

MÁTTI KOVLER

COMPOSER

Described as “a potentially estimable operatic composer in the making,” (New York Times) composer **Mátti Kovler** was born in Moscow, raised in Jerusalem, and is now based in Brooklyn.

Kovler’s music has been commissioned by Tanglewood, Carnegie Hall and Israel Festival. His orchestral works have been performed worldwide by the Israel Philharmonic, the Fox Studios Symphony (Los Angeles), the Metropole Orchestra (Amsterdam), the American Composers Orchestra (New York), and others. Matti was a fellow at the Tanglewood, Aspen and Academia Chigiana Festivals, a winner of two ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Awards, and of the Theodor Presser and Brother Thomas Awards.

Kovler has mastered a range of styles from folk and jazz to those steeped in the classical tradition, and brings these together in works of considerable dramatic scope, by turns comic, mystical, warm, and searing. His musical influences include Jewish folklore, Broadway musical theatre and the cult writings of the French theatre philosopher Antonin Artaud.

Kovler “appears to be contemplating the fork in the road that divides opera from musical theater.” (Boston Musical Intelligencer). In 2011, he launched Floating Tower, a cross-cultural music theatre company. With a modular make-up of 27 multi-national actors/musicians, since its founding, Floating Tower has created over thirty productions in the US, Israel, China, Scotland, Russia and Ukraine. The company’s most recent production, an acclaimed opera-parody of Wagner’s Ring Cycle, ‘The Drumf and the Rhinegold’, was produced during the historic 2016 election, in collaboration with Doug Fitch, Claire Chase and members of ICE, starring Ariadne Greif as Melania.

In addition to his work with Floating Tower, presently Mátti is also a member of the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop, the premiere training ground for musical theatre composers and lyricists. Recent engagements include the Carnegie Hall premiere of Cokboy for actor and orchestra with the Garden State Philharmonic. Kovler is now at work on a new music theatre piece, *Gospel of Sabbatai*, in collaboration with librettist Matthew Kelly.

Please visit www.floatingtower.com and www.mattikovler.com for updates and more information.

Press Kit

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Here Comes Messiah!

A tour-de-force for soprano and chamber ensemble, the opera follows a young woman in the final stages of giving birth - gradually moving from comedy to revelation.

World Premiere:
Carnegie Hall, NY

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The Escape of Jonah

A vernacular oratorio for trumpet, choir and big-band is a parody on the story of the prophet Jonah. The biblical text is juxtaposed with Jonah's agitated speech, voiced by the trumpet.

World Premiere:
Jerusalem Music Centre

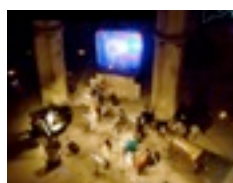
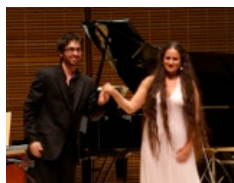
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Unbearable Lightness

A chamber work for seven double basses employing "Italian fingering," a musical technique allowing the double bass to sound in the extreme expressive range of its register.

World Premiere:
Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood

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Ami and Tami

Today's take on "Hansel and Gretel," the musical comedy deals with modern teenagers overstretched by the high hopes and ambitions of their success-driven parents.

World Premiere:
Cummings Hall, Jerusalem

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La Testa Di St. Caterina

A mini-opera from the point of view of St. Catherine of Siena, exploring her graphic vision of her own posthumous decapitation in her own words.

World Premiere:
Accademia Musicale Chigiana, Siena

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Cokboy

A tone poem for narrator and orchestra evoking the experience of Eastern European immigrants in America.

World Premiere:
Jordan Hall, Boston

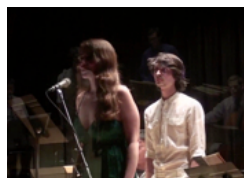
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Or [Light]

A multimedia opera based on the rise and the fall of Shabtai Zvi, the scandalous Jewish messiah of the 17th century. In collaboration with Theodor Tezhik (Cirque Du Soleil)

World Premiere:
Hilversum Radio Hall, The Netherlands

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ARTIST STATEMENT



As a composer, my most important goal is to create a moving and memorable experience. I believe music should have a tangible impact on the audience, whatever their background may be. What I value in any music is its ability to reach, both directly and deeply, as well as a certain magnetism that will call listeners to return to it again and again.

*My own works draw on many contrasting musical and textual sources. Traditional religious chants - from Gregorian to Hassidic - are juxtaposed with experimental musical theater and jazz. A biblical Psalm rubs shoulders with Yeats's "Second Coming." The classical avant-garde is paired with Klezmer. Sometimes these widely scattered sources bring up surprising and fascinating parallels - the striking similarity, for example, between Hassidic and Native American chants, that appear in my tone poem **A Jew Among the Indians** (for actor and orchestra), in which the music illuminates the tragic plights of these two peoples.*

*This type of synthesis is a key aspect of my compositions. In **Here Comes Messiah** (for soprano and orchestra), several layers of text are combined. One is colloquial - a monologue in English of a young woman on the verge of giving birth. Another is poetic - passages from Yeats's poem "The Second Coming."*

*The **Escape of Jonah** (an oratorio for solo trumpet, choir and brass orchestra) emerged from yet another type of synthesis. Beginning as a spontaneous improvisation by a group of jazz and classical musicians, it resulted in a work of musical theater which moves freely across different genres, shifting from Gospel to Gregorian chant in the choral part, and from jazz to klezmer and avant-guard in the part of Jonah, impersonated by the trumpet.*

*Perhaps the most daring of my works so far in its instrumentation, **The Unbearable Lightness** for seven double basses, was commissioned by Tanglewood to commemorate Koussevitsky two summers ago. The recent performances of this work in Beijing and Shanghai Conservatories (who approached me after seeing the video online), underscored my basic belief in the mobility of music. This is a motto of mine - whether it is creating a string quartet, or producing a music video with my*

students -- today, more than ever, I feel that composers should strive to make use of the variety of tools to reach out.

The opportunity to work with composition students is another aspect of exploring my musical purpose. I am not only interested in giving the students the skills of orchestration, harmony etc., but causing them to find the consequence in their music, to reach into their private places and express their experience of the world.

I find inspiration in a variety of sources, from folk songs to religious chants to jazz to experimental theater. What I ultimately strive for is a sense of inevitability and truth, no matter how wide the spectrum of the musical language. When these qualities are present, it is because I have listened attentively and have been able to express something universal that extends beyond the specific constraints of the piece. In this sense, I see music as an open-ended process, born out of the collaboration (or confrontation) of the composer, the performer, and, ultimately, the audience.

Those days when music professors of academia sat in their ivory towers are gone. Today, when composers no longer depend on publishers and world-wide music distribution is at the tips of one's own fingers, composers again have a chance to fulfill their natural obligation to the broader community. In this environment, creating music which speaks on an immediate level and making use of today's social media toolkit while retaining artistic and intellectual substance is crucial.

Finally, as Charles Ives famously said: "Only music that has local color can be truly universal." I cannot underestimate the role of my own Russian-Israeli background and Jewish culture which provides a spiritual undertone for some of my music. However, on a broader scale, I strive to create music that transcends religious differences, bringing together people from different strands of life.

*In **The Escape of Jonah**, the recalcitrant prophet eventually succeeds in grappling with the eclectic muddle of musical genres, making his voice heard in a trumpet solo of wonder and praise (inspired by the Hassidic chant 'My soul wonders for thee'). This sense of wonder - of constant questioning - is perhaps the most essential element in my work.*

--- Matti Kovler

BIOGRAPHY

Matti Kovler is an Israeli-American composer and creator of musical theatre works. Kovler's music, described as "intensely moving" has been commissioned by the Tanglewood Music Center, Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center. His works have been performed by the Israel Philharmonic, the American Composers Orchestra, the Metropole Orchestra (Netherlands), Fox Studios Symphony, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Ariel Quartet and others.

Kovler is the grandson of the Russian opera and Yiddish singer Leonid Kovler. Creative influences include Jewish folklore, improvisation, a fascination with Janáček and Bartók poly-modality and the cult writings of the French theatre philosopher Antonin Artaud. Matti has mastered a range of styles from folk and jazz to those steeped in the classical tradition, which he brings together in music of considerable dramatic scope, by turns comic, mystical, warm, and searing.

Born in Moscow and educated in Israel and the US, in May 2014 Matti completed his doctorate at the New England Conservatory. Professional recognitions include fellowships at Tanglewood, Aspen and Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, two ASCAP Morton Gould Awards, and the Theodore Presser Award in Composition.

Inspired by his mentor, Israeli composer André Hajdu, since his arrival in the US in 2006 Matti has continuously been galvanized by a number of extraordinary young music creators in Boston. A passionate educator, Matti runs a small **Young Composers Studio** based out of Boston with heavy emphasis on ear-training and improvisation as triggers for musical creativity. His students received a

number of national and international accolades, including the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Awards and the St. Petersburg International Composition Competition.

André Hajdu's model also triggered the spontaneous foundation of a grassroots ensemble of friends and students as a performance outlet for Matti's stage works under the broad definition of "Jewish Musical Theater." In the five years of its existence the ensemble, in its various incarnations, created six productions in Boston and internationally, aiming to extend the genre beyond 'fiddler-on-the-roof'.

In 2013, Matti was recognized by the Boston Foundation as one of the six winners of the 2013 Brother Thomas Fellowships, "no strings attached" \$15,000 bi-annual awards designed to support 6 artists making outstanding creative contributions to their community.

The fellowship coincided with Matti's engagement as Artist-in-Residence at the Hillel at Northeastern University where he taught Jewish Music and now teaches Composition. The residency

enabled Matti to consolidate all his activities, including writing, teaching, performing and studying, under one roof. In 2013 Matti launched an online **Jewish Musical Theater** Network as well as the **Israeli Music Salon**, an informal get-together around Israeli songs, falafel and hummus.

In December 2013, in response to antisemitic vandalism of the Menorah at Northeastern, Matti and students produced a music video starring American Idol's Brett Loewenstern. Titled **Suf-Ga-Ni-Ya** (Hebrew for 'donut') the video culminates with an aerial shot of hundreds of dancing students forming a "live" human menorah on the Krentzman Quad, where the original vandalism took place. Featured on blogs and media outlets internationally, **Suf-Ga-Ni-Ya** was praised by the YouTube sensation BBC Radio's Pat Condell, included in **Top Ten Hanukkah Videos** by BestJewishVideos.com and highlighted on the official website of the Jewish World Congress among others.



Matti Kovler, artist-entrepreneur: Great products always carry a great vision

A Jew Among the Indians: this year's BMOP's winning composition: The Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), a major orchestra dedicated exclusively to performing, commissioning, and recording new music, presented its 11th annual Boston ConNEction concert on January 17th at Jordan Hall (Gil Rose, conductor) featuring works by William Thomas McKinley, Michael Gandolfi, Peter Maxwell Davies, John Heiss, Kati Agócs, and Matti Kovler's *Cokboy – A Jew Among the Indians*. Right after she saw this final version of Matti's piece, my daughter, Sophie Delphis, sent me an enthusiastic email, of which this is an abstract: "I have seen Matti's piece in a number of transformations this past year: with piano, with a small group of non-classical musicians, and now with an orchestra. In this third version, the wider palette of sounds available to him has apotheosized his vision. The reaction I hear from the majority of people about him, and specifically this piece, is their surprise at the broad range of sources that find themselves into his music. It is certainly not every young, contemporary composer who has the knowledge and the courage to explore both "schmaltzy" and abstract motives, and incorporate them so easily into the same piece. It is only fitting then, perhaps, for Matti to work with a large ensemble, wherein the breadth of soundscape can corroborate the breadth of his material. *Cokboy* is in many ways an epitome of Matti, the man: sensitive, Romantic, part mystical, part comical."

Vision of the Baal Shem in America: I heard the first version, and I was pleased to find out that a fan posted the latest version on YouTube (see below). Despite the limitations of this video shoot, I am confident that you will get the right feel about this great piece. It is a symphonic poem where the composer recites a part of Jerome Rothenberg's extraordinary poem, *Cokboy*. A displaced Jew is transported into a whole different world: "saddlesore I came/a jew among the indian/vot em I doink in dis strange place." Discordant sounds hit his discombobulated mind where a mish-mash of times, things, and peoples

richochet off the image of his grandfather, until this image itself merges into the Baal Shem's presence. The Baal Shem wearing his shtreimel unites with the old-new world ("the local all thought he was a cowboy/maybe from Mexico/ "a cokboy?" /no a cowboy."), and reconciles humans among themselves ("we will watch the moonrise/through each other's eyes") and with the spirit. The way Matti intensely and humorously mingles Hassidic chanting within the movie-style theme that progressively builds through the piece is simply stunning – as is his peaceful classicist postlude in which all the displaced people of the world may heal and communicate.

Meet with Matti Kovler: Matti Kovler, was born in the Soviet Union and spent his childhood in Moscow, where he started to play the piano and write small pieces. When he was 10, his family emigrated to Jerusalem and he encountered the Hungarian-born composer Andre Hajdu (who studied at the Paris Conservatoire National de Musique under Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen). By his late teens, Matti was already a successful composer and had an opera already staged, *Ami and Tami*, A Jewish take on Hansel and Gretel.

Many high-tech entrepreneurs bootstrap their companies. Artists bootstrap their entire existence and live from their ability to express themselves – and can do this quite successfully. This is the case with Matti, who makes a living as the director of the NEC Children's Choirs, teaches privately piano and composition, receives scholarships and gets commissions for his compositions, the latest one being an opera from Carnegie Hall for the Osvaldo Golijov and Dawn Upshaw Workshop (to be performed on May 9 & 10). His goals? To work even more and be able to create a touring company one day.

Marylene Delbourg-Delphis, **Grade A Entrepreneurs**

REVIEWS

“Young Composers Share their Sounds”

Mr. Kovler’s “Unsung Serenade,” in which a gloom akin to Ravel’s pregnant murk in “La Valse” gave birth to brighter sonorities, had an emotive potency that suggested, of all things, a potentially estimable operatic composer in the making.

Steve Smith, [New York Times](#)

“New Opera Revealed: a Miracle”

That underground water reservoir witnessed the birth and breath of a new Jewish opera. The expectation of a miracle, a rather mysterious sensation, forged from the dialogue between the musicians and the composer on stage. In the center of Kovler’s “Here Comes Messiah!” a young woman awaiting her first-born. Yearning to experience the wonder of the birth, and yet fearful for the child’s destiny, Reut Rivka’s moving performance of the Hassidic tune left me speechless.

Tatiana Alexandrova, [Booknic.com](#)

“The Art of (New) Song: Carnegie Hall New Commissions Reviewed”

(...) Most memorable for me was Matti Kovler’s three-part song cycle “Here Comes Messiah!” In remarks before the performance, Kovler said he completely changed his conception of the work after hearing the remarkable soprano Tehila Goldstein, who is at least as much an actor as she is a singer. Sure enough, Goldstein whistled, keened and grunted through the poetic and religious texts, while Kovler looked on from the piano. His music bore a close resemblance to Bernstein’s, filled with all the same joy and wonder: “Where can I escape from Your spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend up to heaven You are there, if I descend into the netherworld, You are there. Such knowledge is too wondrous; I cannot attain it.” (Psalms 139)

Pete Matthews, [Feast of Music](#)

“Artists-entrepreneurs: Carnegie Hall Young Artists Concert”

...“Here Comes Messiah!” was clearly marked with the Kovler stamp. Matti’s instruments are not merely textural tools, but characters themselves. As the piece began, the breaths and physical movements of his solo singer, Tehila Goldstein, were echoed and magnified by the ensemble. From this point, there was no question that we were not watching a poem with orchestral accompaniment, but instead the group effort of a large cast of players – in which extraordinary poet-translator, Janice Silverman Rebibo unambiguously belongs. It was particularly in the second part of the piece that this group dynamic gained a strong hold over the audience’s attention. In the climax before the third and final part, the performers’ grip on the room was visceral, tangible, in a series of fortissimo pulses (labor pangs) from the instrumentalists, and exclamations from Tehila Goldstein.

Here the expressivity she had already demonstrated earlier intensified exponentially, in her face, her stance, the timbre of her voice. Matti was at the piano, and he brilliantly made use of it in this passage, as both a harmonic and percussive instrument, driving the sound of the others around him. Although his part in Here Comes Messiah! is less central than in his Jew Among The Indians (performed earlier this year in Boston), and the work revolves around a woman’s experience in child birth, it is, nonetheless, entirely an extension of Matti himself. He is wholly present in his music, and not simply because of his compositional language or aesthetic. The audience does not need to be introduced to the composer, or his thought process, to become privy to his internal world – he wills us to come in.

Sophie Delphis,

[Grade A Entrepreneurs](#)

“Boston Modern Reveals in a Conservatory Connection”

Matti Kovler’s “A Jew Among the Indians” surreally evokes the experience of Eastern European immigrants in America...The music was notable for its pacing and the bold colors of the orchestration.

David Weininger, [Boston Globe](#)

“Boston ConNEction Concert Review”

Winner of Boston Modern Orchestra competition, “A Jew Among the Indians” was a setting of Jerome Rothenberg’s poem and movingly captured the anxiety and placelessness of the immigrant transported to a new world and finding himself among other disenfranchised peoples. The orchestra provides a wandering backdrop to the poem’s narration, performed by the composer. Overall, an intensely moving piece about immigrant experiences in America.

Sarah Canice Funke, [Suite101.com](#)

SELECTED WORKS



Description



Here Comes Messiah, an opera for soprano and chamber ensemble, was commissioned from Kovler by Carnegie Hall for the 2009 Upshaw/Golijov Workshop. The opera follows a young woman through giving birth oscillating between comedy and revelation.

Matti Kovler first heard the Hassidic chant *Peliab* from a friend in Jerusalem. She sang him the melody that her grandfather, Rabbi Eliahu Ki Tov had sung to her. Like much of the Hassidic folk repertoire, the musical motto of *Peliab* reflects the meaning of the text. (An interval of a rising third immediately followed by a descending third corresponds to “If I ascend up to heaven / You are there, if I make my bed in the underworld / You are there.” Psalms 139: 6–8.) This mirroring, in addition to the somewhat strange quality of the melody, captured the composer.

Synopsis



In Act 1, in the hospital soon to give birth, the young woman is accosted by “chattering behind her back”. She insists all is normal and as it should be. In Act 2, she can no longer deny her fate and her fear rises. She attempts to push down her fear with fantasies about her “cotton candy”, her sweet baby, and the niceties for him. A frightening vision of a descending falcon seems to threaten her child (the text builds a gradual allusion to the falcon and other elements in W.B. Yeats’ *The Second Coming*).

Transitioning, both in terms of labor and delivery and into the final Act of the piece, she suffers the acute pain of being chosen and asks the ultimate questions, “Why me? Why my child?”. Act 3 brings her through the monumental throes of this seemingly unattainable childbirth which give over to the wondrous secrets of *Peliab*.

© Janice Silverman Rebibo





Description



The Escape of Jonah retells the story of the prophet Jonah from today's point of view, bringing together the sounds of a nine-piece band, Jazz choir, soloists and electronics. The 'vernacular oratorio' juxtaposes the biblical text performed by the choir with the agitated speech of Jonah, the wandering Jew. The text of the oratorio libretto was originally written in Hebrew by Israeli poet Sivan Beskin. In the new English version, by Janice Silverman Rebibo, the part of Jonah is impersonated by the trumpet.

Jonah is at risk of obliteration, drowning in a sea of conflicting influences. This eclectic piece depicts a level and range of sensory, societal and personal demands that obscure still small voices and thrust us into avoidance. Like Jonah, we may even refuse to heed the calls and cries to us from without and within, so prominent in the language of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Kovler's own performance throughout his piece offers an ongoing dialogue with Jonah, musically and verbally illuminating his predicament.

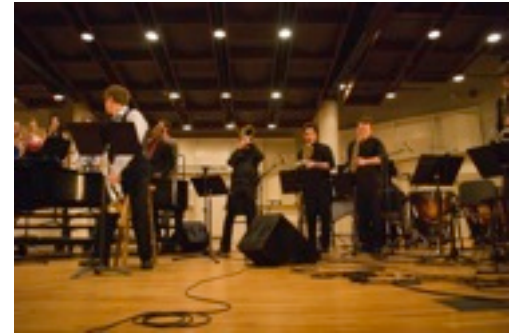
Synopsis



In **Act 1**, a choir of angels tries to get a rise out of the recalcitrant, sleepy Jonah and his stifled trumpet, goading him to "get up and go" to Nineveh. Jonah runs the other way – to Jaffa – and is whisked off on a ship to Tarshish.

In **Act 2**, aboard this "cowardly crate of a ship," a band of sailors (saxophone, trombone, percussion, etc.) begins by welcoming the newcomer into their musical midst but is soon disenchanted. The angels' choir instigates an outrageous storm at sea and informs the sailors that Jonah, the Hebrew, is at the root of their trouble. Jonah is cast overboard.

Act 3 finds Jonah in the belly of the fish, after being assaulted from all sides by increasingly conflicting elements. In the surreal but seductive coziness of the fish's innards ("Is this a dream?"), Jonah hears the Siren's Song, a lethal lullaby. He is tempted to totally give in and give up. It is within this very lull, however, at the last possible instant, that Jonah is able to grapple with the utter muddle, an eclecticism of musical genres and



quotations from classical, jazz, Broadway, klezmer and Israeli pop. He "hears his calling" and rises to the occasion, finding his way and making his own voice heard in a trumpet solo of wonder and praise. Jonah's journey concludes with a musical wink, a raucous laugh at the rollercoaster challenge of it all.

© Janice Silverman Rebibo



Description



Scored for seven double basses, **The Unbearable Lightness** was commissioned by Tanglewood in 2012 to commemorate Koussevitsky with the intention of addressing the increasing virtuosity of modern-day solo bass players. The title, alluding to Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, refers to a sense of illusion - wanting to obtain something which is beyond reach. Moments in the piece utilize the "Italian fingering" technique, expanding the traditional range of the double bass. The work begins in an abstract fashion and gradually transforms into a soundworld which is almost Mahlerian in its dramatic intensity.



In 2013 the work has been featured at the International Double Bass Convention in Eastman School of Music (Diana Gannett, soloist). On February 7, 2014, choreographer Bill De Young presented the world premiere of the choreographed version of the work. A new, expanded version of this work, with choreography and lighting design by Theodor Tezhik (Cirque Du Soleil) will be presented in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts on December 17, 2014.

© David Smythe





Description



The musical **Ami and Tami** is today's take on the popular Grimm Brothers' fairytale "Hansel and Gretel." The readapted story is attuned to the reality of modern day children, overstretched by the high hopes of their success-driven parents. Conceived in the realm of Bernstein's *West Side Story* and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, the original score of **Ami and Tami** calls for a cast of seven singers, a dancing choir and a full orchestra. It premiered in Israel in 1999. A new English adaptation of the musical is currently at work, with previews scheduled in the Berkshires for July 2014.

Synopsis



Ami and Tami are two imaginative siblings living in a strict and ambitious family. Their parents object to the children's foolish ideas and educate them to see time management, wealth and success as the primary goals in life. The children are thus forbidden to play in the 'dark forest' outside their house.

One night the children decide to disobey their parents' orders and run off into the forest. Guided by a talkative troll named Impf and a cabaret of Singing Lice, they discover a wonder-world of adventures and magical creatures.

But the forest has its monsters too. After falling into the clutches of the Evil Giant Humm and Yaga the Witch, Ami and Tami narrowly escape with the help of their new friends. Back at home, the agonizing parents reconsider their ways. The ending scene shows the whole family joining in an imaginary game.



© Aya Lavie

La Testa Di Santa Caterina



Description



Growing up in Moscow, one of the most memorable (and terrifying) experiences of my childhood was the annual trip to the Mausoleum -- a black tomb not unlike the tombs of the Egyptian Pharaohs, in which the Soviet communists preserved the body of Vladimir Lenin. The image of the mummified Lenin bathed in a yellowish glow, surrounded by plastic flowers, remains ingrained in my memory.

I had a similarly chilling, yet somehow thrilling, experience upon encountering the mummified head of St. Catherine in the Basilica San Domenico in Siena. Even though it dates from 1383, with the right angle and a trick of light we imagine the beautiful woman Catherine once was. St. Catherine, who believed herself to be the bride of Jesus, died of starvation at the age of thirty-three and was buried in Rome. Her head was cut off, stolen from its Roman grave by her fellow Sienese, who wished to bury St. Catherine in her native city.



The text for this work is based on St Catherine's last letter, written in 1377. Catherine, who at this point had nearly starved herself to death, describes an hallucination -- likely a clinical death experience. Despite the subject matter, the text of this letter conveys something rather naive, even joyful, in the voice of a young girl, who is ready to except death playfully. As if predicting the future, Catherine talks about her own head, separated from her body.

© Matti Kovler



Cokboy



Description



Matti Kovler's *Cokboy* (A Jew Among the Indians) is a highly personal setting of a highly personal, and also political, poem by the New York-born poet Jerome Rothenberg (b.1931).

Rothenberg, who has also been an anthologist, translator, and anthropologist, included *Cokboy* (parts 1 and 2; only part 1 is set here) in his collection *Poland/1931*, published 1974. The premise is that of a Jew, narrating in the first person, finding himself among the American Indians (Rothenberg lived on a Seneca reservation for a time), a displaced Jew among a people whose culture has become displaced from around them.

Between them mistrust and sympathy go hand in hand, the narrator blending the elements of his culture with that of the Indians: "silk of his prayershawl-bag beneath/cover of beaverskin above/savor of esrog fruit within/horn of mountaingoat between/feather of



dove...." His "vot am i doink here," the deliberately assumed Yiddish accent, is both comic put-on and expression of his insecurity. Kovler in his setting carries it a step further, incorporating very naturally an ancient Hassidic chant that adds texture to the stream-of-consciousness, multi-layered meaning and perspectives of the poem.

Musically the piece works with similar blending of materials and shifts of focus. The opening passages are aleatoric, asking the players to play almost randomly, creating an unsettled, fuzzy surface before the entry of the narrator and suggesting his unsettled state. Identifiable figures gradually coalesce, becoming melody and counterpoint. Following a return to aleatoric music a culmination, a strongly diatonic and sustained section linked to the words "the old man watches from the cliffs a city/overcome with light"—a great G major chord, marking a kind



of false epiphany for the narrator. A gradual recapturing of the complexity of the opposing cultures of the poem, with the interpolated Hassidic melody, demands a less straightforward, but more satisfyingly realistic, musical conclusion.

© Robert Kirzinger



Description



OR [Light] is a multimedia opera in progress, inspired by the rise and fall of the scandalous 17th century Jewish Messiah, Shabbtai Zvi.

The project began with the composition of an overture with themes from the opera for the Metropole Orchestra in Holland. The first version was scored for this unique ensemble which combines full symphony force with a big band. The piece has more recently been scored for a chamber orchestra which includes a variety of ethnic instruments in addition to an electronic soundtrack.

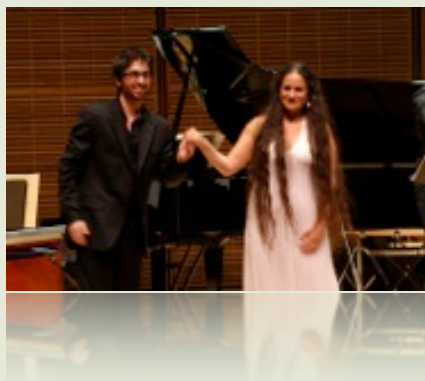
OR [Light] is the first large-scale collaborative project with iconic Russian/Czech visual artist, Theodor Tezhik, whose long list of previous collaborations includes scenography for Cirque du Soleil, Brian Eno, and Slava Polunin's "Diablo." In Russia Tezhik is known for his set design for the film "Tale of Wandering" (1982), in collaboration with composer Alfred Schnittke.



Short previews of the production will be scheduled during the 2015-2016 season. Full production will premiere in Theodor Tezhik's Theater in Prague in 2016-2017.

© David Smythe





**Matti Kovler with soprano Tehila Goldstein,
World premiere of the opera "Here Comes Messiah"
Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, NY**