

## **Uri Golomb: A glimmer of hope or the loss of innocence?**

### **On the last song in two late versions of Tsippi Fleischer's song cycle *Girl Butterfly Girl* (Op. 4)**

*Girl Butterfly Girl* is a song cycle by the Israeli composer Tsippi Fleischer, based on poems by four 20<sup>th</sup>-century Lebanese and Syrian poets: Fu'ad Rifka, Shauki Abi Shakra, Muhamma al-Maghut and Unsi al-Hajj. Composed in 1977, it is one of the composer's earliest forays into 'classical' music. The work revealed, from its inception, a degree of flexibility which is rare in Western Classical music from the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century onwards. Since its first publication – in scores, and in concert and on records alike – it was presented in two equally-valid versions, with one version (in Hebrew, with Western instruments) bringing it closer to the traditions of Western Classical music, and the other (in Arabic, with Arab instruments) bringing it closer to the literary and musical traditions of Arab culture. Since then, the work continued to evolve: the composer herself wrote several additional versions, as well as allowing performers to prepare their own arrangements. This development culminated with the recent emergence of a version in Arabic with symphony orchestra (one of the two versions which form the focal point of this article). This combination might strike most Western listeners as embodying a dichotomous combination of unrelated worlds; yet it seems quite natural when viewed within the context of Fleischer's *oeuvre* as a whole, and the history of *Girl Butterfly Girl* in particular.

This multiplicity of versions gave rise to a unique album, *Girl Butterfly Girl: A World Journey* (2005). This album presents various versions of each of the cycle's songs – including improvisations inspired by them. Rather than presenting the cycle as a whole, the album consists of a series of performances for each song, placed along an East-to-West spectrum. The CD booklet offers various essays on the work: its genesis, history and performances, as well as the poets which inspired it. All these materials can be heard, read, and downloaded on the Discography pages of the composer's website (<http://www.tsippi-fleischer.com/disco2005a.html>).

Since then, the work continued to evolve. My paper focuses on two of its latest incarnations – a Hebrew version for soprano and chamber ensemble (flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano, violin, viola and cello; 2011); and an Arabic version for soprano and symphony orchestra (2012). Recordings of both versions appear on the 2013 album *Tsippi Fleischer: Innovated Classics*, also freely available on the composer’s website (<http://www.tsippi-fleischer.com/disco200013.html>).<sup>1</sup> I would strongly recommend a close listening to both versions as a prelude to reading this article, preferably while following the scores on the Israel National Library’s website (see full links in the footnote below). Both versions employ Western ‘Classical’ ensembles, though both of them – especially the orchestral version – evoke some of the Eastern sonorities explored more fully in several earlier versions. In this paper, however, I focus on the way these two orchestrations re-interpret the cycle’s poetic message, especially with regards to the fourth song.

In all the pre-2011 versions, this final song – whose title, “Girl Butterfly Girl”, is the same as that of the entire work – is set apart from the rest: it is the only one to be sung *a cappella*. Mira Joseph, in one of the essays accompanying the *World Journey* album, argues that this song represents – at least on the surface – “the calm after the storm”, contrasting with the increasingly dark, surrealist drama which reached its climax, both musically and poetically, in the third song, “The Coffin with its Lid Remote”. Unsi Al-Hajj’s poem “Girl Butterfly Girl” uses lighter, more optimistic imagery compared with the other poems set in this cycle, and this is intensified by the Fleischer’s airy, unaccompanied scoring. The composer herself suggested that this song was meant to provide an optimistic conclusion to an otherwise harrowing work. However, from the start, darker interpretations were suggested. Three of the cycle’s first performers (interviewed by Mira Joseph for the *World Journey* booklet) all agreed that Al-Hajj’s poem is not as optimistic as it might seem on first reading, though they disagreed on whether its darker undercurrents are reflected in Fleischer’s music.

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<sup>1</sup> The score of the chamber version can be viewed on [https://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE72506407](https://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE72506407). The score of the symphonic version can be viewed on [https://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE72506410](https://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE72506410).

In the 2011 and 2012 versions, Fleischer decided to withdraw the song's most distinctive element: instead of presenting *a cappella*, as before, she scored it for the same ensemble as the other three.<sup>2</sup> Within these new parameters, however, she still set the song apart: most of the ensemble, in both versions, moves primarily in parallel with the vocal line, albeit in different intervals, enveloping the voice in a resonating halo instead of offering an active accompaniment. This distinctiveness is especially noticeable in the chamber version, since the symphonic version employs the resonating-halo approach in other songs as well. In many instances, the orchestral instruments move in parallel lines, creating the effect of a single, multi-layered sonority, albeit rich in inner timbres; whereas the instruments in the chamber version are more clearly differentiated. This distinction is already notable in the opening of the first song: the chamber version features distinctive *obbligati* for specific instruments (e.g., the flute accompanied by the clarinet in bb. 19-21, and earlier violin obbligati), whereas similar lines in the symphonic version are subsumed into the overall sonority (e.g., that same flute fragment accompanied by a richer texture). The examples below provide partial lines from both version for comparison.

**Example 1: First Song, Chamber Version, bars 19-21 (fl, cl, bn)**

<sup>2</sup> There is only one other version in which the last song has the same scoring as the others – namely, singer Esti Keinan Ofri's purely-vocal version, which opens the album *A World Journey*. In this version, the singer extended the original vocal line to include allusions to instrumental accompaniments and interludes from the original versions. Keinan Ofri's performance of the fourth song is quieter, more introverted than her renditions of the three other songs; this is especially notable after the anguished cry which ends the third song. However, this rendition also includes hints of vulnerability, fragility and darkness, pointing towards a more pessimistic interpretation of the final song.

**Example 2: First Song, Symphonic Version, bars 19-21 (fl 1, ob 1, 2 bns, xyl, mar)**

The musical score for Example 2, Symphonic Version, bars 19-21, features five staves: Flute I (Fl. I), Oboe I (Ob. I), 2 Bassoons (2 Bns), Xylophone (Xyl.), and Maracas (Mar.). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The score begins at bar 19. The Flute I and Oboe I parts play a melodic line starting with a *ff* *obligato* dynamic, marked with a *rit.* (ritardando) and then *a tempo*. The melody includes two triplet markings (3). The 2 Bassoons part plays a lower melodic line, starting with *mf* and *sub. mf* dynamics, and marked with *rit.* and *a tempo*. The Xylophone and Maracas parts play a rhythmic accompaniment, starting with *sub. f* and *mf* dynamics, and marked with *rit.* and *a tempo*. The score concludes at bar 21.

It is important to note, however, that the resonant-halo approach does dominate the last song throughout. The symphonic version makes use of sustained individual notes on harp and piano at key points, creating inner divisions in the song (bb. 1-2, 28-27, 79-80,<sup>3</sup> 93); and in both versions, an independent, rising-and-falling figure recurs intermittently, appearing on the piano (in the chamber version) or in the flutes (in the symphonic version); below, I will discuss the possible implications of these and other differences between the two versions.

This new figure constitutes a distinctive compositional addition, above and beyond the change in the song's orchestration. A similar addition appears in the third song, where a recurring ornamental figure is added, appearing first in the second half of bar 4 (oboe in the symphony version, piano in chamber version). This ornamental figure in the third song,

<sup>3</sup> This particular point forms a darker, threatening sound, as I will discuss later.

like the rising-and-falling figure in the fourth song, has no clear precedents in the work's earlier versions.

Melodically, the additions to each song in the symphonic version are virtually identical to those in the chamber version:

**Example 3: Third Song, Chamber Version, bars 4-5 (piano)**

**Example 4: Third Song, Symphonic Version, bars 4-5 (oboe I)**

**Example 5: Fourth Song, Chamber Version, bars 11-12 (piano)**

**Example 6: Fourth Song, Symphonic Version, bars 11-12 (flutes I & II)**

11

*p leggiero*

3 3 3 3 3

In examining the score, one might note a certain affinity between the two melodic figures (i.e., the figure added to the third song and the figure added to the fourth). For listeners, this affinity is much more apparent in the chamber version than in the symphonic version, since the chamber version allocates these figures to the same instrument (the piano), whereas the symphonic version scores them differently. As a result, the added figures clearly deviate from their surroundings in the chamber version, even when they move in parallel with other instruments – compare, for instance, the instrumental interlude in the third song, bb. 39-46, in both versions.

**Example 7: Third Song, Chamber Version, bars 39-41 (piano)**

♩ = 110

39

*mp*

Pno



**Example 9: Third Song, Chamber Version, bars 4-9 (piano): The first two appearances of the “grafted foreign element”**

The musical score is for piano and consists of two systems. The first system, bars 4-6, is in 8/4 time. It begins with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 108. The dynamic marking is *mp*. The melody in both staves is characterized by a series of eighth notes, with a prominent interval of a tritone (F# and C) that creates a sense of tension and dissonance. The second system, bars 7-9, also in 8/4 time, features a dynamic marking of *p* in the first measure, which then transitions to *pp* in the final measure. The melody continues with similar rhythmic patterns, maintaining the tritone interval.

The singer’s line is closer to that of the other instruments, and the piano therefore seems to struggle against the entire ensemble. The figure also seems to reflect the dominant literary motif of distance and alienation in the text; in the instrumental interlude, one can connect it with the storm, or “foul weather”, described in the text in the preceding lines. In the fourth song, the added figure in the piano seems to echo its counterpart in the third song: in both cases, its rendition on the piano creates the sense of an alien element grafted onto the texture. In the fourth song, this alien element undermines the singer’s melancholy – yet potentially optimistic – lyricism.

The symphonic versions of the third and fourth songs create a greater sense of inner dialogue – and of dramatic and narrative development – compared with the chamber version. This is already apparent in the relationships between songs 2 and 3. The second song (in both versions) has a sort of obsessive unity in the entire ensemble. In light of this, the opening of the third song in the symphonic version gives us something approaching a sense of relief. The opening orchestral prelude evokes, in my ears, the pastoral image of a distant caravan of camels, or of a shepherd’s melody, set against the backdrop of wide, peaceful desert vistas. The orchestra is clearly split between atmospheric background



(strings, harp) and woodwind obbligati. The entry of the added figure – the “grafted foreign element” in the chamber version – is perceived here as an answer, or echo, of what we’ve already heard: Oboe I, introducing this added figure in the middle of bar 4, is merely responding to Oboe II’s presentation of the opening motif in bars 1-4 (first half), and the two instruments seemed engaged in an almost equal dialogue, soon joined by other instruments and, eventually, the singer.

**Example 10: Third Song, Symphonic Version, bars 1-6 (presentation of internal dialogue)**

c e n t r a l   m o t i f

Moderato ca. ♩ = 80  
obligato

Ob. II *mf* *f* Bn I *f* *obligato*

rit. Tempo ♩ = 108 Tempo I ♩ = 98

Ob. I *mf* *mp*  
Cl. II *mf* *p*  
Bn I *mf* *p*

Sop. *mf* *p*

'IN-NA-NI 'A-QI - FU - 'A-LA HA-FA  
فُ-كَالِيَسَ قُ-قِي-أَنْبِي-ذُ-أَذُ

The sense of threat and alienation enters only later in the song, in the flute’s fast, upper-register playing, bars 8-9.

**Example 11: Third Song, Symphonic Version, bars 8-9 (flutes I & II)**

different assymetrical rapid  
recitation for each flute

Overall, one senses an arch of cumulative tension – from quiet beginnings to a growing sense of looming threat made manifest by all orchestral instruments, especially in the stormy orchestral interlude.

The fourth song also makes quite a different effect in the chamber and symphonic versions. As I noted above, the added figure in the chamber version’s piano part created an unpleasantly alienating effect. In the symphonic version, however, that same figure is assigned to the flutes, evoking the image of the fluttering butterfly, peacefully moving up and down above more threatening sonorities. Among these threatening sonorities, one might mention the low-register opening sounds (gong, mallets on piano) and the quick, a-symmetrical string *tremolandi* (bb. 19ff).

**Example 12: Fourth Song, Symphonic Version, bars 19-27 (violins I & II, viola)**

recitations in all Vlns - free rapid repetitions, extremely not symmetrical between all Vln's.

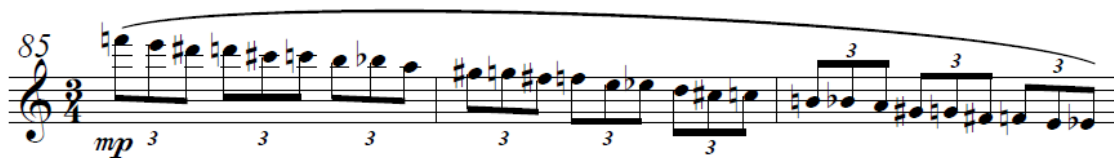
### Example 13: Fourth Song, Symphonic Version: Table of Mallets on Piano

#### Mallets

<b>1</b> middle high	<b>6</b> high	Always touch quite slowly and only once!! with one/both mallets according to what is written. When with both mallets- hold mallets and swift/act (=play) in contradictical direction, in the length of one bar with pedal on strings (sound will continue naturally).
<b>2</b> under middle high	<b>7</b> higher	
<b>3</b> above middle high	<b>8</b> highest	
<b>4</b> low		
<b>5</b> middle trill (bar 79)		
<b>5</b> middle on strings, first octave (bar 94)		

The *tremolandi*'s disappearances and reappearances, and the increasing presence of mallet- and harp-strokes, create a sense of growing tension and discomfort, reaching its climax on the threatening sounds surrounding the word “tamazzakat” (“was torn”) in bars 80-82. After this, the appearance of the descending figure in the flute (bb. 85-87) seems to depict the fall of the butterfly.

### Example 14: Fourth Song, Symphonic Version, bars 85-87 (flute I)



In different ways, then I sense that both of these later versions enhance the interconnections between the fourth song and the other three, especially the third song. Most of the earlier versions of the fourth song are indeed characterized by a sense of peace and innocence, which distinguishes it from the others, leading to a lyrical and (potentially) optimistic conclusion. The composer’s choice to add a new motivic figure to this song – in the instrumental accompaniments of both versions – affects this optimistic potential in

different ways, despite the fact that the same rhythmic-motivic figure is added to both versions. In the chamber version, one senses that a foreign, alienated element – represented by the piano – preserves a sinister echo of the previous song, where it had already contributed to intensifying the dark drama. In the symphonic version, on the other hand, that same motif enhances the sense of optimism through its depiction of the butterfly's flight – but this is contrasted with other musical elements, which were either absent or subdued in the chamber version, to create a narrative of growing threat, similar to that created in the same version's third song.

The topic of innocence and its loss is a dominant motif in many of Fleischer's compositions, especially since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as I discuss in my contribution to the Hebrew monograph *Tsippi Fleischer: A Biography*.<sup>4</sup> Preoccupation with this topic is thus more characteristic of the period in which these orchestrations were made, rather than the period of the original composition. In works like the opera *Cain and Abel* (Op. 57, 2001/2), *Symphony No. 6: The Eyes, Mirror of the Soul* (Op. 73, 2011), the song cycle *Lead Life* (Op. 52, 2001/2; Opp. 60-64, 2005), the grand opera *Adapa* (Op. 76, 2014)<sup>5</sup> and others, Fleischer confronts the elements that threaten human innocence – violence, jealousy, cynicism and others. Her approach is never cynical in itself: if real innocence does not exist, its loss cannot be perceived as real, let alone tragic. In the original, unaccompanied version of the fourth song in *Girl Butterfly Girl*, one might hear a pure if fragile representation of this innocence (though its purity has already been doubted, as Mira Joseph noted above), serving as a counterweight to the bleak, threatening worlds in the rest of the cycle. The 2011 and 2012 orchestrations seem to present a more soberly reflective approach. The chamber version is harsher, accentuating the sense of threat through a clear connection between the fourth song and the darkly dramatic third song. In the symphonic version, the sense of innocence is enhanced by the representation of the fluttering butterfly, and the familiar contrast between the third and fourth songs is retained. Despite this, the

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<sup>4</sup> *Tsippi Fleischer: A Biography*, edited by Uri Golomb (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2018). The book alternates between Tsippi Fleischer's contributions (newly-written materials as well as extensive excerpts from her letter and diaries) and my own surveys of major aspects of her music.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Black's review of this unique grand opera, *IAWM* journal (vol. 25/2, Fall 2019, pp. 27-28)

darker shadows are also intensified in other instruments in the orchestra. The sense of simplicity, possibly even *naiveté*, embodied in the vocal line remains; but Fleischer's orchestrations delineate different dangers which threaten this fragile innocence.

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Dr. Golomb has worked intensively with Tsippi Fleischer for more than a decade. He is editor and co-author of *Tsippi Fleischer: A Biography* (Ha-Kibutz Hameuchad, 2018; in Hebrew), and of the paper "Eros, jealousy and love: A new interpretation in an ancient guise for the myth of the first homicide in Tsippi Fleischer's opera *Cain and Abel*", published in volume 4 of *Pe'imot: Journal of Music and Culture*, edited by Dr Shoshana Zeevi (Tel Aviv: Resling & Buchmann-Mehta School of Music at Tel Aviv University, 2020, pp. 103-127). He is currently editing a bi-lingual collection of essays on Tsippi Fleischer's music, to be published in 2021, celebrating her 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. His own contributions to this collection include a short paper on *Girl Butterfly Girl*, and a more extensive paper on naïve innocence vs. brutality and violence across Fleischer's *oeuvre*, as well as an interview with Fleischer about her grand opera *Adapa*