

Posted by **Pamela Hickman** at **5:30 AM** No comments:

Labels: **Clara Schumann, Dikla Baniel, Judith Shatin, Leonard Bernstein**

Saturday, July 8, 2017

The Atar Trio bows out of the 2016-2017 concert season with works of three women composers and the suite from Bernstein's "West Side Story"



Photo: Yaniv Druker

“From Kafka to Clara” was the title given to the Atar Trio’s last concert for the 2016-2017 season. The concert, on July 5th 2017 in the Ran Baron Auditorium of the Israel Conservatory, Tel Aviv, was also the Israel Women Composers Forum’s concluding event of the current season. Members of the Atar Trio are pianist and director Ofer Shelley, violinist Tanya Beltser and ‘cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper.

The evening opened with “Gregor’s Dream” by American composer Judith Shatin (b.1949), a work for amplified piano trio and electronics commissioned by the Atar Trio and premiered by it in a program titled “Dream within a Dream” in 2016. This is not the Atar Trio’s first collaboration with Shatin, who serves as professor at the University of Virginia and who founded the Virginia Center for Computer Music. “Gregor’s Dream” takes its inspiration from Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis”, in which Gregor Samsa has a frightening dream, then to wake up to find he has turned into a horrible bug. In preparation of the magnetic tape, Shatin requested recordings of beetles from three bioacousticians (biologists researching animal sounds). Talking about the work, the composer writes “The mood of the anxious dream, and the ominous world into which Gregor wakes, suffused my musical imaginings. While there is some longing, it is mainly the fear of the ‘other,’ that permeates the story, or at least my reading of it. This poignant story is an important reminder that the ‘other’ is part of our own family.” A demanding work, the players’ text constitutes a tense and terse, sometimes fragmentary, dialogue with the tape, the electronic effects ranging from ominous dark sounds, to what might sound like the squawking of large birds, to squeaking sounds, to high whizzing electronic auditory sensations. In well-

measured cooperation with the tape and with each other, the Atar players joined with competent playing bristling with effects, including strumming of the piano strings, in this work presenting players and tape as equal forces. Interestingly, at the work's outset, and later at its conclusion, there was, woven into its dissonant agenda, a kind of solid anchor - a sense of tonic. Judith Shatin's work is intense, uncompromising and powerful, its subject not for the faint-hearted!

Clara Schumann's Romances for violin and piano op.22 were composed in 1853; this was a productive year of writing for the greatest woman musician of the time. She dedicated the op.22 Romances to the renowned violinist Joseph Joachim; the two artists took the pieces on tour. Joachim later performed them for King George V of Hanover. The romance was one of Clara's favourite character genres, those of the opus 22, however, being among the last pieces she wrote. Kristina Reiko Cooper provided the audience with some interesting background information on Clara Schumann, the great virtuoso pianist, composer and editor, who had performed with the likes of Paganini and Mendelssohn and who was idolized by Goethe. Cooper also mentioned the fact that, in Clara's day, a great virtuoso was required to perform his/her own works. Beltser and Shelley's performance of the tri-partate pieces was personal and beautifully shaped, as they allowed the spontaneous character of the music itself to dictate pace. Beltser's signature sound - her warm timbre and generous expressivity - is well suited to the plaintive Romantic lyricism of the works. With much dialogue between Beltser and Shelley, I felt that Shelley, at times standing back a little too much to give the violinist the stage, might have filled the soundscape more boldly, considering the fact that Schumann's pianistic writing is no less luxuriant, intricate or idiomatic than that of the violin. A welcome addition to the program might have been a solo played by the Atar Trio's newest member - renowned 'cellist Ms. Reiko Cooper.

The Tel Aviv concert included the Atar Trio most recent commission - Jerusalem-born composer Dikla Baniel's "If Forget Thee, O Jerusalem" (January, 2017), a work for piano trio and smartphones. It was premiered in the USA and has been performed to very different audiences. The composer, present at the concert, spoke of the "Binding of Isaac" as lying behind the work, of the three monotheistic religions addressed in it, of the constant conflict in the city and of the fact that Jerusalem is a city that brings out emotions in people. The work refers to holiness, sacrifice and religious fundamentalism. Where do smartphones come into the performance? Audience members were asked to open the Jerusalem-Atar YouTube app. and to each choose and play one of three recordings on it. With that, we were instantly transported to hustle and bustle of Jerusalem's Old City, with a collage of crowd noise and prayers of all three monotheistic religions filling the hall - at times mingling, at times surfacing singly, at times silent. As to the sections of the instrumental score - intense and individual, as is Jerusalem - they are infused with clear musical associations of each of the three religions and also with the concept of violence, destruction and bloodshed. Between each instrumental section, the players are silent as the sounds heard in the Old City's alleys serve to sweep away one association in readiness for the next. With the recordings silenced, the work ends on an eerie, thoughtful note. Dikla Baniel's writing is intelligent, original and stirring. No easy work to perform, it makes for fascinating listening. The audience was deeply moved.

Ofer Shelley engages in much arranging for the Atar Trio. The concluding work of this concert was his new arrangement of Raimundo Penaforte's Suite from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story", in which Shelley has expanded the violin-and-piano

version into a five-movement work for piano trio. The Romeo-and-Juliet story (Tony and Maria) set in the urban underworld of New York, its brilliant blend of instrumental- and vocal music, dance, theatre and art come together in Bernstein's feverish, hypnotic score. What better vehicle could there be for a new arrangement than this rich canvas of sublime melodies, jazzy rhythms, calculated dissonances and raw emotion! In brilliant, colorful and polished performance, the Atar Trio players gave expression to the many aspects of this milestone work, especially to its tunes - the coquettish "I feel pretty", "There's a place for us" tugging at the heart strings, the pizzazz of "America" and the nostalgia of "Tonight". Here was fresh, collaborative playing (also fine solos by all) bristling with jaunty banter, individual expression, energy and rhythmic dash, conjuring up New York with its city traffic sounds, bells, intensity and urgency, together with the human, touching aspects of "West Side Story". Bernstein wrote: "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before." Ofer Shelley's arrangement is splendidly crafted. As to the potential of the piano trio, I couldn't agree less with Menahem Pressler who whimsically referred to the trio constellation as "a poor man's orchestra".

Posted by **Pamela Hickman** at **5:30 AM** No comments:

Labels: **Clara Schumann, Dikla Baniel, Judith Shatin, Leonard Bernstein**

About Me



Pamela Hickman

Born in Australia; in Israel since 1968. Studied at Melbourne University (BA Languages, Music, Education), the Jerusalem Academy of Music (Theory, Composition), New York University (Music education.)

[View my complete profile](#)