

Tsippi Fleischer: Commentary on *Avram – An Oratorio Portraying the Birth of Monotheism* Opus 72 (2011)

Concept

AVRAM – an appellation for a supreme power which motivates all believers (also, the Avram who was, before he became the Jews' Abraham). This is my paraphrase on the birth of the three monotheistic religions, the angle from which I view the beginnings of monotheisms. I have now brought forth something I have long wanted to express, depth and mystery (like Gauguin's) steeped in ritualism, my own approach to this subject, emerging from my diggings into the large historical processes. The words I have selected from the religious, contemplative and philosophical sources on this subject are like points pinned statically into space, which observe like a mosaic. They always project, from every corner, the same message within the aesthetic-dramatic path I have created. They are planted into the texture, taking account of their sonoric essence, and presented in a clear, transparent and easily-digestible manner. Their scattered inventory almost demands that we internalize them. The pointillist-plastic words are mainly in Hebrew, but words in Greek and Arabic have also found their way in. The Coda finally raises the hero's name into the listeners' consciousness, elevating it into its deservedly exalted level. He who wanted to know everything. All the words aside from his name are tied to his essence in the three religions, to their historical-philosophical point of origin, with four signification codes: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, general. These codes are marked in the musical language. At the moment, the image that seems most appropriate for visualizing this is the image massed believers, from all three religions, assembling at the gates of one temple dedicated to that one monotheistic God – a joyful assembly, positive and ecstatic.

Motion

The Oratorio's formal structure can be described as a flow of six parts, slightly separated from each other. I have created an aesthetic-dramatic motion. We begin with the **Exposition of the believers**, divided into two sections, the second emerging organically for the first. The first section moves in a particularly slow tempo (*Largo*), in order to make it

easily comprehensible, while the second moves at a slightly faster tempo (*Tempo giusto*); the choir's two voices are split between the characterisations of the endings a and i. For instance:

On the phoneme a

Hebrew

Gvura (heroism), makhshela (obstacle), El olam (God of the world), ahava (love), Rei'ya (vision), akeda (the Sacrifice)

Greek

Logia khresthenta (Avraham's desire for divine knowledge)

Arabic

Al-Ka'aba

On the phoneme i

Hebrew

Ur Kasdim, avi hakhokrim (progenitor of seekers), hama'aminim (the believers),

Greek

pistis (belief, faith, confidence)

The emerging sequence can create, in the listener, the seeds for free associations – varied, interesting, personal.

In the third section – **The ecstasy of the believers** (*Energico*) – the choir bursts in an energetic unison; the ecstasy resonates from sonorous Hebrew words with an 'ut' ending: itstanginut (astrology – diving the future through the stars), pnimiyut (inwardness), hitbonenut (reflection), hishokekut (yearning), dvekut (devotion), and others. The decrees of destiny strike in the fourth section, **The believers struggle with one another**. This section's shape emerges from the two expressions which reflect this puzzling, horrifying dichotomous confrontation: the great contrast between *love of the land* (ahavat ha'aretz) – which leads to wars and alienation – and the *pursuit of peace* (redifat shalom). The imitative strikes in 'Love

of the land' clear the way to the terpsichorean atmosphere as the 'Pursuit of peace', which intensifies into a whirlwind of great desire.

The fifth section, **As we part**, is shaped as a farewell *de-ja-vu*: we proceed through a "synopsis" of the work, presented in a calm *moderato*. The sense of prayer within a sanctified atmosphere is intensified by the increasing use of doubled *unisono* textures. After this prolonged process and its brief reminder, we move into the coda – **Chorale Grave** – where Avram's name appears as the only word in the entire section. It is as if we emerge into Avram only at the end, reaching him after a grandiose preparation. After all we have learned, with all its symbolism, we are finally ready, and only then does he appear, in all his spiritual being and in great splendour.

Shape

I have chosen the medium of the female choir, suffused with human warmth and bright colour, accompanied by three harps, who provide their own rich associations: antiquity, exoticism, femininity and an all-embracing diapason. The violins breathe their own ancient atmosphere, and are obedient to the tonal patterns; the five young players symbolise the still-relevant addressees of the path that Avram pointed to – a path we have now strayed from.

World of Pitch

The pitch patterns of this work are faithful to basic tetrachords, shaped from two minor seconds + diminished second (or minor third), inspired by *maqam hijaz* – a key component derived from Arab music. Their treatment involves their shifting into higher and lower pitch levels, focused on F, G, E and F-sharp. There is no permanent basic pitch, no binding pitch order; instead, the 'flavour' of *maqam hijaz* acts as a constant yet ethereal presence.

In fitting with my quest for an ancient, exotic character, filled with hollow chords (fourths, fifths and octaves), the modulations – which do surface occasionally – are of the melodic type.

Two additional comments

1. I crave the indulgence of scholars (historians, philologists, etc.) for meddling in their affairs, removing words from their contexts and pinning them into space. I include among these scholars my husband and my son, whose forgiveness I seek. They are highly

knowledgeable scholars; in comparison, I know very little – no more than one soothsayer who lays bare the magic.

2. In Alice Dor-Cohen's dance work *One* (presented at the Inbal Multicultural Ethnic Centre, Tel Aviv, February 2011), there was a clear desire to aim towards the One, despite the Trio/Trinity. In my work the One exists, or does not exist, and reality moves along its way. The mysteries permitting free choice are yet to be unveiled.

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(a collection of my notes while composing)

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