

**Stefan
WOLPE**

**The Man
from Midian**

**Sonata for Violin
and Piano**

Cameron Grant, Piano

James Winn, Piano

Jorja Fleezanis, Violin

Garrick Ohlsson, Piano

**The Group for
Contemporary
Music**

**Stefan
WOLPE**
(1902-1972)

The Man From Midian (1942)

31:54

Part 1

1 Overture	1:25
2 Serfdom lamentation	1:13
3 Mother conceives child	1:17
4 Pharaoh's daughter bathes in the Nile, finds the baby	2:24
5 Procession	2:28
6 Pet of the court—Political intrigue	3:05
7 Moses among the workers	1:13
8 Moses buries the taskmaster in the sand	3:13

Part 2

9 Conversation with God	2:54
10 Moses meets Aaron; Command of Moses for the waters	1:19
11 March through the Red Sea	3:39
12 Restlessness	1:04
13 Aaron's desperation	0:52
14 Joshua's pleading	0:19
15 Bacchanal	0:31
16 Return of Moses; breaking of tablets; Moses falls on the arm of Joshua	1:10
17 Moses walks among the people; commands some to be killed	1:06
18 Gathering of people	2:42

Cameron Grant, Piano I • James Winn, Piano II

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1949)

27:01

19 Un poco allegro	6:24
20 Andante appassionato	7:55
21 Lento; Scherzo	3:28
22 Allegretto deciso	9:14

Jorja Fleezanis, Violin • Garrick Ohlsson, Piano

Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972)

The Man from Midian • Sonata for Violin and Piano

Born in Berlin, Stefan Wolpe studied at the Berlin Musikhochschule, had encouragement from Busoni and was associated with various left-wing groups in Germany, before the accession to power of the National Socialists. Taking refuge for the moment in Vienna, he studied with Anton Webern, but soon moved to Palestine, where he taught at the Conservatory in Jerusalem. In 1938 he moved to New York, his career in the United States involving him with a number of important musical institutions as an influential teacher.

The dancer and choreographer Eugene Loring commissioned Wolpe to compose the score for *The Man from Midian* for his company. The music was composed in January and February 1942, and the ballet was performed in April at the National Theater in New York, sharing the bill with Aaron Copland's *Billy the Kid*. Loring danced the title rôle in both ballets, with Walter Hendl and Arthur Gold providing the music at two pianos. The cast included the characters of Aaron, the brother of Moses, Miriam, his sister, Jocheved, his mother, Pharaoh, Pharaoh's daughter, Magicians, Israelites (Scene 1), Ladies in Waiting (Scene 2), and Taskmasters (Scene 4).

Loring was an innovative choreographer who stripped down plot and character to thematic essentials. His scenario for *Billy the Kid* packs the life of the protagonist into a half-hour span, and Winthrop Palmer's scenario for Moses does likewise. Loring provided Copland with a detailed breakdown of timings and suggestions for musical topics and probably did the same for Wolpe, which would explain why the music seems spare for scenes that are so eventful. Whereas Copland portrayed the American outlaw in episodes based on a series of cowboy ballads, Wolpe conceived of *The Man from Midian* as a set of developing variations. While in Palestine (1934-1938) he had opposed the practice of decking out folk melodies with the trappings of European concert music (the so-called 'Mediterranean style'). Wolpe incorporated diatonicism

and dodecaphony in a continuous spectrum of resources, and *The Man from Midian* employs scales that range from seven-tone (diatonic), to eight-tone (octatonic), to twelve-tone (dodecaphonic). For the most part the harmonies derive from the octatonic scale of alternating half and whole steps that Wolpe adapted from an Arabic mode (or *maqam*). Wolpe said that his music of this period was the result of an encounter between historically bound European ideas and Middle Eastern melodies and structures. Wolpe's "faith" was far different from Schoenberg's, whose Moses bore the burden of wordless devotion to the Deity. Wolpe the Marxist had no use for religion as such. His Moses was not the philosopher-priest, but rather the political agent who strove to liberate his people from oppression.

The suite is basically a double theme and variations. The *Overture* presents the "Moses" theme of augmented triads, wide-spanned, striding gestures, and eruptive polyrhythms, while No. 2, *Serfdom lamentation*, introduces the "People" theme of stepwise melody within a narrow compass and simpler chords and rhythms. Nos. 3 and 4 develop the material of No. 2. The theme of No. 5 is a folk-like melody derived from D natural minor. The five pitches that complete the chromatic octave enter towards the end of the movement and link the diatonic and chromatic materials in an inclusive palette. No. 6 depicts Pharaoh's court with an energetic double fugue. The first theme is a crooked twelve-note figure in quarter notes and eighths, while the second theme, which scurries about in sixteenths, is based on the octatonic scale. No. 7, *Moses among the Workers*, combines slowly striding octaves in the bass with a stepwise, mournful melody in thirds. The struggle between Moses and the Taskmaster in No. 8 develops the material of No. 7 in a scene of intense conflict. One supposes that the violent chords at the slaying of the Taskmaster were provided at Loring's request. A coda slows down the action to end the first part.

No. 9 finds Moses in the wilderness communing

with the Lord. Moses questions the Lord with material drawn from the *Overture*, while the Lord responds with quiet A flat major triads. Moses' protestations agitate the Lord until they come to a shared resolve on G minor. In No. 10 Aaron exhorts the People to accept Moses as their leader, and Moses parts the waters. The *March through the Red Sea*, No. 11, is the most extensive number of the work. The plodding, modal theme accumulates material at each iteration until it becomes fully chromatic and the movement reaches its powerful culmination. No. 12 *Restlessness* pits octatonic figures in eighth notes against chromatic figures in quarter notes. The same material fuels No. 13 *Aaron's Desperation*, No. 14 *Joshua's Pleading*, and No. 15 *Bacchanal*, which follow each other without pause. Moses appears with the tablets (No. 16) to the opening theme of the *Overture* laid out as a twelve-note series of rising thirds. This material is developed in No. 17, when Moses breaks the tablets. Moses commands the ringleaders to be killed to the same music as when he broke the tablets. The people depart for the Promised Land, No. 18, and leave Moses to his tragic fate. A noble melody sounds forth in enhanced B flat minor. The reprise of the melody is accompanied by rhythms that recall the marching-songs that Wolpe wrote in Berlin ten years before. The great liberator does not go gentle into the night.

Wolpe's orchestral version of the *First Suite of The Man from Midian* was first performed by Dmitri Mitropoulos with the New York Philharmonic in November 1951.

Wolpe took out United States citizenship in 1945. As he became acculturated to life in America he let go the need to reconcile his European background with his Jewish heritage. As Wolpe said to Eric Salzman, "It took me a long, long time to discover and rediscover my unity". The *Violin Sonata* was "one of the first pieces which show my personal liberation, or my personal restoration". Wolpe wrote a note on the *Sonata* in his idiosyncratic English:

I very much like to maintain the flexibility of sound structures (as one would try to draw into water). That leads me to the promotion of a very mobile polyphony in which the partials of the sound behave like river currents and a greater orbit spread-out is guaranteed to the sound, a greater circulatory agility (a greater momentum too). The sound gets the plasticity of figures of waves and the magneticism and the fluid elasticity of river currents, or the fire of gestures and the generative liveliness of all what is life (and Apollo and Dionysos, and the seasons of the heart, and the articulate fevers).

The first movement begins with two thematic constellations, the first, assertive and directed, the second, wide-ranging and zig-zag. The initial engagement extends for some fifty seconds and the movement continues in a mercurial dialectic. The action of the second movement is of warm, long-breathed, lyrical musings. The piano for the most part underlines the violin's variegated moods, only occasionally taking the lead or interposing a contrasting image. For the slow third movement the violin has languorous repeated notes, while the piano is more actively solicitous. A lively scherzo-like passage intervenes, followed by an abbreviated reprise of the opening material. After completing the *Violin Sonata* Wolpe noted in his diary that he had learned a lot from composing the piece, namely, how to incorporate older models so that they sound brand new, as in the manner of Picasso, where overlapping historical perspectives lead to "astounding, affecting, radiant things from olden times." The fourth movement begins in the playful spirit of the first movement, but with a more purposeful intent, almost a wide-striding march. The action slows for a *romanza*, a "radiant thing from olden times." A vigorous dance breaks in then broadens into a long-breathed song and *cadenza*. The piano and violin take off on a spirited chase and a dance that recalls the Middle Eastern *hora*. The violin soars free in a state of ecstasy that evokes the Hasidic *niggun*. At the time of writing the *sonata* Wolpe

had fallen in love with the young poet Hilda Auerbach Morley, whom he married in 1952. It is tempting to view the sonata as a double portrait that celebrated their relationship, a pledge to the Beloved. Frances Magnes and David Tudor gave the first performance in Carnegie Recital Hall in November 1949.

Austin Clarkson

Further Reading:

Clarkson, Austin, ed. *On the Music of Stefan Wolpe: Essays and Recollections*. Hillsdale NY: Pendragon Press. *Recollections of Stefan Wolpe*. <http://www.wolpe.org>. *An oral history collection of interviews*.

Stefan Wolpe, Das Ganze Überdenken: Vorträge über Musik 1935-1962. Edited by Thomas Phleps. Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag.

"In conversation with Eric Salzman", *The Musical Quarterly* 83/3: 378-412 (1999).

For more information, see www.wolpe.org.

The Group for Contemporary Music

In 1985 The Group for Contemporary Music was awarded a citation from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters as follows: "The Group for Contemporary Music, founded in 1962 by Harvey Sollberger and Charles Wuorinen ... changed the musical climate by redefining the standards of performance of knowing, demanding contemporary composition. It was the first collection of musicians joined in ensemble to present new music exclusively and appropriately, with the necessary preparation, in time and understanding. Today its ideals, and its personnel have spawned a population of such groups across the country...wherever the music of our time has its rightful place." For four decades, the Group has been central to the American new music scene, and for more than a generation has trained or introduced a large number of distinguished musicians. The Group's primary aim is to present a broad spectrum of the highest compositional achievements of our time, from the classic works of our century to emerging new talents, never bowing to fashions of the moment, but always supporting excellence in composition and performance.

Cameron Grant

Cameron Grant joined the New York City Ballet in 1984, became a Solo Pianist there two years later, and was appointed pianist of the NYCB orchestra in 1998. He has performed all the major “piano ballets” of the company such as the *Goldberg Variations* and *Dances at a Gathering* of Jerome Robbins, *Davidstündertänze* of George Balanchine, and *Waltz Project* of Peter Martins as well as virtually all the piano concertos of the repertoire, including those of Tchaikovsky, Ravel, Hindemith, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich. He has been the soloist in premières of ballets by Richard Tanner, Robert La Fosse and Christopher Wheeldon, and toured as a featured performer with the company on trips to Paris, Edinburgh, Athens, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Italy, Russia and Denmark. In 2004 he appeared in the Emmy Award-winning Live from Lincoln Center broadcast of New York City Ballet, as well as being invited (along with three other members of NYCB), to perform at the Kennedy Center Honors before the President. Cameron Grant has performed extensively outside the ballet as well. He was pianist of the Leonardo Trio for fifteen years, recording a CD and appearing across the United States and in Europe. As a member of the Grant-Winn duo-piano team, he was a prize-winner at the Munich Competition and performed two hundred concerts in the United States, Canada, and Germany. As a soloist, he has toured Japan and the Middle East, and made his New York début at Town Hall. He has recorded for Orion (with Joel Krosnick), CRI, CBS, XLNT, Koch International and 4-Tay. He has also recorded five CDs with violinist Zina Schiff.

James Winn

James Winn, piano and composition professor at the University of Nevada, Reno since 1997, made his professional début with the Denver Symphony at the age of thirteen, and has been performing widely in North America, Europe, and Japan ever since. With his duo-piano partner, Cameron Grant, he was a recipient of the top prize given in the two-piano category of the 1980 Munich Competition. James Winn has been a solo pianist with the New York City Ballet, a member of the New York New Music Ensemble, and of Hexagon (woodwind quintet and piano), as well as a frequent guest with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum, the Washington Square Contemporary Music Series, the Chamber Music Society of Sacramento, the Group for Contemporary Music, and Bargemusic. Well known as a specialist in new music, he has been involved in numerous world premières by many renowned composers, among them twelve Pulitzer Prize winners (John Adams, Michael Colgrass, Mario Davidovsky, Norman Dello Joio, Jacob Druckman, Aaron Kernis, George Perle, Wayne Peterson, Mel Powell, Melinda Wagner, Charles Wuorinen, and Ellen Zwilich). He is currently a member of Argenta, UNR’s resident chamber group, and performs regularly with internationally acclaimed New York based violinist Rolf Schulte. An active recording artist, he is featured in more than two dozen CDs as soloist, chamber musician, and composer. He has received the College of Liberal Arts’ prestigious Mousel/Feltner award for creative activity, and an Artist Fellowship Grant in composition from the Nevada Arts Council.

Jorja Fleezanis

Jorja Fleezanis has been Concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra since September 1989, assuming that position after eight years with the San Francisco Symphony as Associate Concertmaster. Her musical activities regularly take her to teaching venues such as Indiana University, the Boston Conservatory of Music and the Round Top International Festival Institute. She has had two major solo works commissioned for her by the Minnesota Orchestra, the John Adams *Violin Concerto* and the *Ikon of Eros* by John Tavener, the latter recorded on Reference Records. The complete violin sonatas of Beethoven with the French fortepianist Cyril Huvé were released last year on the Cyprés label. Other recordings include Aaron Jay Kernis's *Brilliant Sky*, *Infinite Sky* on CRI, commissioned for her by the Schubert Club of St Paul, Minnesota. Her performance of the première of Nicholas Maw's *Sonata for Solo Violin*, commissioned for her by Minnesota Public Radio, was broadcast on Public Radio International's Saint Paul Sunday Morning in 1998, and in 1999 she gave the British première at the Chester Summer Festival. In 1998 she was the violin soloist in the American première of Britten's recently discovered *Double Concerto for Violin and Viola*. Jorja Fleezanis has been an adjunct faculty member at the University of Minnesota since 1990.

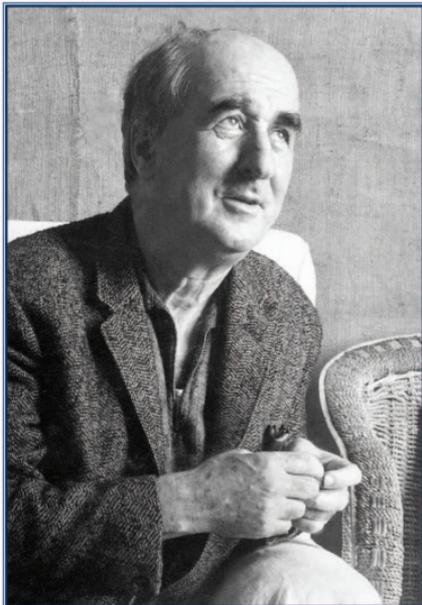
Garrick Ohlsson

Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist Garrick Ohlsson has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although he has long been regarded as one of the world's leading exponents of the music of Chopin, he commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Garrick Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. His concerto repertoire alone is unusually wide and eclectic, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century, and to date he has at his command some eighty concertos. A native of White Plains, N.Y., he began his piano studies at the age of eight, attended the Westchester Conservatory of Music and at thirteen entered the Juilliard School in New York City. His musical development has been influenced in completely different ways by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne and Irma Wolpe. Although he won First Prizes at the 1966 Busoni Competition in Italy and 1968 Montréal Piano Competition, it was his 1970 triumph at the Chopin Competition in Warsaw, where he won the Gold Medal, that brought him worldwide recognition as one of the finest pianists of his generation. Since then he has made nearly a dozen tours of Poland, where he retains immense personal popularity. He was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor, Mich. He makes his home in San Francisco.

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WOLPE**

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58:55

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**Stefan
WOLPE**
(1902-1972)

The Group for Contemporary Music Series

The Man From Midian (1942) 31:54

1-8 Part 1 16:18

9-18 Part 2 15:36

**Cameron Grant, Piano I
James Winn, Piano II**

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1949) 27:01

19 Un poco allegro 6:24

20 Andante appassionato 7:55

21 Lento; Scherzo 3:28

22 Allegretto deciso 9:14

**Jorja Fleezanis, Violin
Garrick Ohlsson, Piano**

First issued on Koch International Classics in 1993 (tracks 19-22) and in 1996 (tracks 1-18)

A full track list can be found on page 2 of the booklet

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Producer and engineer: Judith Sherman • Editor: Jeanne Velonis

Tracks 19-22 recorded at Concordia College, Bronxville, New York, on 9th November, 1991

Engineer: Michael Fine • Editor: Joanna Nickrenz

Executive Producer: Howard Stokar

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Cover photograph: *Stefan Wolpe in Palestine*
courtesy of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel



AMERICAN CLASSICS

In his early career as a composer, Berlin-born Stefan Wolpe espoused social causes and wrote songs on revolutionary themes. With the rise of Nazism he moved to Palestine, where he taught musical theory at the Jerusalem Conservatory. His music of this period was the result of an encounter between European cultural and historical ideas and Middle Eastern melodies and structures, as can be heard in his score for the ballet *The Man from Midian*. Wolpe described his *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, written after he had taken American citizenship, as 'one of the first pieces which show my personal liberation'.

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