

Compact Disc Review on Oasis

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Tsippi Fleischer is one of the major composers of her generation in Israel and the first internationally established woman composer in the Middle East. She has developed a distinctive compositional voice influenced by the rhythms and inflections of Semitic languages. The three works presented on Oasis span a wide range of both style and expression.

Erasure (2009) is a virtuoso composition for solo violin, brilliantly performed live by Yael Barolsky, for whom it was written. A compelling work, it takes the listener on a journey from the most vigorous life force to what the composer describes as “a gradually vanishing world” evoked by a “development-through-fading” form. Fleischer uses an imaginative range of violin techniques as motives spin out in reverse, towards a reductionist kernel or essence. The effect is both moving and intriguing. The great variety of glissandi is especially striking, and Barolsky has total control of the many-hued shadings called for in the composition. This work warrants repeated listening, each time revealing new nuances and relationships.

Moderna (2010) sets a minimalist text by the Egyptian poet Iman Mersal, who now lives in Canada. Combining Arabic and Hebrew, the three poems, *Soul*, *City*, and *Sex*, offer dark commentary on modern life. Fleischer’s setting mirrors the intensity of the texts in sparse settings—each less than two minutes long—for soprano, oud, cello, and piano. Soprano Rona Israel-Kolatt effectively conveys the dramatic intent as she moves from sung-speech (Sprechstimme) to full-voiced singing. The CD booklet provides a hint of the intertwining of the two languages in the poems; a fuller text and translation would be even more helpful. These settings suggest Mersal and Fleischer share a commitment to crossing boundaries and meeting a lived truth in spite of cultural pressures against such collaboration.

The CD’s title composition, *Oasis*, is a thirty-minute children’s opera, which takes Fleischer further into her boundary-crossing journey. Commissioned and premiered by Cantus-Juvenum Karlsruhe (the German youth choir) at the initiation of stage director Sebastian Stiebert, the opera is set in an imagined biblical Sinai

desert. Yael Medini’s libretto, translated into German for this commission, portrays Israelite and Bedouin children who forge a bond of friendship when the Bedouin youths offer water to the desperately thirsty Israelite children and their parents. The opera is an allegory for peaceful cooperation, with the backdrop of contemporary Arab-Israeli relations hovering close by. Fleischer’s writing is most effective in the half-sung, half-spoken *Mantra of Wandering* sections. The overlay of solo flute arabesques, tube whistling, percussion, and instrumental punctuation, all of which accompany the chorus, creates a sense of wandering in vast desert spaces. Here one feels the effect of Fleischer’s immersion in the Sinai desert while composing the opera, as described in her notes.

When the opera shifts to solo voices and the narrative of the story plays out, the music becomes more straightforward, with simpler rhythms and less nuanced inflections. Writing for children’s voices presents performance limitations, which may explain the contrast in styles. Intervals of fourths and fifths create a feeling of exotic starkness. The mostly German libretto includes a few phrases in Hebrew and Arabic in a nod to cross-cultural inclusion, and Fleischer herself penned an optional scene in Arabic. Dance scenes meld the Israeli *hora* with the Arabian *debka*, further emphasizing a meeting of two cultures. The performance here by the Campanella Children’s Choir is convincing and clear-voiced. Players of the Moravian Philharmonic, with Petr Vronsky conducting, bring virtuosity and sensitivity to the score.

Meira Warshauer is a composer based in Columbia, South Carolina, whose music is inspired by Jewish themes and their universal message.

