

STRIVING FOR UNIVERSALITY

I take the occasion of two public performances of my works this autumn, as a reason for some retrospective thinking. The first event was the competition sponsored by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and the Israel Music Institute, at which my SYMPHONY NO.1 was performed by the orchestra conducted by Mendi Rodan. The other concert took place at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art on December 31, 1996, where my work ISLOSSNING – BREAKING THE BONDS OF ICE for two pianos and percussion was performed by the Musica Nova Consort. The concert was sponsored by the Embassy of Sweden and I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for their initiative. The work for two pianos and percussion was written in 1984, when I was in the midst of my composition studies with Prof. Leon Schidlowsky at the Tel Aviv Academy of Music, and it was in fact my first work to receive a public performance in Israel. This was in 1989. Between the writing of that work and the completion of my first Symphony in May 1996, lie twelve years of life and work, in the course of which I have actually written most of my music so far.

I began composing regularly when I became a student of Leon Schidlowsky. Before that I have studied a great deal of theory, but found it hard to put things together. As a matter of fact, at this stage, Leon Schidlowsky did not 'teach' in a conventional way in that he never told me what to do or how to write. We had long discussions about philosophy, literature and the emotional background of other composers and, as a result, I began to comprehend my own creative process. Another aspect of my contact with Schidlowsky was his familiarity with German and North European culture, music and literature. Being a new immigrant from Sweden, not yet adapted to the Israeli intellectual climate, I was greatly helped by Schidlowsky's knowledge of the German language and musical culture. During my studies in Sweden I had specialized in the works by Ligeti and Mahler thus the study of scores by Arnold Schönberg, analyzed with the help of Schidlowsky, came as a natural continuation to that. During this period, I also wrote a work for choir entitled GLÜHENDE RÄTSEL, on a text in German by Nelly Sachs, who came to Sweden as a refugee from Germany during World War II. This work enabled me, later on, to compose my choral work on a Hebrew text AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE, a work to which I will return later in this essay.

At the end of my studies with Schidlowsky (1986) I wrote my orchestral work CYCLES performed by the IPO in March, 1996. When writing this work I developed some thoughts of my own, described in my article 'In Search for an Answer' (IMI-News 92/2-3). Using the principles mentioned in the above article, I managed to unify all my musical influences, some of which have originated already in the course of my studies in Sweden. During my years in Stockholm I had been a piano student and while studying classical sonatas and fugues by Bach, I also studied musicology at the Stockholm University. At the same time I took many courses in the history of music and, after arriving in Israel, I continued my musicological studies at the Tel Aviv University concentrating on the Medieval and Renaissance church music and counterpoint in the style of Palestrina.

When I came to apply all this in a compositorial technique of my own, it crystallized into two quite simple principles of which the first can be called 'the principle of density'. This idea suggests that musical styles can sometimes be defined, not only by the different pitches used, but also by their quantity. In other words, a very dense texture will be perceived as contemporary even if the melodic and harmonic material seems to belong to earlier historical periods. The degree of density, or the number of polyphonic parts superposed can in itself be a stylistic denominator. To illustrate this I have chosen a passage from my choral work AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE (1993). Towards the end of this work there is a sixteen-part canon on a melody in G major. Had this canon been written with a similar melody but in four parts, it would have sounded as if it belonged in the 17th or 18th century. But the extension of the canon to sixteen independent parts creates the impression of a static field that sounds blurred and is reminiscent of a cluster which connects its texture with music of our time:

Ex.1.

It is the living, only the living.

who can give You praise,

The second principle can be called the 'principle of mode'. After much thought and hesitation I came to the rather simple conclusion that in all styles, except the ones which use the twelve-tone serial system or those involving chromatic clusters, some pitches are more important than others. This is to say that hierarchic structure is always present, in folk music as well as in art music, in modal as well as in tonal styles. The choice of mode, scale or intervallic structure is usually the most important indicator of style. Once the intervallic material is defined it can be used, without losing the sense of unity, in all kinds of different and contrasting textures: either in a very transparent setting with only a small number of polyphonic parts, or in a tutti built as a cluster or otherwise. This idea was applied in CYCLES, where violent orchestral outbreaks, slow meditative or introverted sections and tutti with stormy cluster character are united by the modes used.

The choice of mode gives the work its harmonic colour, even if it is not obvious to the listener which mode is used. The use of the Dorian mode or the Harmonic Minor will make the music sound Israeli, or inspired by Israeli folk music. On the other hand, the use of the Phrygian mode will give the music a somewhat Spanish flavour. If the mode used includes mainly sevenths, ninths, and tritones, the music will seem more modern, atonal and will be generally associated with 20th century styles.

Another method of creating unity in large-scale works for orchestra and choir is the use of canons, as it appears in the example given from AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE (see ex.1). A canon can be written in a small number of parts, or in a dense manner with cluster texture where the number of parts is practically unlimited. I would like to quote my first symphony as an example of orchestral tutti consisting only of three-part canon:

Ex.2.

Symphony No. 1, 1st movement, bars 157-160, reduction

The writing of canons in a varying number of parts can be regarded as an additional way of uniting contrasting musical material and texture, keeping the canon technique as the common denominator. Canons have been used through the whole history of music, from early Medieval and Renaissance church music up till the clusters of Ligeti. The character of the canon is determined not only by the kind of melody used and the number of parts, but also by the melodic interval at which it is repeated and at what time distance. If, for instance, I repeat a completely tonal melody at the interval of a ninth or a minor second, the result, if the number of parts is sufficient, will be a chromatic cluster.

As an example of a quite transparent canon I would like to quote the CONCERTO FOR TWO PIANOS AND ORCHESTRA (1988). In the second movement I have used, for the first time, a Jewish melody built on a mode that resembles an 'Ashkenazi Steiger':

Ex.3.

The melody occurs at the beginning of the movement set for two pianos:

Ex.4.

Symphony No. 1, 2nd movement, bars 1-5

Later the same melody appears in the orchestra in an eight part canon, where the canon is on the fourth:

Ex.5.

Symphony No. 1, Bars 64-68 2nd movement, reduction

The result of this canon is a kind of a semi-tonal texture, where tonality seems to hesitate to appear.

It is probably obvious by now that the main reason for developing my two principles and the idea of canonical writing has been the search for compositorial unity. However, the general meaning of this concept has been changed through the history of recent decades for, today, the concept of unity in composition can be defined in more than one way. Until quite recently the conventional idea has been that, for the sake of coherence, the work should be composed in one style from the beginning to the end, preferably developing only one idea or two contrasting compositorial ideas. As against this there developed a new and somewhat eclectic attitude, where tonality and atonality, expressionism, romanticism and elements from other styles, widely apart, are juxtaposed in a more or less successful manner. My own struggle has been to overcome this slightly confusing pluralism, and to reach some kind of unity.

My ideas described above have been adapted mainly to orchestral works. In composing chamber music, where it is impossible to create large canonical structures, I have used other means in order to maintain my struggle for unity. I have been trying to write music that stands, so to speak, above historic definitions of stylistic periods, intending to compose in a way that transcends time. In the TRIO for clarinet, viola and piano (1989) I used modes consisting of major and minor thirds and sixths in non-tonal combinations such as a major third on top of a major sixth, creating an augmented octave (or a minor ninth).

Ex.6.

In the first movement I wanted to create a very rich texture reminiscent of chamber music by Brahms, but with my own harmony. In the following example we can see an illustration of this:

Ex.7.

Bar 39 from the first movement of the TRIO for clarinet viola and piano. (the clarinet part is notated in Bb).

The critics, in a comment on my work, remarked that it sounded like a "modern Brahms" which proved that I have succeeded in conveying my intention to the listener. In my work for violin solo, VARIATIONS ON 12 (1991) I was influenced among others, by J.S.Bach. I would like to quote the beginning of the third section, where my initial motif:

Ex.8.

was developed in the following way.

Ex.9.

In this work too, my message seems to have been clearly conveyed since a critic wrote about its resemblance to works for solo violin by Bach (in addition to other stylistic influences).

In AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE for 16-part mixed choir a-capella (1993), I continued to develop the idea of coherent pan-stylistic unity and inner logic. The piece is also a continuation of my use of thematic material associated with Jewish and Israeli music, which appeared for the first time in my CONCERTO for two pianos and orchestra (see examples 3, 4 and 5). At the same time this composition is, in a way, a continuation of my early choral work GLÜHENDE RÄTSEL mentioned above. In AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE I have used for the first time a text in the Hebrew language taken from Isaiah 38: 10-18, in which King Hezekiah thanks the Lord upon his recovery from a serious illness. The text of the work is divided into three parts. In the first, King Hezekiah tells of his suffering and his closeness to death. In the second part, he begins to see some light and his mood wavers between hope and despair. In the third part, Hezekiah expresses happiness and joy of life, praising the Lord who has saved his life and delivered him from his suffering. The music is built on a kind of genetic cell that governs the entire work and undergoes continuous change as it develops. The cell is inspired by a work by Mordecai Seter, MIDNIGHT VIGIL, and the motif occurs right at the beginning of Seter's work.

Ex.10.

The motif from MIDNIGHT VIGIL:

My choir work begins as an elegy with modal chromaticism built on minor seconds and fifths, in the dark register of the male voices. Later on, altos and sopranos enter, and the first tutti climax is reached with a bitter and dissonant section written with sixteen independent melodic parts, held together by canons. The suffering and bitterness increase in violent outbursts, built on dissonant intervals (ninths and sevenths) in the extreme registers, where the high sopranos do their utmost to manage. This very difficult section ends with an unexpected unison, that solves the tension with a cadence melody to A minor. The original motif now comes back, but in a more hopeful manner in which the minor seconds grow into major seconds and thirds. The ornamental motif can be used in many different modes and scales - it can be used with thirds which would give it a classical character, or with a whole-tone scale to resemble impressionist music. In the middle section consonant and dissonant materials are juxtaposed, interfering and interrupting one another until, suddenly, only a major third is heard in pianissimo in two soprano parts while the rest of the choir remains silent. This third is the beginning of the ecstatic finale (see ex.1) ending with a completely tonal cadence in G major. In this work I have achieved the kind of overall stylistic unity which I have had in mind for such a long time, inspired as I was by the music of Mordecai Seter on the one hand and of modern European choir music such as Ligeti's REQUIEM and his work DREI PHANTASIEN NACH FRIEDRICH HÖLDERLIN, on the other. In addition, in the finale there is also an influence of the music by J.S.Bach.

So far I have dealt mainly with the musical material and its treatment, but I have not tackled the no less important question of form. This concept can be understood in several ways: it can refer to the specific form of one single composition; it can also refer to certain well-known categories, such as the sonata form, the rondo form etc., indicating the way in which a single movement is composed. Finally there is also the general use of the word

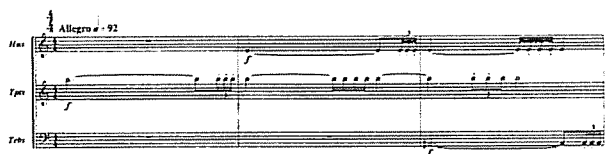
'form' when speaking of large categories, such as sonata, concerto or symphony. These terms have undergone changes in their meaning in the course of music history, but the form of the symphony has kept its identity as a large scale orchestral composition usually, but not always, in more than one movement. After writing my choral work AND WE SHALL SING MY SONGS OF PRAISE, I have invested a great deal of thought in trying to build a symphonic concept of my own, one that would respond to the needs of the present and yet continue a musical tradition.

Ever since Joseph Haydn had established the symphonic form more than 200 years ago, composers confronted the challenge of writing symphonies in accordance with the intellectual concepts of each historical period. It is relatively easy to distinguish two symphonic categories, relating to classicism on the one hand and to romanticism on the other. It is more difficult to assess what would be the common character of the symphonies of the 20th century. Generally speaking, composers were returning to classicism following the post-romantic period, adding to it the achievements of our century in the fields of harmony and orchestration. The post-romantic style of Mahler, loaded with programmatic pathos and heavy orchestration, was abandoned in favour of a lighter and more rational attitude.

Although there are some programmatic elements in my own first symphony, my intention was to write a work of the classical type without too much heavy pathos and with a relatively transparent orchestration. The symphony has an optimistic character, that stems not only from my own life but also from the general atmosphere in Israel during the period in which this work was written, when we seemed to be heading for peace in the near future. The symphony is in three movements: fast-slow-fast. Despite the optimistic mood of the work, the slow movement is dedicated to Yitzhak Rabin, whose tragic death occurred while I was about to begin writing the movement. The bright and happy mood that prevails, even though the slow movement is a lament, and is expressed by the choice of compositional material as well as by its treatment. At the initial stage of writing, I actually thought of subtitling my work "Fanfares, Songs and Canons", and although I later decided to abandon this title it gives a good indication of what my work is about. The idea of fanfares is associated with a festive, happy atmosphere. The concept of 'songs' or song-like melodies is connected with my wish to link the work with earlier Israeli symphonic music, first and foremost with that of Paul Ben-Haim. There are two sections in the first and third movement (one in each movement) with the texture of 'harmonized melody' and with modes associated with Israeli music, and these two sections are deliberately linked to the style of Ben-Haim. But apart from this influence, the formal concept and the technical solutions are my own and they can be seen mainly as a continuation of my preceding works.

My symphony opens with a fanfare, in which two trumpets joined by horns and trombones in unison, proudly proclaim their message, as appears from the following example:

Ex.11. Symphony No. 1, 1st movement, bars 1-3



After the rhythmic canon in bars 1-3 there is an immediate split-up into a cluster in the bars that follow:

Ex.12. Symphony No. 1, 1st movement, bars 4-6



This opening was intended to make a clear statement, which immediately afterwards becomes blurred and yet, at the same time, more interesting. The rhythmic cluster is suddenly interrupted in bar 7 and is

followed by a simple melody in the first bassoon, a motif that belongs to the idea of songs, or even a dance melody:

Ex.13. Symphony No. 1, 1st movement, bars 7-10



We have now seen how all three elements of which the compositional material consists, are exposed right in the beginning. Actually the word 'material' refers to the fanfares and the songs, while the concept of canons refers to the treatment of this material. As in my earlier works, here too there are textures of contrasting character, e.g. a 24-part cluster of the strings on the one hand and simple textures of harmonized melody on the other. In fact the interaction between very dense textures and transparent sections is the decisive factor for creating the first and third movements.

I have described how the fanfare appears in the opening bars, how it splits up between the individual brass instruments and is then interrupted. The melodic motif which follows, played by the bassoon, is elaborated until it disappears into a canonical cluster, then reappears in the whole orchestra and is followed by the return of the brass fanfare. The structure of the first section of the movement looks as follows:

- 1.a. Fanfare cluster
- b. melody (bassoon) cluster melody melody
- aa. fanfare cluster (brass)

The middle section, or part 2, can be described in short as 'cluster, song section, cluster'

- 2.a cluster (violins)
- b. song-section
- c. cluster (strings & brass)

The cluster of 2.a serves as a section that carries us suddenly to a very high, calm and remote area, reminiscent of the slow second movement. This cluster is played *divisi* in six parts by violins, where each part moves in the melodic minor tetrachord, although the listener perceives a chromatic cluster. The *divisi* parts are gradually united until, quite unexpectedly, we hear a traditional orchestral texture with strings and woodwinds playing 'melody with accompaniment', elaborating the idea of melodic minor. This of course, is the song section referred to as 2.b in the above scheme. The transition into the following cluster, written *divisi* in 24 parts for the strings, has been done in a slow, gradual way, where the string parts split up with canonical *divisi* entrances, first in the second violin, then spreading out to the whole string section:

Ex.14. Symphony No. 1, 1st movement, strings, bar 117-120



Here we see how a song texture gradually emerges into a cluster. On this cluster, or 'cloud', horns and trumpets enter one by one playing rhythmic fanfare patterns and developing slowly into a melodic motif, which will later prove to be decisive for the ending of the whole symphony. The motivic cell itself can be seen, for instance, in the horns (Ex. 16.):

Ex. 15.

Ex. 16.

At the same time as the horns and trumpets develop the quoted motif, the string cluster gradually disappears. In the third section which follows, and which ends the first movement, the motif of ex. 16 is enhanced with polyphonic textures in the brass, in the woodwinds and then, in the three-part canon mentioned above (see ex. 2) in the whole orchestra. In the course of this development, the interval of a rising major ninth is changed to major and minor sevenths and minor ninth. After the three-part canon the motif splits up into a cluster that concludes the first movement in a dissonant and quite powerful tutti climax.

In the second movement, *Andante lamentoso*, there are no fanfares and no songs, but there are two canonical sections. The movement begins in the lowest range of the orchestra, with double bassoon, tuba, harp, and double basses giving it its mourning character, together with tam-tam and gongs. The melodic development begins, slowly and heavily, when bass clarinet, bassoons and cello enter. *De profundis*, the tuba and the double basses start a ten-part canon that keeps moving upwards; each entrance a fourth higher. After a while, all instruments having entered, we reach a canonical tutti which embraces the whole orchestral range. Then, when the lower instruments gradually disappear (each part ends when the canonical melody ends), we find ourselves in the highest range of the violins and woodwind instruments, somewhere in a remote sphere of brightness and light. The harmonic development is now very slow – almost static – while glockenspiel, marimba and harp contribute spots of colour. In this static field, we begin to distinguish melodic movements that turn out to be a very calm five-part canon, similar to a fugue. Lower and still lower instruments enter slowly, the canonical interval being a major sixth. We again reach the lowest range and, after a while, the bright colours begin to disappear, as if dying out. The end of the canon brings us back to the low and dark range where the movement began. We find ourselves in the tonality of A minor, and bass clarinet, tuba, cello and double basses close the movement in *pianissimo*.

The third movement, *Allegro moderato con moto*, is opened by the bass trombone that has been silent in the *Andante lamentoso*. We hear a fanfare, although very low, reminding us of the trumpet fanfare which opened the work. The beginning of the third movement is rather low and sombre, gradually becoming brighter and more consonant. The general idea is that of a continuation of section 2.c from the first movement, where brass instruments were playing fanfares against the background of a 24-part cluster of strings. Beginning in the lowest range with trombones and bassoons, followed by cello and double basses, we then hear a slow development of brighter colours. Violas and horns join in, and after them the instrumental colour changes again, when the whole woodwind section plays a not too dense texture in their middle register, thus ending the first part of the third movement.

The woodwinds disappear and, a large canonical section begins in the tuba and the low strings, developing to a 26 part canonical cluster of strings and woodwind instruments, finally reaching the highest range in the first violins and flutes. We hear once again, as if approaching from far away, the horns entering one by one and then uniting in unison and holding a dialogue with the trumpets, which are now heard for the first time in the third movement. The horns and the trumpets are elaborating a motif that recalls the first movement (see ex. 16) and the horns reach a tonal version of this motif:

Ex. 17. horns bars 64-65, third movement

The horns then disappear and the 26 parts of the background cluster are gradually unified, while the atmosphere becomes calmer and softer, leading us to a cadence in E minor. Here the song section of the third movement begins, and the simplicity of this melody and its tonal harmonization serves as a contrast to the very dense and intensive music from which it was developed. But the quiet and calm do not last, since the 'song' is cut off by some dissonant chords in the brass.

The 3rd part of the third movement brings us to the end of the symphony. This can be described as a finale, consisting of two climactic four-part canons for the brass section against the background of running passages in the string and woodwind sections, all this rounded off by a coda. The first canon begins with fugal entrances of the dotted fanfare motif (see ex. 16) in augmentation, starting with tuba and bass trombone. The weighty canon climbs upwards to tenor trombones, horns and trumpets, ending with the trumpets playing a long note of C sharp in the third octave, which is extremely difficult to perform. Then, again, comes a fugal exposition of a chromatic motif, beginning with enormous power in the tuba and bass trombone. In this last canon, the harmony finally dissolves and becomes entirely tonal. After a few bars of dominant function, the music reaches a brilliant C major. The fanfare motif reappears, but this time in a tonal version in the trumpet part:

Ex. 18. first trumpet, bar 156

This motif repeats itself triumphantly, concluding the symphony with a victory over pessimism.

My first symphony is connected with the here-and-now of Israeli life, but I would like to believe that it can also exist as absolute music, to be heard without any extra-musical associations.

I have described here my search for compositorial unity or universality. This search might be described as the main theme of my composing. There is also an important secondary theme and that is my contact with Jewish and Israeli motifs which has grown stronger with the years. It is my hope that the first and second theme will continue to co-exist enriching one another.

I have also described my search for common denominators between all styles of western music, as one of the aspects of universality. Although no human being can reach absolute perfection, it is my dream and my ideal that my music be above time and place, music that moves in a vast universe, guided by universal laws.