

Dialogues of Love

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2014
Duration: 40 min
Orchestration: 2(pic).2.2+bcl.asx(barsx).2/4.3.2+btbn.1/timp.3perc/acn.hp.pf/str
Publisher: G Schirmer Inc

Program Note

Texts

Part I:

Leone Ebreo

Rabbi Aharon Peretz, 18th cCE, Tunisia

Oswald von Wolkenstein, 1376-1445

Part II:

Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, ca. 1021 Malaga-ca. 1058, Valencia

Translations and transliterations by the composer.

Part III:

1st Corinthians 13:4-7, translated into English by the composer based on the Franz Delitzsch 1877

Hebrew translation and the John Nelson Darby 1884 English Translation

Composer note

Dialogues of Love

A Choral Symphony

I first read Abravanel's Dialoghi d'Amore in my late teens or early twenties. My grandfather translated the book into Hebrew from Italian, and I think I read it after his death. Poetic and deep, spiritual and rational, it aims to answer many of the basic philosophical and scientific questions that we all have: What is love? What is happiness? Why do objects fall? When was the universe created?

Dialogues of Love is divided into three parts, roughly following the three parts of Abravanel's book. Part I, which focuses on romantic love and desire, opens with a melismatic exclamation in Latin, from the first sentence of the book: "Knowing you Sofia, causes me to feel love and desire." The accordion, the first instrumental character of the work, expresses yearning and desire with a sad yet simple, diatonic melody. The accordion's role continues throughout the work, commenting on the texts with a singular and familiar voice. "Ayelet Khishki," the next section, derives from an 18th-century text by the Tunisian poet, Rabbi Aharon Peretz. Men's voices express a man's strong desire for a woman, and the setting calls on choral traditions from the Caucasus, characterized by powerful open and natural intervals between voices. Each stanza expresses the desire more vividly, and the music builds in turn. Beginning with the pastoral "Doe of my desire, perfection of beauty," the man's affections grow troubled. "All day long, I am sick with your love." This love drives him to exclaim, "Oh great gazelle, I shall drink bitter waters." After a brief return to the opening, "Sofia," the music relaxes into a song of love told from a woman's perspective.

Although Oswald von Wolkenstein, a 14th-century author and poet, wrote the text, "Kom Liebster Man," the text speaks of the deep love that a woman feels for a man. Each section of the poem begins with a call to the beloved man followed by a short expression of love and affection. The musical setting initially follows the structure of the poem, until a later reversal of text, leading back to the words, "I gladly will give myself to you forever." A meditative mantra follows, with the repetition of the woman's thoughts, "Your manliness revives my spirit and thoughts, more than anything else in the world." In reply, the men again enter, now with another poem by Wolkenstein: "Your words and gestures alleviate all my cares, woman, and even better, a proud lady." This coming together signifies the unification of woman and man through love and desire.

Part II begins with a Scherzo that broadly depicts the physical and natural phenomena that Abravanel also includes in the forces of love. The power of gravity, fire, rain, wind, and even the ocean's tides are connected to passion, echoing the musings of ancient Greek philosophers, who went so far as to link emotion with geometry and algebra. The meter and rhythms of this movement follow certain geometric shapes and principles, but the emotional character swings between

great joy and sadness. Solo alto saxophone then enters as the work's second instrumental character, expressing love and passion that is yet unfulfilled. Nature serves as a metaphor for love in the Hebrew choral song, "Kehtamar At," which closes the section with text that mirrors Abravanel's book. Upright bass, muted trumpet, and rich harmonies create a jazz-influenced setting upon which the saxophone and accordion seem to search for each other.

The breakdown of love opens the third and final part of the piece, as the saxophone restates the music just heard in Part II. At this point, however, love can no longer exist, triggering an increasingly aggressive orchestral section. The pain and agony that can accompany love now crush the motives of the piece, leaving the music almost unrecognizable.

Out of these ashes, love is reborn through the voices of children, singing the words from 1st Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is patient, love is kind." The accordion's simple voice again returns, expressing the steadfast and unending character of true love along with the text, "It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

— Avner Dorman

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