

Works of Survival

Program Notes

Intermezzo

Franz Schreker

Franz Schreker comes from a fascinating background. He was born in Monaco in 1878 to Ignaz Schreker and Eleanore von Clossmann. His father was Jewish and a court photographer who travelled often for his profession, requiring his family to move frequently. His mother was a member of the catholic aristocracy of eastern Styria, a region of Austria. After the death of Ignaz, the family settled in Vienna, where Franz Schreker studied violin and graduated from the conservatory with degrees in Violin and Composition.

In 1896, Schreker had his first performance in London. *Love Song* was premiered by the Budapest Opera Orchestra. This work is now lost, which shows us how lucky we are that we are able to perform any of Schreker's great music. Each work in print today is truly a jewel to be treasured. The talented Schreker became the most frequently performed opera composer of his generation.

Schreker's opera, *Der Schmied von Gent*, premiered to right wing protests. Under pressure from the Nazi party, planned premieres of his works were cancelled. He was forced to resign from his teaching positions, finally taking a job at the Prussian Academy of the arts, from which he was dismissed in May of 1933. Shortly after, his music was banned. Tragically, in December of 1933, he suffered a stroke and eventually died just, before his fifty-sixth birthday. Ironically, this saved Schreker from being sent to a concentration camp had he lived longer.

Seven Easy Pieces for String Orchestra

Suite for Clarinet and String Orchestra

Ernst Krenek

Ernst Krenek studied with Franz Schreker in Vienna and became a conductor of operas; active in the music scene of Vienna. In 1924, Krenek married Anna Mahler, daughter of the late great composer, Gustav Mahler. Their marriage ended before their first anniversary.

In 1933, Krenek started to feel pressure from the Nazi regime just as his former teacher, Franz Schreker, was being dismissed from his post at the Prussian Academy. The premiere of Krenek's opera *Karl V* was cancelled at the Vienna State Opera. His work *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* was withdrawn from Mannheim. It wasn't only Jewish composers who suffered suppression under the Nazis. His modernist music was later declared degenerate and appeared in the Degenerate Music exhibition of 1938. Although Krenek was a Catholic, he was often labeled a Jew by Nazi propaganda. When the Nazis annexed Austria, he escaped to the United States where he lived in exile and eventually became a U.S. citizen.

Pavel Haas and Hans Krasa were both imprisoned at the Terezín concentration camp in what is today the Czech Republic. Pavel Haas, himself from the Czech Republic, studied with Leos Janacek and was reputed to be Janacek's best student. During the Second World War, Haas was deported to Terezín. Very depressed, it was difficult for Haas to compose; however, he eventually did take up composition in the camp. His output was not prolific,

understandably. He wrote at least eight pieces while at Terezín; only a few survive today. The *Study for Strings* is one of the most popular of the works that survive from the camp.

Contrasting Pavel Haas, Hans Krasa was his most prolific as a prisoner. The works of Hans Krasa are well known; most notably his children's opera *Brundibar*, which was performed fifty-five times in Terezín. The *Overture for Small Orchestra* is an example of Krasa's productive output while imprisoned. Some other examples of his work from this period have been lost. In 1944, Hans Krasa and Pavel Haas were taken to Auschwitz and murdered.

Drash

Francesco Cilluffo

How does one write music about the *Shoà*? My composition teacher, Alexander Goher, used to say that one should simply never write a piece about the Holocaust – although he has evoked that dark place in human history in his own oratorio *The Death of Moses*. Despite the words of my teacher, I welcomed the commission, by the Chicago Arts Orchestra, of a piece to commemorate the *Shoà*. This would be a meaningful occasion; for me to find in myself music that reflects such a terrible period of our history.

Drash can have many meanings in Hebrew but, in this case, I wanted to underline the meaning of research and story-telling. *Midrash* is a method used by rabbis and writers to understand and explain obscure aspects of a sacred text; in order to make sense of something that may be hidden or left out of the narrative. In my orchestral piece *Drash*, I have tried to create a musical parallel to this methodology by writing several attempts to explore and bring forward a distant melodic idea (a sort of inner echo), which comes forward gradually throughout the piece and is eventually 'sung' by the strings section. Yet, the piece ends with a question mark; as in many cases when dealing with our actions and with our own history, we can only come closer to understanding something by accepting its complexity.

Drash is dedicated to my dear friend and admired colleague Rani Calderon.

~Francesco Cilluffo, Milan April 2011

Can Heaven be Void?

Ella Milch Sheriff

My father's diary, which had revealed to me the true story of his life as well as a personality I had never really known, did not let me rest. I knew I had to write something connected to this painful and terrible text.

When I started re-reading his book, it felt as if some pages stood out and forced themselves into my awareness. I took the marked pages to my sister and together we edited them so that they could be a basis for my composition.

Sometimes, the work was unbearably difficult for me. The thought that it was my own father who was talking about all the horrors he went through left me full of tears, unable to continue. In order to go on with the composition of the music, I had to detach myself emotionally and to imagine that I was writing about a stranger and not someone so close to

me.

In Paul Celan's poem, "Stretto", I found everything I could look for and integrated it into my father's text.

The composition is written in a simple and clear musical language and is not a conscious attempt to describe the text in musical notes, but rather to give it a suitable background. In the composition, there are three songs on texts by Paul Celan. There is also the contract between my father and his family and the Ukrainian farmer who hid them. It is sung at first on a Jewish melody that later becomes typically Christian. I hoped to convey through the music how absurd it all seemed to me when I read the contract for the first time and tried to imagine the surrealistic situation. A family taking upon themselves a commitment by signing a contract the way one buys real estate, so that someone will save their lives.

The third song is a prayer and elegy interwoven with the text of my father's cry to God. The same cry that ends with the question: "Can Heaven be Void" which is the name of both the book and the composition.

My sister, Dr. Shosh Avigal, an important theatre critic, director of various cultural institutions, adviser, researcher, and lecturer on theatre at many universities, was also my dearest friend. When my father, may he rest in peace, wrote his memoirs of World War II, he made the two of us swear to have them published after his death.. It took nine whole years before the book was finally published.

It was Shosh who was the driving force behind the project. She traveled to Poland, and insisted on writing a Hebrew translation that would do justice to the original Polish version. I will never forget how she dragged me to the very places where the terrible things my father wrote about had happened. It was a shattering experience that will remain with me forever.

The work was first performed 5 times in Israel, in March 2003. The reaction of the audience, musicians, music lovers, audiences of all kinds left me overwhelmed.

I dedicate this composition to my sister, Shosh Avigal, who passed away in February 7th, 2003 from Breast cancer. Blessed be her memory.

~Ella Milch Sheriff