with Orpheus the Horn Trios of Brahms, Ligeti on Bridge, and the Trios of Wuorinen on the Koch label. He is closely associated with contemporary music, especially through his work as conductor, soloist, and ensemble member of New York's Speculum Musicae. He is on the music faculty of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

**Lois Martin** is an active freelance violist based in New York and a recognized specialist in contemporary music. She performs regularly with the Group for Contemporary Music, the ISCM Chamber Players, the New York New Music Ensemble, Speculum Musicae, the Composers' Guild, and Steve Reich and Musicians. She is a graduate of the Juilliard School, where she received her master's degree and studied with Lillian Fuchs. She also attended the Peabody Preparatory School and the Eastman School of Music. Martin is a founding member of the Atlantic String Quartet, and of Fidelio, a unique ensemble of viola-cello-piano. She is on the faculty of the annual Composers' Conference at Wellesley College and has taught at Princeton University. She recorded Sheila Silver's String Quartet for CRI with the Atlantic String Quartet.

**Lisa Moore**, a native of Australia, has been an active freelance pianist in New York City since 1985. She is currently touring as a member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars ensemble with whom she has appeared at The Kitchen, Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theatre, the Holland Festival, and the Southbank and Huddersfield Festivals of the U.K. She has also performed with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, St. Luke's Orchestra, Philharmonia Virtuosi, the League ISCM, the Albany Symphony and Musical Elements, among others. She received the Silver Medal in the 1981 Carnegie Hall International American Music Competition and holds a DMA from Stony Brook where she studied with Gilbert Kalish.

**Thad Wheeler**, percussion, graduated from the Hartt College of Music and studied in the graduate division of the Juilliard School. He has recorded and toured internationally with Steve Reich and Liza Minnelli, among other artists. He last appeared on Broadway as conductor and percussionist in Stephen Sondheim's *Passion*. He is musical director and arranger of Alborada Latina, The Chamber Ensemble for Latin American Music, and co-founder of the Zasis Improvisatory Ensemble. He is the composer and director of The Wheeler Project which had its first release, *The Dancing Bird*, in 1994.

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## Production Notes

Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Editing Assistance: Jonathan Schultz

*To the Spirit Unconquered* and *Dynamis* recorded at the American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York, April 23, 1994, and April 20, 1995, respectively. *Six preludes* recorded in the Recital Hall, Staller Center, SUNY, Stony Brook, New York, June 5, 1994. *Dance Converging* recorded in the Recital Hall, Music Division, SUNY, Purchase, New York, April 12, 1995.

All works published by MMB Music (ASCAP).