

NWCR839

# Herman Berlinski

## Return & Sinfonia No. 10



*Return*, a song cycle for baritone

- & piano (1950, rev. 1985) ..... (21:37)
1. The Listener (Walter de la Mare) ..... (6:09)
  2. Return (Demetrios Capetanakis) ..... (6:30)
  3. Travelogue for Exiles (Karl Shapiro) ..... (2:40)
  4. Portrait of a Girl (Conrad Aiken) ..... (6:18)
- Donald Boothman, baritone; Herman Berlinski, piano

*Sinfonia No. 10* for Cello and Organ ..... (36:38)

5. I - "Min-Ha-Maakim" Out of the depths .. (19:12)
  6. II - "Av-Ha-Rachamim" Father of Mercy (17:26)
- Lori Barnet, cello; Herman Berlinski, organ

Total Playing Time: 58:20

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## Notes

*Return*, a song cycle for baritone & piano

A few years ago I visited my hometown Leipzig for the first time in forty-eight years. My wife and companion for over fifty years was with me. We walked hand in hand through the streets which were the streets of our childhood. The houses looked smaller, the streets narrower and time had eaten into the walls of the houses a shade of gray, death and decay. It was bitter cold and all the windows were closed. The snow muffled our four steps as we walked in the middle of the street, for very few cars were circulating then in Leipzig.

These were the houses, once our homes. Here lived our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, childhood playmates, school comrades, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives. Nameplates of people we once knew, attached to the outside of houses, were removed and the gaping holes have never been filled. In our minds we recalled the names which each house evoked. There was an eerie silence behind the windows. Nobody knew us, nobody greeted us. Who lives now behind these windows?

We saw the old churches and the empty spaces where once our synagogues stood. Our old parochial school is still standing but there is not a single child of our faith there to attend it. The school is now an institution for the blind.

*Return* is the music for this scenario, though written some thirty years ago. We were "Travelers knocking at the moonlit doors," sailors from "The shore of darkness" and weary exiles without a home in the sky, the waters, and the earth. At the old cemetery there is only one tombstone with our name. Most of the others have no tombstone, no cemetery. Clasp our hands we knew that we had not returned. We only visited as two of the "three beautiful pilgrims who came here together touch slightly the dust of the ground." *Return* is only in the clasp of our hands. No more, no less. (These songs are

dedicated to Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Friedman who believed when nobody else did.)

— Herman Berlinski, 1985

*Sinfonia No. 10* for Cello and Organ (1977)

This work is dedicated to the memory of Milton Feist, rabbi, kabbalist, music publisher and a dear friend. Milton, crippled at the age of four by polio, lived his whole life in a wheelchair. This life, a never ceasing struggle against the overwhelming power and brutality of this disease, became to all who knew him a metaphor for the triumph of the spirit over a decaying body. Milton Feist was called, after he had passed on, by his Kabbalist colleagues *meir*, a "Shining Star." He was, and through his faith I still believe, he is.

The first movement of this *Sinfonia* is based upon kabbalistic interpretation of the words of Psalm 130, "Out of the depth have I called Thee O Lord." According to kabbalistic tradition it is not from the depths of desperation that we cry unto the Lord. It is into our own depths we must reach in order to experience God, and only then can we address ourselves to Him.

No traditional Hebrew music motifs are used in this movement, but it nevertheless mirrors a central Jewish attitude towards religion. Faith does not just exist. It must be acquired from the depths of one's own being. However, for the blessing of the Lord, one must, like Jacob with the angel, fight for it.

The cello here becomes a metaphor for man who, groping for wordless prayer, the experience of God, is confronted with a brutal, seemingly impenetrable wall of sound, to be pierced only by deep and abiding faith which first we must acquire. Only a few among us succeed in this fight which, after all, leaves all of us somewhat limping.

The second movement is based on a melody called: “Av-Ha-Rachamim” (Father of Mercy) attributed to the nineteenth-century Russian-Jewish composer Abraham Dunayevsky. From a musical point of view it is a set of theme and variations. The hostile sound wall is slowly overcome, gives way to prayer which flows towards its intended destination.

—*Herman Berlinski*, 1999

**Herman Berlinski** (d 2004), composer and organist, was born of Polish Jewish parents in Leipzig on August 18, 1910. His prolific output includes symphonic and chamber works, solo works for the organ, song cycles, numerous liturgical choral works, and oratorios. Among his recent large-scale works is *Ets Chayim* (The Tree of Life), commissioned by Project Judaica for performance at the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, D.C., on the opening of the “Precious Legacy” exhibit.

Berlinski has given organ recitals throughout Europe and America, in Temple Emanu-El, New York; Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris; and the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. His principal works for the organ include Eleven Sinfonias, the *Burning Bush*, and *The Glass Bead Game*, commissioned by the Rogers Organ Company for the new Carnegie Hall organ in 1974. In 1993, the Union Theological Seminary of New York commissioned Berlinski, with Catholic composer Robert Helmschrott of Munich and Protestant composer Heinz Werner Zimmermann of Frankfurt, to compose a work in honor of the German Anti-Nazi fighter Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Altar Tryptichon for Bonhoeffer* has now been performed in America, Germany, Israel, and South Africa.

Herman Berlinski received his primary music education at the Landeskonservatorium Leipzig, graduating with honors in 1932. Forced to leave Germany at the onset of the Nazi regime, he became a student of the Ecole Normale de Musique, studying composition with Nadia Boulanger and piano with Alfred Cortot. Berlinski, formerly a Polish citizen, enlisted as a volunteer in the French Army, receiving the Croix du Combattant Volontaire from the French government for his wartime service. He fled the German occupation of France in 1941, settling in New York. In 1960 he became the first doctoral candidate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America to earn the degree of doctor of sacred music. He has held the posts of organist at Temple Emanu-El, New York, and minister of music to the Washington Hebrew Congregation. He was the founder and director of the Shir Chadash Chorale, a choir distinguished by its pioneering programs of historical and contemporary Jewish music.

Berlinski has lectured as a visiting professor in many institutions of learning, both here in the United States and in Germany. His most recent lectures were given under the auspices of the American Information Agency at the Mendelssohn Academy, Leipzig, and at the Europäischen Zentrum für Jüdische Musik, Hannover. Among the honors, awards, and fellowships the composer has received are a MacDowell Fellowship (1958); The Peabody Waite Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1984); a commission from the McKim Fund in the Library of Congress

(1985); the establishment of the Herman Berlinski Collection at the Sabin Music Center of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (1986); the Shenandoah University and Conservatory medal of Excellence (1992); and The Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Guild of Organists (1995). He was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz Erster Klasse by the president of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1995.

Berlinski’s most recent major work, *Oratorio Job* (Hiob), may also be his most important. Commissioned for the ground-breaking ceremony for the re-building of the synagogue in the city of Dresden, Germany, it received its world-premiere there (in its German version) on November 9th 1998. This work was performed by singers, dancers, the orchestra of the Dresden State Opera and the Dresden Chamber Choir, all under the direction of Hans Christoph Rademann.

Bass-baritone **Donald Boothman’s** varied career as singer, teacher and musical commentator includes performances in operas, oratorio, and concert in forty-six of the United States and in thirty-eight countries in Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America. His formal education at Princeton and Oberlin was in English Literature as well as Music, and subsequent teachers have included William Albert Hughes in oratorio and Welsh Song, Daniel Harris in opera, and the great Todd Duncan in every aspect of the vocal art. Boothman came to Washington, D.C. as a soloist and announcer for the U.S. Air Force Band and Singing Sergeants, and following that service, became the leading baritone with the Washington Civic Opera. He also began teaching, both privately and on the faculty of the American University. For many years he was the Cantorial Soloist at the Washington Hebrew Congregation.

Donald Boothman has been recognized here and abroad as an outstanding interpreter of songs—one who holds the musical and poetic values in equal measure and possessing the taste and technique to perform Baroque oratorio or abstract contemporary chamber music as living and persuasive expressions.

**Lori Barnett**, cello, is an active freelance musician in the Washington, D.C. area. She is a graduate of Bennington College, where she first developed an interest in contemporary performance. Currently, she is cellist for two ensembles specializing in the presentation of contemporary repertoire: Orchestra 2001 in Philadelphia, and the Contemporary Music Forum in Washington, D.C. She has toured Russia, Denmark, and England with Orchestra 2001 and participated in their many recording projects, available on CRI. Barnett regularly appears as soloist, recitalist, and chamber artist, and serves as principal cellist with two orchestras in Washington, the National Chamber Orchestra and the Washington Chamber Symphony. She is professor of cello at George Washington University and cello coach for the Montgomery County (MD) Youth Orchestras. Also available on CRI is her recording of Robert Parris’ *Fantasy & Fugue for Solo Cello* (CRI CD 792).

## Texts

### 1. *The Listener*

Walter de la Mare

“Is there anybody there? said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses  
Of the forest’s ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of a turret,  
Above the Traveller’s head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
“Is there anybody there?” he said,  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That in the lone house then dwelt  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller’s call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
‘Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:—  
“Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word,” he said.  
  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house  
From the one men left awake:  
Aye, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

### 2. *Return (permission pending)*

Demetrios Capetanakis

### 3. *Travelogue For Exiles (permission pending)*

Karl Shapiro

4. *Portrait of a Girl*

Conrad Aiken

This is the shape of the leaf, and this of the flower,  
And this the pale bole of the tree  
Which watches its bough in a pool of wavering water  
In a land we shall never see.  
The thrush on the bough is silent, the dew falls softly,  
In the evening is hardly a sound...  
And the three beautiful pilgrims who come here together  
Tough lightly the dust of the ground.  
Touch it with feet that trouble the dust but as wings do,  
Come shyly together, are still,  
Like dancers who wait in a pause of the music, for music  
The exquisite silence to fill...  
This is the thought of the first, and this of the second,  
And this the grave thought of the third:  
“Linger we thus for a moment, palely expectant,  
And silence will end, and the bird  
“Sing the pure phrase, sweet phrase, clear phrase in the twilight  
To fill the blue bell of the world;  
And we, who on music so leaflike have drifted together,  
Leaflike apart shall be whirled.  
“Into what but the beauty of silence, silence forever?...”  
... This is the shape of the tree,  
And the flower and the leaf, and the three pale beautiful  
pilgrims:  
This is what you are to me.

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## Production Notes

*Return*, a song cycle for baritone and piano: Produced, recorded and engineered by Curt Wittig at the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress on November 6, 1986.

Sinfonia No. 10: Recorded June 1998 at the 68<sup>th</sup> Ranks Aeolian-Skinner Organ of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington D.C. Recorded by Natasha Rodriguez at Elan Recordings. This organ is reputed to be one of the last organs designed by the famous organ designer Donald Harrison.

**Publishing:**

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