

Four songs — Impressions of a listener

The composer selected four poems from the wealth of contemporary Arabic poetry and combined them into a unified song-cycle. After the words had made their impact on her, she created her own dramatic line.

In each of the poems the condition of Man's existence in the world — and in particular in today's world — is considered.

In **Piece of Earth** the narrator tells that he built a cavern of light to God and spent nights therein, apparently in the hope that God would appear to him. And indeed, his hope is realized. This dreamed-of revelation is the main event of the song and is placed at its centre. In the aftermath of the revelation, interaction between God and the man takes place. But then the morning comes; God disappears, never to return. Here then is the condition characteristic of Man in the modern world: he has lost his God and whoever has previously been a believer, bemoans this loss.

On listening to the music, three things impressed me particularly:

- a. The musical serenity which pervades throughout almost all the song and imparts an exotic atmosphere
- b. The large amount of high notes, expressing a ceaseless yearning for God
- c. The considerable increase in intensity at the words "To me would he then come". This central line becomes the centre of musical expression of the song, and creates a type of climax, with the high notes moving fast in relation to the song generally and the words being articulated more quickly — perhaps to mark a moment of great emotion in the narrator's life.

In the second song, **Eyelids**, the narrator is disorientated, floating, detached. This detachment is a result of the demons' persecution: one demon sprinkled salt on both his eyes and threw him like a ball amidst the feet of tribesmen. Other demons kicked him up high towards the desert sands, taking from him everything that was dear to him. All this the narrator tells his haggard mother at the beginning of the song. With its short lines and its alliteration (in the Hebrew text), the song as a whole reflects the narrator's breakdown. It opens as if with a shout, perhaps a call for help, turns into an expression of fear at the height of the persecution and ends with what sounds like a subdued sigh (emphasized by the rhyme on "ai" in the Hebrew).

In Tsippi Fleischer's music, the very beginning of the song already establishes a strongly dramatic contrast to the first song. This is because of the fast, agitated notes which enter immediately after the quiet conclusion of "Piece of Earth". The fugal texture in which melodies seem to chafe against one another, clearly evokes the game which the demons play with the terrified and helpless human being.

In the third song, **The Coffin with its Lid Remote**, the narrator declares that he is standing on the brink of madness. The image accompanying this phrase — "like an infant who stands upon a window ledge" — brings to life the immediacy of his statement. The narrator enumerates a list of things which he lacks, the loss of each of which is liable to cause him to lose his sanity: the effect of their combined loss is thus so much greater. The poem ends with a number of powerful images describing the narrator's distress and his longing for some degree of stability in his life.

In the music to this poem, the storm of madness is clearly depicted. The initial lull before the storm very soon turns into a web of notes — high and low, slow and fast, quiet and clamorous. Here there is a direct follow-through from "Eyelids". The organic development reaches its climax with the last shout which signifies both the cawing of the blackbirds and the unrestrained outburst of an hysterical person.

The fourth poem, **Girl-Butterfly-Girl**, transports us suddenly to a world of optimism. It is like a children's fairy tale. The word "butterfly" immediately suggests concepts such as freedom, airiness, beauty and colour. The "girl" of the poem is in the midst of a lovely dream. Her awakening does not bring disillusionment in its wake; on the contrary — the object of her dream penetrates into the reality of her world, and she does not know whether she is "a girl who had dreamed she was a butterfly/or/a butterfly dreaming that it was a girl". This condition prevails until things change: "In the evening, a gentle breeze...". First the change is minimal and the dream-like mood continues to encompass both the girl and her companion who has come to join her. But then "all was torn apart

outside". The poem does not identify any particular tragedy as such, but the reader senses clearly that this symbolizes a destructive outside event which has a powerful influence on the individual's life.

The melody to this poem is performed by an unaccompanied voice only. Thus, after the piercing outcry accompanied by instruments to conclude "The Coffin with its Lid Remote", the fragility and intimacy of the vocal line is particularly marked. The dreamy atmosphere is reflected in the high-lying melody, the butterfly's fluttering is suggested by the vocal *melismata*. The turning-point comes with the deeply-felt low notes to the words "All was torn apart outside". The word "butterfly" retreats further and further and the listener is aware of the butterfly's dying struggle until the actual "tearing apart", represented by the distinct separation of syllables of the sung word "but-ter-fly".

From past experience in providing guidelines for teachers of literature (where different fields of art are combined, including painting and music), I recommend the inclusion of this record in literature classes at high school level. After introducing the poems the teacher should play Tsippi Fleischer's music. The words and atmosphere of the poems come to life more powerfully in the music: in this way the composer, without any intermediacy, draws the young listeners closer to the cultural world reflected in the poems. The pupils should preferably be presented with the Western version first and then with the Oriental one. The latter is a more advanced stage towards familiarization with the culture of the East. More detailed instructions appear in my article "From Arabic Poetry — How to organize Learning Materials Units and how to introduce them to High School Pupils" (Hebrew) ("Aleí Siach", 1986).

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