

CRI SD 530

Mario Davidovsky: *Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim*

Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim (26:13)

Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano

Frank Hoffmeister and Charles Walker, tenors; Raymond Murcell, bass

Parnassus

Anthony Korf, conductor

Romancero (13:55)

Diane Ragains, soprano

Syzygy New Music Ensemble, Larry Livingston, conductor

Mario Davidovsky (b Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1934) pursued his early musical studies in Argentina, coming to the United States in 1960. Although best known for his pioneering works with synthesized sound, especially the *Synchronisms* series for synthesized sound and traditional instruments, his canon includes a considerable variety of works scored for all ensembles.

Davidovsky has been recognized with major awards and commissions. His prizes include the 1971 Pulitzer Prize, the Walter W. Naumburg Award, the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award, and awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and the Tanglewood Festival. He has received two Guggenheim and two Rockefeller Fellowships, and numerous commissions from the Fromm, Koussevitzky, and Naumburg foundations; the Library of Congress, the Juilliard String Quartet, the New York Chamber Soloists, the American Composers Orchestra, the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago, and Yale University, among others.

Davidovsky has taught at the Instituto di Tella, Buenos Aires; the Manhattan School of Music; the City College of New York; the University of Michigan, and Yale University. He currently is professor of music at Columbia University, director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, and director of the Composer's Conference at Wellesley College.

Much of Davidovsky's work maybe heard on CRI recordings: SD 204, *Synchronism No. 1 for Flute* (1963), Harvey Sollberger, flute; *Synchronism No. 2 for Flute, Clarinet, Violin and Cello* (1964), Sophie Sollberger, flute; Stanley Drucker, clarinet; Paul Zukofsky, violin; Robert L. Martin, cello; Efrain Guigui, conductor; *Synchronism No. 3 for Cello* (1964–65), Robert L. Martin, cello; SD 268, *Synchronism No. 5 for Percussion Ensemble* (1969), with Raymond DesRoches, Richard Fitz, Claire Heldrich, Donald Marcone, Howard Van Hyning; Harvey Sollberger, conductor; SD 305, *Chacona for Violin, Cello and Piano* with Jeanne Benjamin, violin; Joel Krosnick, cello; Robert Miller, piano; *Inflexions* for 14 players, David Gilbert, conductor, SD 356, *Electronic Study No.2* (1962) for electronic tape.

Notes on the Music

Because he is best known as a composer of instrumental and electronic music, it is perhaps not often mentioned that in his earliest training in Argentina, Mario Davidovsky was steeped in rich and varied vocal traditions. Simply to have been raised in a Latin Catholic country exposed any young musician to both the magnificent tradition of polyphonic music and to a fertile indigenous folk and dance music; Davidovsky's own youthful experience was further enriched because he was surrounded by the practice of Jewish cantillation which, combined with his serious formal training in violin, persuaded him of the expressive powers and dynamic qualities inherent in the single line. This first recording of Mario Davidovsky's vocal music gives us the opportunity to

imagine how this early immersion in such rich traditions shaped his thinking and influenced his own writing for voice. We may also be better equipped to wrestle with the issues at play in Davidovsky's other music, once we return to it from the better-informed vantage point of having heard the two vocal pieces recorded here.

The opposition between an explosive, unpredictable, often violent, powerful, jaggedly interruptive force and a tender, searing lyricism which lies near the heart of much of Davidovsky's music written in the last twenty years is more explicitly instantiated and clearly audible in these vocal works for two reasons, one practical and one poetic. First, due to the necessities of text declamation, the rate of turnover of musical objects and affects in Davidovsky's vocal music is much slower than his electronic music, for instance, where the sharp juxtaposition of events and the rapidly fluctuating time sense are more in tune with the splice-and-stretch ability of that particular sound material. Second, the raw angularity and barely-contained violence seem to belong to the worlds of these particular texts: the *Shir ha-Shirim*, of course, speaks from an ancient, sun-flooded desert in which love, pleasure, and tenderness do figure, offering glimpses and fantasies of lush green rapture; but where nature and the Old Testament God are by no means always benign or merciful, and where dreamy images of shaded date groves clash harshly with a reality in which one dare not trust one's neighbors and where even the sunlight can be treacherous. And in a similarly sundrenched Mediterranean landscape, even the artifacts of these Spanish *Romancero* texts, stained as they are with traces of Ladino, Greek, and Turkish, bear witness to the violence and brutality of medieval and Moorish Spain which lie just behind the surface in these songs, even in their most youthful, dancing, carefree moments.

In spite of the differences in musical material and pacing between the cantata and Spanish songs on the one hand and his electronic music on the other, these two pieces would not have been possible before Davidovsky's many years of work in the studio, where he explored in depth the combinatorial possibilities inherent to the sound material itself, that is, its potential for reversability, invertibility, recombination in various forms, and polyphonic manipulation. His extensive experience with electronic music led him to produce the unusually synergistic combinations of conventional instruments which result in such strikingly fresh and unanalyzable sonorities as we find in these two works. Davidovsky's orchestration is subtle; background will suddenly become foreground, as subliminally introduced instrumental shades of foreground events are magically transformed into altogether different combinations of instruments which take on leading functions, as they become the main vehicle of motion or the new focus of attention.

This masterful sleight-of-hand approach to orchestration makes the listener aware of the interpenetrable potential inherent even in what seemed to be clearly opposed or differentiated types, functions, and roles of musical matter. Through sheer alchemical wizardry, this composer alerts us to the plasticity and the multi-dimensional aspect of what is apparently a two-dimensional line. Which brings us back to lyricism and to song, for ills with this infinitely elastic, deftly calligraphed, dynamic, lyrical line that the composer paints the laughter and the pain of both his sunlit landscapes, sacred and profane.

That is, both *Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim* and *Romancero* are essentially linear works, where the notion of "line" takes on a new depth and elasticity, as in a Matisse or a Chinese ink drawing; and where one is forced to redefine one's notion of counterpoint as the play of the relative weights and densities that make up each hand-crafted line and determine the larger-scale relations between successive linear gestures as well. By attending to these vocal pieces, where this special "polyphonic" aspect of Davidovsky's linear writing is particularly clear, we can deepen our understanding of his electronic and instrumental music as well, where similarly diverse and tightly-coiled energies are bound up economically in lean, eloquent, etched strokes.

Davidovsky's setting of the *Shir ha-Shirim* is in three movements. The traditional division of the Song of Songs into eight chapters, although useful for textural reference, was probably more or

less an arbitrary one. In fact, there are probably many authorial and thematic divisions within these eight chapters, and it is perhaps more appropriate to think of these shimmering sacred texts as an anthology, somewhat haphazardly assembled, but eventually rather carefully arranged to create a cycle of texts that move roughly from the expression of desire to one of fulfillment. For the first two movements of his cantata, Davidovsky has chosen to set the first two “chapters” of the Song of Songs, with the first three lines of the third “chapter” as his last movement. Unlike the more typically joyful renderings of this ecstatic text, Davidovsky’s setting resonates not only with the text’s gloriously sunlit movements, but with its darker side as well.

The instrumentation for *Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim* was given by the New York Chamber Soloists, who commissioned the work. In order to conjure his dry Middle Eastern landscapes, the composer was forced to undermine the natural gravitational predisposition of this Central European chamber ensemble and to reinvent a manner of painting with the same combination of instruments.

The first movement opens strikingly as the soprano and two tenors, supported by alto flute, piano, and one of each string, sing in a sinewy line of an elastic thickness. All essential pitch, intervallic, and timbral material for the cantata is first adumbrated in this opening Introit, where the raw open sound of the rooting on D, *pizzicato senza vibrare*, with plucked piano, and string harmonics is set off by shards of sparkling crotales to create an illusion of three-dimensionality. These evocative textural elements, in combination with the preponderance of minor thirds, fourths, and all manner of seconds, somehow conjure both the music of the synagogue and that of the belly-dance. Instruments are scarcely used in their traditional capacities: the piano, for example, is featured only as a resonator, rather than in its ordinary capacity as an accompanimental or a solo virtuosic instrument.

The texture thins, by way of lyrical string fragments and bass clarinet tones, to alto flute and string harmonics with *glissandi* and bowed tam-tam, punctuated by splinters of percussion, for the exotic, smooth and tensile soprano setting of the handsome, “I am dark, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.” With the tenors’ return, as they (the brothers of Shulamite?) advise her, “the fairest of women,” not to stray far from the shepherds’ camps, the oboe first makes its presence strongly felt and the texture thickens again. After the bass’s first solo in which he compares his love to a “mare among Pharaoh’s cavalry,” the soprano returns to sing of “her scent yielding up its fragrance to the king”; for a moment, only those two exist in the world: scantily adorned by piano, percussion, and high string harmonics, they counterpoint each other until the soprano, suddenly *sotto voce* and alone, likens her lover to a cluster of cypress from the vineyards of En Gedi. Her intimate simile, rendered in a line pregnant with fourths, is abruptly intruded upon when cymbals, crotales, triangles, and the piano’s own plucked fourth herald the return of the tenors and the rest of their company, who sing her praises in a more public fashion and remind us, both through a stern, chromatic textless injunction (“not to excite Love until it is ready!”) and through a gentler *falsetto* passage accompanied by firm ritual tollings of the opening D, of the sacred source of the very bowers and rafters beneath which such a love must be consummated.

The second movement features the even more exotic and unusual combination of oboe d’amore, piccolo, contrabass, marimba, and a more natural percussion redolent of wood, shells, and skins for this passionate but understated and dignified expression and fulfillment of love. The opening duet for soprano and tenor(s) is followed by a soprano and winds passage, featuring the oboe d’amore as her sensuous counterpart as she sings of her appetite and her desire; this section culminates in the low, sultry *sotto voce* setting of the words “shetech-patz” (“for faint from love am I”), the final consonants of which are accented by the soprano and then echoed and sustained by a sizzle cymbal. The tenor’s solo entrance marks the beginning of the text’s rhapsodic and lyrical serenade, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” The clarinet and flute enter *da niente*, increasing in volume and adding *vibrato* as the figs ripen; the textual refrain, “Arise, my love” is sung the second time by both tenors in rhythmic unison.

The bass entrance introduces the famous “Catch us, the little foxes” (where the word “me-chablim,” translated here as ‘vineyard spoilers,’ and often interpreted to refer to the neighboring threats to Israel, has become the modern Hebrew word for terrorists); this *ff* passage, sung by all three male vocalists is followed by one of the most tender passages in the *Shir ha-Shirim*, which starts with both tenors, *falsetto*, for the recurring “My love is mine and I am his . . .,” and continues with a solo tenor for the beautiful setting of “Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee..,” when, cushioned by a bed of soft winds, percussion, and a string drone, he ends the movement singing of their night of love, echoing the soprano’s solo expression of desire which opened the movement.

The third movement is a later addition to the cantata. It treats the first three verses of the third poem, in which the narrator rises at night and wanders through the streets of the city looking for her love. This brief, final, exquisite movement was written for and is dedicated to the memory of the composer’s sister, Clara. Essentially a soprano solo, its music is astonishingly simple, as if in the face of loss, much of music too is lost, or at least must be reduced to essentials. Here for the first time in the piece’s course, all the shining percussion has vanished; after an initial strong D articulator, which reminds us of the distance traveled since the cantata’s higher-spirited, more rhythmically charged D opening, all that remains to accompany the soprano are instrumental passages of *pp* vocal shadowing in rhythmic unison, a single glistening after-image, and one homophonic phrase sung unaccompanied by the male voices which sets the stage for the *a capella* passage that ends the cantata with the pure four-part polyphonic setting of the question, “Have you seen the one I love?”

Commissioned by the group Speculum Musicae, *Romancero* is the setting of four anonymous Spanish texts from more popular romance traditions, and is naturally more light-hearted in character. The set opens with the playful, dance-like “Morenica,” a Sephardic text (which quotes, in fact, from the Shir ha-Shirim). With its spare accompaniment and its combination of flirtation, roughness, and tenderness, it exactly captures the spirit of this young dark-eyed beauty and her innocent coquettish romantic fantasies.

The second text is obviously of Christian origin, whereas the third is an example of a popular form, the “Seguidillas,” which are self-contained *trouvère*-like quatrains that sing of love, courtship, and desire. Both of these middle movements show off Davidovsky’s imagination for apt and dazzling instrumental text-painting: particularly dramatic instances occur at the opening of “Arriba canes Arriba” (Hell, dogs, Hell!) and at the close of “Seguidillas,” in his setting of the “flechas tiraba,” or “showers of arrows” flashed from the maiden’s eyes.

The lean, virtuosic austerity of homophonic textures that characterize the accompaniments to the first three songs, as well as the carefully-calculated identification and confusion of instruments with voice, as vocal doublings turn to sustained instrumental pedals, all take on a new poignancy in the fourth and eloquent final song, “Triste Estaba el Rey David,” dedicated, in memoriam, to Peter Wernick. As in the final movement of the *Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim*, the accompaniment and musical material is reduced to its purest, most essential form in the expression of mourning. The pairings of winds and then strings, *senza vibrare*, in rhythmic unison, suggests the close and brutally ruptured relation between David and his handsome and rebellious third son, Absalom. In her three-time reiteration of Absalom’s name, the singer moves from a voiceless grief, on her low *pppp* C, through a shrill and agonized “Geschrei” on high A-G-sharp, to a mid-register melisma that turns to lamentation and to wailing under a diminuendo and a sustained *pianissimo* violin B-flat. This lamentation is continued in rhythmic unison with the winds, which are somehow comforting in their pure *legato*, *piano*, and *senza vibrato*, as one is reminded of the ancient therapeutic aspect and function of choral singing. The final movement ends with an instrumental crescendo on a single chord that is felt as one last ferocious outcry against the sadness, for which there are no more words.

I.(1:1-17)

The Sublime Song of Solomon

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For truly thy love is sweeter than wine,
Than the smell of your precious oil.
Turaq oil is your name.
Therefore do the maidens love you.
Draw me after you, let us run!
The king brought me to his chambers.
We will delight and joy in you.
We will savor *your* love above wine.
Like new wine do they love you.

I am dark, but comely,
O daughters of Jerusalem.
Like the tents of Qedar,
Like the pavilions of Salmah.
Stare not at me that I am swart,
Because the sun has gazed upon me.
My mother's sons were incensed at me,
They made me guard the vineyard;
My own vineyard I did not guard.

Tell me, my true love,
Where do you pasture your sheep?
Where do you rest them at noon?
Lest I be as one veiled
Among your comrades' flocks.

If you do not know
O fairest of women,
Go follow the tracks of the sheep,
And graze your kids
Close to the camps of the shepherds.

To a mare among Pharaoh's cavalry
Would I compare you, my darling.
Your cheeks adorned with plaited wreaths,
Your neck with strings of jewels.
Bangles of gold we will add
To your spangles of silver.

While the king was on his couch,
My nard gave forth its fragrance.
A bundle of myrrh is my love to me,
Between my breasts he lodges.
A cluster of henna flowers is my love to me,
From the vineyards of En Gedi.

Indeed you are fair, my darling,
Indeed you are fair.
Your eyes are doves.
Indeed you are handsome, my love,
Yea beautiful indeed.
Our couch is luxuriant.
Our bower's beams are cedars.
Our rafters cypresses.

II. (2:1-17)

I am a rose of Sharon
A lily of the valleys.

Like a lily among thorns,
So is my beloved among the young girls.

Like the apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my love among the youths.
Under this shade I delight to sit,
And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.

He brought me into the wine house,
His intent toward me Love.
“Sustain me with raisin cakes,
Refresh me with apples,
For faint from love am I.”
His left hand was under my head,
His right hand caressed me.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by hinds of the field,
That *you* neither *wake nor rouse*
Love until it please!

Hark my beloved!
There he comes,
Leaping over mountains,
Bounding over hills.
My love resembles a gazelle,
Or a young stag.
Lo, there he stands behind our wall,
Gazing through the window,
Peering through the lattice,
My love spoke and said to me,
“Arise, my darling,
My fair one, and come away!
For, lo, the winter is over,
The rain is over and gone
Blossoms have appeared in our land;
The time of pruning has come.
The song of the turtledove

Is heard in our land.
The fig ripens her fruits.
The vines in bloom give forth fragrance.
Arise, my darling,
My fair one, and come away!”

My dove in the cranny of the rocks,
Hidden by the cliff,
Let me see thy form,
Let me hear thy voice;
For thy voice is pleasant,
Thy form fair.
Catch us the foxes,
The little foxes
Vineyard spoilers—
For our vineyard is in blossom.

My love is mine
And I am his
Who browses among the lilies.
Until the day breathes
And the shadows flee,
Turn and be, my love,
Swift as a gazelle,
Or a young stag,
On the cleft mountain.

III. (3:1-3)

Upon my bed at night
I sought the one I love.
I sought, but found him not.
I must rise and roam the city,
Through the streets and through the square;
I must seek the one I love.
I sought, but found him not.

I met the watchmen
Who patrol the city.
“Have you seen the one I love?”

Romencero

1. *Morenica a mi me Llaman

Morenica a mi me llaman
yo blanca naci;
el sol del enverano
me hizo a mi ansi.
 Morenica y graciosa
 y mavromatiani.

*Morenica, they call Me
Morenica, they call me,
Born white was I;
The sun of summer
Made me dark.
 Morenica and beautiful
 And dark-eyed.*

Morenica a mi me llaman
las casapicos;
si otra vez me llaman,
yo les doy besicos.
 Morenica . . .

*They call me Morenica,
the butchers:
If they call to me again,
I shall give them tiny kisses.
 Morenica . . .*

Morenica a mi me llaman
los marineros;
si otra vez me llaman
yo me vo con ellos.
 Morenica . . .

*They call me Morenica,
the sailors;
If they call to me again
I shall go away with them.
 Morenica . . .*

Ya se viste la morena
y di amarillo;
ansina es la pera
con el bembrillo,
 Morenica . . .

*She is dressing up
in yellow
like the pear
and the quince
 Morenica . . .*

Ya se vista la morena
y de verdoli;
ansina es la pera
con el shiftili,
 Morenica . . .

*She is dressing up
in green
like the pear
and the quince
 Morenica . . .*

*Endearing epithet meaning dark-skinned one.

II. Arriba canes arriba!

Aruba canes arriba!—; Querabia mala os mate!
En jueres matais el puerco—y en viernes comeis la carne.
Ay, que hoy hace los siete años—que ande per este valle
pues traigo los pies descalzos—las uñas corriendo sangre
buscando triste a Julianesa—la hija del emperante
pues me la han tomado moros—mañanica de San Juan
cogiendo rosas y flores—en un vergel de su padre.

Oido to ha Julianesa—que en brazos del moro está.
las lagrimas de sus ojos—al more dan en la faz.

*Hell, dogs, Hell! —; May a raging fury kill you!
You slaughter the pig on Thursday—And on Friday you eat its meat.
Oh, today is the seventh year—That I am wandering through this valley
With naked feet and bloody nails
Sad, I am looking for Julianesa—The daughter of the King
Who was taken by the Moors—On the morning of St. Juan
While gathering roses and flowers—In her father's garden.*

*He was heard by Julianesa
While in the arms of the Moor
The tears of her eyes
Hitting the Moor's face.*

III Seguidillas

A la sierra viene
la blanca niña
y en arroyos la nieve
huye de envidia

*To the hill comes
the white maiden
And the snow with envy
flees to the streams*

Manajitos de hinojo
coge la niña
y sus hojos, manojos
deflechastiraba.

*Handful of sweet fennel
the maiden gathers
And her eyes were flashing
showers of arrows.*

IV. Triste estaba el Rey David

Triste estaba el Rey David
Triste y con gran pasión
Cuando le vinieron nuevas
de la muerte a Absalom.

*King David was in deep sorrow
And stricken by great grief.
When the news was brought to him
Of the death of Absalom.*

Palabras tristes decía
salidas del corazón.

*The sad words he uttered
Came forth from his heart.*

The composer has dedicated his setting of the “Triste estaba” to the memory of Peter Wernick.

Performers:

Larry Livingston has conducted professional and collegiate orchestras throughout the United States. He has been a member of the faculties of Luther College, Palomar College, the University of California at San Diego, San Diego State University, Northern Illinois University, and the New England Conservatory of Music. In 1982, Livingston became dean of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University and assumed the Schneider Chair as Professor of Music. He has since accepted the position of dean of music, University of Southern California. Livingston has won plaudits for his conducting of contemporary repertoire; he has commissioned over forty works, and given premieres of works by Jan Bach, Roger Reynolds, Russell Peck, Robert Erickson, Ernst Krenek, Yuji Takahashi, Edwin London, Pauline Oliveros, William Thomas McKinley, and Paul Cooper. This is his debut on CRI.

Syzygy New Music Ensemble is sponsored by the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, and features its artist faculty and guests. This is their debut on CRI.

Syzygy New Music Ensemble: Diane Regains, soprano; Peter Middleton, flute, piccolo, alto flute; Melvin Warner, clarinet, bass clarinet; Sergiu Luca, violin; John Burton, cello

Anthony Korf received his master's of music degree from the Manhattan School of Music. The director and conductor of Parnassus since 1975, he has appeared as a guest conductor in many concert series. As a composer, his orchestra and chamber compositions have earned recognition in the form of awards and commissions from many organizations. Korf has recorded for the New World and Desto labels. He may be heard on CRI recording SD 499 conducting Parnassus for Korf: *A Farewell* and Babbitt: *Paraphrases*, and on CRI SD 480, Mamlok: *Sextet*.

Since its inception in 1975, **Parnassus** has earned a distinguished reputation as a vital champion of contemporary music. They have toured extensively throughout the Northeast, and may be heard on CRI SD 480, Mamlok: *Sextet* and on CRI SD 499, Korf: *A Farewell* and Babbitt *Paraphrases*, all conducted by Anthony Korf. **Phyllis Bryn-Julson** may be heard on CRI recordings: SD 294, Del Tredici: *I Hear An Army* with the Composers Quartet; SD 301, Mamlok: *Stray Birds* with Harvey Sollberger, flute; Rhodes: *Autumn Setting* with Speculum Musicae; SD 343, Gideon: *The Condemned Playground* with Constantine Cassolas, tenor; SD 364, Melby: *Two Stevens Songs* with electronic tape; SD 453, Starer: *Anna Margarita's Will* with ensemble; SD 485, Rorem: *The Nantucket Songs* with Ned Rorem, piano; SD 488, Walker: *Eleven Songs* with Walker, piano; Lockwood: *To Margarita Debayle* with Sutherland piano; SD 492, Del Tredici: *Syzygy* with the Festival Chamber Orchestra, Dufallo, conductor, SD 498, Clayton: *Cree Songs to the Newborn*; Hibbard: *Menage*; Dickman: *Song of the Reed*; *My Love Makes Me Lonely* and *Love, the hierophant*.

Parnassus

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| Keith Underwood, flute, alto flute | Chris Finckel, cello |
| Gerard Reuter, oboe, oboe d'amore | Donald Palma, contrabass |
| Dennis Smylie, clarinet, bass clarinet | Edmund Neimann, piano (first movement) |
| Cyrus Stevens, violin | James Primosch, piano (second movement) |
| Maureen Gallagher, viola | James Preiss, percussion |

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Scenes from Shir ha-Shirim: C.F. Peters (BMI)

Recorded by David Hancock

Produced by Ronald Borrer and Anthony Korf

Recorded at the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York City, April 5, 1984.

Romancero: C.F. Peters (BMI)

Recorded by Andy Bradley, assisted by J.R. Griffith

Produced by Arthur Gottschalk and George Burt

Digital editing by Gary Moon, Digital Services of Houston

Recorded at Sugar Hill Recording Studios, Houston, Texas

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