Nigunim

Sonata no. 3 for Violin and Piano

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2011
Duration: 20 min
Orchestration: vn, pf
Publisher: G Schirmer Inc

Program Note

Premiere
April 16 2011
Gil and Orli Shaham
92nd St. Y, New York, NY

Composer note
The Nigun is a fundamental musical concept of traditional Jewish music. According to Habbad literature, the Nigun serves as a universal language; it ascends beyond words and conveys a deeper spiritual message than words can; a Nigun sung in Yiddish will reach and affect someone who only speaks Arabic and vice versa. The Nigun may be short but since it begins and ends on the same pitch it may be repeated over and over. In this sense, the Nigun has no beginning and no end and is eternal. Nigunim (the plural of Nigun) may be secular or religious, fast or slow, and may be sung and played in a variety of social events and circumstances.

When the 92 Street Y and Orli and Gil Shaham approached me to write a new piece for their Jewish Melodies program, my first thought was to write a piece that would explore the music of the ten lost tribes (the Hebrew tribes that were exiled after the first temple was destroyed). Since we know very little about the whereabouts of these tribes, I decided to explore the music of various Jewish traditions from different parts of the world and how they relate to larger local musical traditions.

To my surprise, after researching Jewish music from different parts of the world, I found that there are some common musical elements to North African Jewish cantillations, Central Asian Jewish wedding songs, Klezmer music, and Ashkenazy prayers. Though I did not use any existing Jewish melodies for Nigunim, the main modes and melodic gestures of the piece are drawn from these common elements. Moreover, different sections of the piece draw upon local non-Jewish musical traditions of each of these regions: for example, the second movement uses principles found in Georgian folk rhythms and harmonies, and the fourth is inspired by Macedonian dances.

— Avner Dorman

Avner Dorman
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