

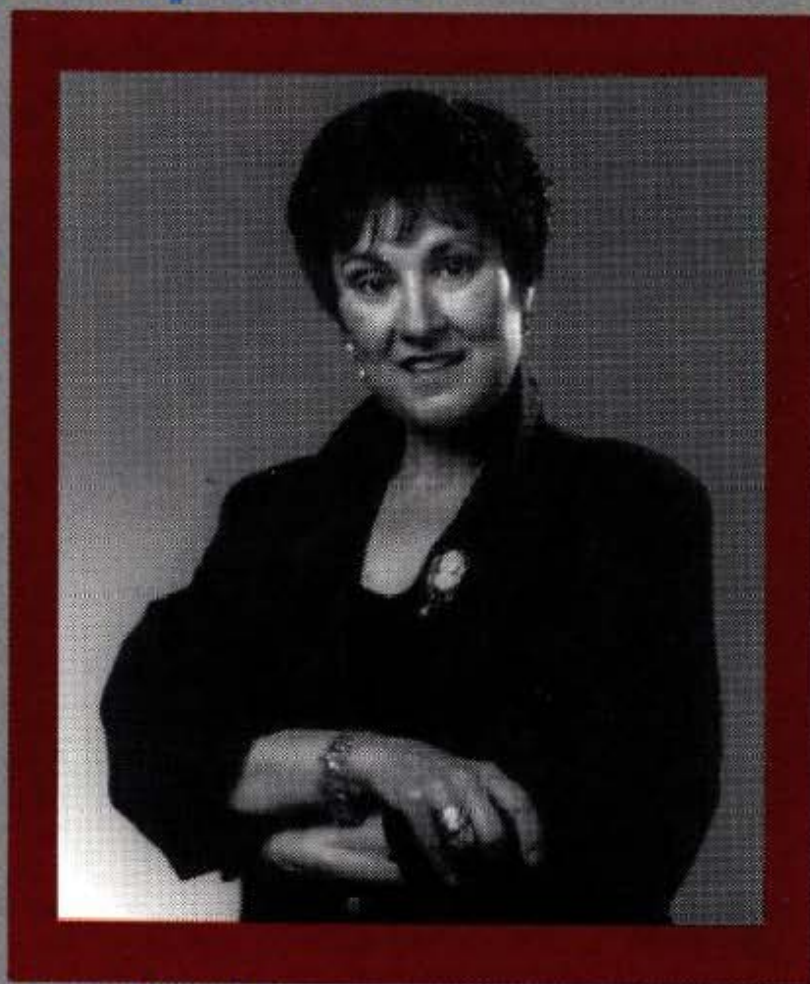
THE PROSCENIUM

(...On the Demise of Gertrude)
a chamber opera in one act
by Meyer Kupferman

with
Barbara Hardgrave
mezzo soprano

Music in the
Mountains
Festival
Chamber Players

conducted by
Meyer Kupferman



Soundings
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THE PROSCENIUM
(...ON THE DEMISE OF GERTRUDE)
a chamber opera in one act

libretto and music by
Meyer Kupferman

Gertrude, mezzo-soprano Barbara Hardgrave
Conductor Meyer Kupferman
The Music in the Mountains Festival Chamber
Players

Flute Marcia Gates
Clarinet Peter Alexander
Bass Clarinet Robert Renino
Violin Carole Cowen
Violin Emily Faxon
Viola Valentina Charlap Evans
Cello Susan Seligman
Piano Christopher Vassiliades

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SYNOPSIS

Gertrude, a woman of distinction, is dying and knows it. We are privy to her final thoughts which evolve around a curious fantasy of Marilyn Monroe and Charlie Chaplin. Gertrude's final days are linked with the ambiguous realities of the American screen. She is surrounded by film images projected on the wall of her sitting room; 'Close-ups' and 'Long-shots' portray the disturbing mythology of her most

intimate experiences. She envisions the destruction of the world. "It's a quicky meltdown", she cries, "gone for a ride on the spiritual machine."

Gertrude receives a letter from her father, an American Army General, with whom she is no longer on speaking terms. He considers her silence "Un-American" but she retreats still further into what she describes as "Simple silence".

Thoughts of war suddenly take over and she becomes incensed at America's glorious screen images of generals... "in a grand guignol celebration of lunatics at war dancing around in 'Presto' tempo. Tanks, bodies and other instruments of destruction plunge into battle." She imagines the songs of victorious armies and children on the march with flags of every crusade.

Gertrude's fantasy now turns to love: "Behold a double instrument of the sweetest domain - 'A Man And A Woman'... lovers... two parting lovers". Just as the lovers are filmed in their final kiss Gertrude sings a love song based on Italian musical tempo markings like: "Appassionata, Espressivo, Rubato...", etc.

She begins to feel colder and colder and soon realizes that her time is running out. As she dies she says, "My Father misses me..." and offers a motto for the world. "To escape the dangers of the unknown, in love or war, you merely abandon its spells forever."

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CAST:

GERTRUDE.....Mezzo-Soprano

INSTRUMENTATION

Flute, Clarinet, String Quartet and Piano

DURATION:

about an hour

SCENE:

GERTRUDE'S living room. The walls are filled with photos of film stars - mostly Marilyn Monroe and Charlie Chaplin. There are a few modern abstract paintings - sizzling with garish colors. Some of these look like 'take offs' on movie equipment like cameras, projectors, etc. A sofa and a big TV are central to the room. A table with lots of medicine bottles strewn about, looks like it has seen better days. A few chairs and a phone complete the picture.

(The musicians and the conductor are on stage during the entire opera. In several places they even walk over to perform from different sides of the stage. The illusion is that they are sometimes part of the action)

PART I

GERTRUDE:

(unseen, her voice is amplified from off-stage)
Hello? Hello?...Who is this?...I'm sorry to bother you Doctor Michaelman. This is Gertrude. Have you seen the x-rays yet? (long pause)...I understand...

I'm sorry too...No. Please don't call my father. I know it's grotesque - but we all carry exasperating increments of extinction within our souls. No. No. No...I'm OK...I suppose it's just the convulsions of conscience...I'll let you know if there's any change or if I feel unusually cold. Thank you. Please give my best to Matilda and John. Goodbye...Damn...That's my luck...

(Gertrude enters and takes her position down stage as the lights dim up)

GERTRUDE:

Sit Down, relax!

Don't Be Fooled!

It is merely a proscenium of burning candles, like a birthday cake...and perhaps a few surprises...maybe death...

**"ACT ONE
CURTAIN UP!"**

OH MY GOD!

Did the woman fall or was she pushed?

Is she dead?

They said it was a furious tragedy.

Who is she?

(Gertrude turns on her film projector (or video) makes herself comfortable as she watches the film. From time to time she duplicates the action she sees projected on the screen).

A woman of perfect contradictions: Marilyn Monroe...

Unbridled, she's running, I see her fleeing through the forest,

she smiles into the camera,

(Aria) O sweet panorama of internal resemblances...

Are you that omnipotent goddess of love?
or a provocateur of godless materialism?

We're all waiting, Miss Monroe,
Marilyn looks down into the deep throat of the
camera.
She opens her mouth and yawns.
(yawns) "Oh, I'm so tired, take me home, Sweetie."
Before you answer look high above
See your pal aloft,
The ancient architect of sizzling delights and
migrations,
curled up on the moon.

"ACT TWO!"
(We see a silent movie death scene: a woman on her
death bed and a mad doctor trying to save her)

Marilyn is dying, Charlie is crying
A tragic clown, a sad eyed prestidigitator
Who thinks he has discovered the sacred book of
black magic,
Which may contain a miraculous spell to cure
her...Forever...
And even after that...
Anyway, He believes it, and I almost believe it...
Charlie removes the wrapping and holds the book up
to the light
Which begins to pulsate and grow brighter...

The uncut volume,
Neatly wrapped, filled with spicy dialogue
and spells of enchantment.
See how it shines!

Title:
"The Devil's Lair"

Shushhh, Charlie!

"SLOW CURTAIN!"

(Gertrude's 'Pan Shot' "Vision")
Pan shot!
Zoom in on the painting of Marilyn Monroe hanging
on the wall...
Close up...Closer!...Still closer, damn it!
We see the form of a soft, precious, contoured
bosom
Then an equally soft, precious, sculptured bottock

The man with the waxed mustache arrives: Charlie
Chaplan with pendulous jowls
Agitated
Lachrymose...and no Marilyn around!
He slumps down in a stupor of
commiseration...indulgent commiseration,
Charlie throws a tape into the dumbox
and collapses into a coma of sin.
Suddenly his eyes begin to grow bigger and bigger,
Like Pinocchio's nose...
They shine like two enormous street lanterns!
Our hero has begun to rant delirious prophecies!
He screams them! Writes them down! Tears them
up!
Each he believes to be more luminous than all the
arcane ciphers
Of his uncut volume...like "the Great Dictator".
He opens the book and begins to read...
"The infinite...
The Wine of the Cabala, uncorked.
There is a quiet interlude.
Even to the dying these arcane rituals may prove
dangerous!

(Flutist walks to opposite side of stage and plays an
interlude while we see a montage of excerpts from
Chaplin or Monroe films)

No lifetime or deathtime is complete without love,
For even a casual inadvertent touch can provide us
With a quiet enactment of magic.
I see seductive ghosts of the dark dancing to a set of
Delicate variations in each proscenium of the
mind...

Or is it a saraband of lovers, tightly bound
Within the area of a few throbbing forms?

(We see a montage of "film" fires taken from old
movies)

Something's burning!
Run for your life!
Charlie sniffs, he looks around,
Wrinkles his nose, screws his crumpled top hat
down on his head
And stumbles into his dilapidated volkswagen,
The motor roars
And we find ourselves in a pandemonium of
electrified diatribes
and manifestoes
Floppy discs and sleazy gas guzzlers.
Charlie yells: "The world shall be destroyed!
It's a quicky meltdown!
Chernoble has disappeared!"
Gone for a crazy ride on the spiritual machine.
Death speaks now in whispers.
(A blue stained glass window appears upstage with a
holy cross in the center surrounded by a rich halo of
light.)
(Gertrude turns her back to the audience and looks
up at the window in prayer)

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy
name,
Thy kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it
is in Heaven,

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our
trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against
us
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from
evil. Amen."

Sky Blue
And richly corroded
See "Modern Times", suggests Charlie.

I must go now, but I will be back soon... Scene
Two...
(Gertrude exits as flute and clarinet players take their
position on opposite side of the stage for a duet)

PART II (Prelude DUO)

(Duet is played to a stage darkened in deep purple
hues with a 'Moonish' light focused on the two
standing musicians)
(Gertrude appears at the back corner of the stage
reading a newspaper which she holds up in her
hands)

GERTRUDE: Wait! Charlie Chaplin's done it again!
And now we'll all have to take sides!
I bet his friends will either hide under the rug
or desert him completely
Or love him even more! Ha, ha, ha, ha!
(She laughs as she returns to center stage in a brisk
walk)

We are caught up in an ambiguous mix,
An achievement of innocence and fiendish cunning
"Is our hero a progeny of reason and
enlightenment"...
Charlie smiles beneficently but soon chickens out
and runs like hell. What a tramp!

"...or does wisdom make such wicked cowards of us all?" "Yes?"

One strum on the guitar. (She looks at herself in the giant mirror pretending she is acting out her fantasies)

"SCENE THREE!" "Through a Glass Darkly"
My fantasies? They surround me, they envelop me!
Pick one daddy, a sick one, a funny one, a sexy one!
(She laughs) Why I could make a fortune
In this cinema verité, take my word for it!

(Gertrude makes faces at the mirror adding grotesque humorous gestures)

The crooked mirror.
We encounter an orgy of winking and blinking sphinxes...
Like the Beatles at their final concert...

(Fast!) "Zoom in on Charlie Chaplin and Marilyn Monroe tumbling down the street in a double somersault. Arms akimbo, lurching, windmilling and bouncing off the postman like ping pong balls on a treadmill!"

(She looks up and points to the sky)

There are zeppelins flying above.

"ACT THREE"... "A ship of fools" going nowhere,
Floating aimlessly in a sea of death...

(Gertrude tears open a letter and starts to read)

This morning I received a letter from my father.
We still cannot speak, you know.
"Dear Gertrude," He writes, "Things are not well with

me."

"But I keep thinking of you all the time."

"The memory of your voice still haunts me."

Then he adds, "Gertrude, your silence is not golden;
It is un-American- and has the impact
of a foolish, tragic gesture...
Still in the mire of deep sadness."

(Gertrude sits down on the floor like a child, still holding the letter in her hand, as a quiet, misty light engulfs the stage in changing patterns)

Simple silence
Deep silence
Do you feel something?
Touch your neighbor's hand
Or do you feel a certain reticence?
Simple silence, deep silence...
(Violinist stands and plays muted solo)

PART III ("The General")

(stage grows extremely dark as Gertrude picks up the phone)

Hello, hello, who is this?
(She jumps up to attention and salutes)
Attention!
Close up
The face of our general
A commanding silence charged with unspoken meaning,

(A montage of old battle scenes is projected in strange discontinuities)

Long shot with flying zooms
A slender shadow glides over a black whirlwind of falsehoods.

Tanks, bodies and other instruments of destruction
plunge into battle.

And spinning miraculously, without crossing its
trajectory,
A grand guignol celebration of lunatics at war
Dancing around in presto tempo
It is an intimate tarantella,
a noisy, colorful but wholly unedifying spectacle.
The preview is over.

“CURTAIN UP!”

(We see photos of her father, the general, then the
general and his staff, then the general and his baby
daughter)

“As to our military situation,
It is unwise...
As surely we will spill a lot of our own blood too...
If our armies try
Speculative sacrifices
Against an opponent that calculates precisely
And cannot be intimidated”

The smile of our general...
Guns, bodies and other instruments of destruction
plunge into battle
(The projections now turn toward the horror scenes
of war with death and destruction everywhere)
Androgynous figures loom like serpents of the
desert
New perspectives
Culled from deep cavernous tunnels
Beneath the sand...and death...death...

Battle...sand...culled from deep
Cavernous tunnels beneath the sand and
death...death...

(Gertrude marches around the stage in time to the
music and clicks her fingers at various points)

In the distance we hear songs of victory
From faces with big teeth
Biting and shining like weapons brandished in the
sky
In the distance we see children on the march
with flags of every crusade
Proudly waving to the sun
Above the winds of war

PART IV (Moon Lovers)

(Suddenly the images quiet down and we see a
beautiful mountain lake with the moon rising in the
distance)

See how the crescent moon hangs high above the
lake.

(A close up of two lovers embracing is projected on
another screen. They kiss)

Romantic long shot:
Behold a double instrument of the sweetest domain:
“A Man and a Woman”...lovers...
Two parting lovers
Sadly they walk towards us
Blindly groping in exile.
(The sad lover with a bunch of flowers. Finally a long
kiss)
Close up
A teardrop falls
And he gives her a yellow flower
To recover her former lucidity
Their lips join in a trembling kiss
The camera zooms in closer
Seeking undiscovered abysses

As the kiss is prolonged for seventy-six seconds.
(Tango Aria) (Gertrude pretends to Tango with her
imaginary lover)

Appassionata con abbandano

Espressivo alla molto amore e delicatamente

Doloroso lirico

Sussurando e teneramente intenso rubato

Amore agitato quasi recitativo

Stringendo misterioso piu lento

Lamentoso arditamente gravita

Angosciosamente amore

Poco a poco mesto ed affrettando

Amore dolce

(Exhausted, she lies down on her sofa and starts
dreaming.)

I dreamt of moonflowers, baby. Since we fell in
love...

Then last night I stole a kiss from your lips

While you were asleep...moonflowers, moonflowers,

Oh moonflowers, baby

How I love you...I love you...

(String quartet plays)

Lamentoso ah dolce piu lento, gravita e sussurando,

Behold a double instrument of the sweetest domain

Amore dolce "A Man and a Woman"

Sadly they walk towards us blindly groping in exile

Two parting lovers seeking undiscovered abbyes

Mesto arditamente gravita delicatamente e

sussurando gravita

Lamentoso, amore dolce...

(Gertrude rises, walks up to the window and pulls
the shade down)

Curtain down

Wait! It's not over yet. Too bad...

The story does not have a proper ending.

Spotlight!

Which feels good and which, like alcohol

Or a gentle aphrodisiac,

May elevate ones spiritual condition...

I feel cold again...

The doctor said that's how it would begin.

Lend me a swetaer, it's freezing!

(She shivers from the cold and puts on a heavy
sweater)

But you see, Charlie's dead...

And Marilyn has disappeared...

And I'm...I'm...

A measure of fragile contradictions has now been
taken.

The infinte uncorked.

The hybridization of races,

Lulled by resemblances

(In her final burst of energy, Gertrude rushes about
the room as if she has a special message for each
piece of furniture.)

And the mystery of being related

Or just naked

Or just killed

Fly away, if you can!

I tell you quite earnestly, it isn't safe here
anymore!...

Even though it's all an illusion.

Run away while there's still time

But don't leave any tracks behind you!

for the San Francisco Opera and its affiliate Merola Opera Program.

THE MUSIC IN THE MOUNTAINS FESTIVAL, which began in 1982, was founded to foster 20th century American Music by presenting a series of summer concerts. Its performances, given at The College at New Paltz-SUNY, have been broadcast nationwide by National Public Radio and it has received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Dozens of contemporary composers have visited the Festival to work with musicians and introduce their compositions to Festival audiences. The Festival Chamber Players are the resident chamber ensemble. During the winter months, these ensemble musicians perform separately as the Bardavon String Quartet, the Hudson Valley Wind Quintet and with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic.

PETER ALEXANDER is Dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts at The College at New Paltz/SUNY. Dr. Alexander has degrees from Columbia University, the University of Wisconsin and the Eastman School of Music. He is principal clarinetist with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic and has often appeared with them as soloist. He has performed before congresses of the International Clarinet Society and has recorded the works of Meyer Kupferman for Soundspells Productions. His recording of Kupferman's Clarinet Concerto with the Pro Arts Chamber Orchestra for CRI has garnered considerable acclaim. In 1984 he was a National Endowment for the Humanities Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. He has received numerous grants and awards for a variety of educational and creative projects. Dr. Alexander is the Artistic and Executive Director of the Music in the Mountains Festival.

CAROLE COWAN, Assistant Professor of Music at The College at New Paltz-SUNY, is Concertmaster of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, since 1978. She is an active performer in a wide variety of musical venues including the New York City Opera and the American Composers Orchestra. For the last nineteen summers Cowan has performed at the Aspen Music Festival in chamber music concerts, and as solo violinist in the premiere of numerous contemporary works. She is Associate concertmaster of the Aspen Festival Orchestra. Cowan holds the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from Yale University.

MARCIA GATES, flute, has degree from the Eastman School of Music and Ithaca College. In addition to being principal flutist with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, she is a member of the Hudson Valley Wind Quintet, Pone Ensemble for New Music, and has performed as principal flutist with the Music in the Mountains Festival. She teaches flute at the College at New Paltz/SUNY.

ROBERT RENINO, bass clarinet, received degrees from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam and the Manhattan School of Music. Having served on the faculty of Crane School of Music, Mr. Renino has combined a career of music education and professional performance. He was also the director of music in the Nanuet public schools for 14 years.

EMILY FAXON, violin, currently the Assistant Concertmaster of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic has made appearances including the Clarion Concerts, Pro Arts, the American Symphony and the Bach Cantata Series at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City. She holds an M.A. from the Juilliard School of Music.

VALENTINA CHARLAP-EVANS, viola, recieved her B.A. at SUNY Albany while performing with the Albany Symphony Orchestra and the Sarasota String

Trio. In addition to her post as the principal violist of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic she also performs with the St. Cecilia Chamber Orchestra, Pone Ensemble, Amadeus Chamber Orchestra and the baroque ensemble La Grande Ecurie.

SUSAN SELIGMAN, cello, is the principal cellist of the Hudson Valley Philharmonic. Ms. Seligman has performed chamber music extensively in the Pone Ensemble, the New Paltz Chamber Music Society and has participated in festivals throughout Europe. She earned her M.A. at Yale University.

CHRISTOPHER VASSILIADES, Composer/Pianist
Christopher Vassiliades, composer and pianist, has written seven operas, two dance works and many theatre and chamber pieces. He was Artistic director of Oval Window Chamber Ensemble from 1986 through 1989 and has received grants from Meet the Composer, commissions from the City of Iraklion (Crete) and the world music society and was represented in the Kucyna International Composition Prize Competition in Boston. As a pianist, Mr. Vassiliades has premiered many works by some of the world's greatest living composers, and has performed with many important chamber ensembles such as the Group for Contemporary Music and the New Music Consort.

Mr. Vassiliades has toured the United States to rave reviews in demanding solo recitals, including a forty-year retrospective of the piano music of Meyer Kupferman. In the spring of 1992 he presented two programs at Columbia University in celebration of Meyer Kupferman's sixty-fifth birthday. As an annotator he has written numerous liner notes for Soundspells Recordings. For the past six years he has taught on the Composition and Theory faculties of the Manhattan School of Music Preparatory Division and has joined the Theory faculty of the Manhattan School of Music in 1992.

He has also taught Music Theory, Composition and Piano at Sarah Lawrence College in 1991.

MEYER KUPFERMAN was born in Manhattan in 1926. He received his education at the High School of Music and Art and at Queens College. He is entirely self-taught in music composition. He has been professor of Chamber Music and Composition at Sarah Lawrence College since 1951, where he also served as chairman of the music department for five terms. Mr. Kupferman has been awarded grants and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He is a virtuoso clarinetist who has premiered over sixty solo and chamber works composed especially for him. Kupferman is an unusually prolific composer and has an impressive output of work in all forms: 7 operas, 12 symphonies, 9 ballets, 7 string quartets, 10 concerti and hundreds of chamber works. His strong interest in jazz has been abundantly shown by such 'classical-jazz' compositions as Concerto for Cello and Jazz Band, Sonata on Jazz Elements, Tunnels of Love, Adjustable Tears, Jazz Infinities Three, Jazz String Quartet, and Moonflowers Baby, a solo clarinet jazz work which has received international acclaim as a result of Charles Neidich's spectacular performances throughout the Soviet Union, Europe, Japan, and the USA, all an integral part of his "Cycle of Infinities," a series of concert works evolved from the same 12-tone row begun in 1962. He has received commissions from the Saidenberg Little Symphony for his Little Symphony, from the Hudson Valley Philharmonic for his Jazz Symphony in 1988 and Symphony No. 10, FDR in 1982, the Chappaqua Symphony for Wings of the Highest Tower, commemorating the Centennial of the American Double Clarinet Concerto and the

Louisville Orchestra, which commissioned and recorded his Fourth Symphony in 1956. The American Composers Orchestra premiered his Challenger in 1984 and the Pro Arte Orchestra of Boston recorded his Clarinet Concerto for CRI.

A forty year retrospective of his keyboard music was performed during a nine concert tour by pianist Christopher Vassillades. Some of his experimental works in tape-gestalt form includes such pieces as Celestial City, Angel footprints, Superflute and Illusions. Among his film scores are such pictures as Black Like Me, Halleluja the Hills, Blast of Silence and the Truman Capote film Trilogy, which includes the famous, A Christmas Memory.

In the summer of 1990 the Lithuanian National Symphony recorded his "Jazz Symphony" and "Challenger" (Soundspells Productions CD 104). Mr. Kupferman made the heroic trip to Lithuania for that purpose during the time of the Russian blockade. In the 1991-92 season he celebrated his 65th year with the premiere of his seventh opera, "The Proscenium" and several piano retrospectives with pianists Morton Estin, Kazuko Hayami, Svetiana Gorokhovich and Christopher Vassillades. Kupferman's book, Atonal Jazz, a two volume, in-depth study of new chromatic techniques in contemporary jazz was release in 1992 by Dorn Publications.

The Proscenium is published by Soundspells Productions (ASCAP)

Other all Kupferman CD's available on Soundspells

CD101 Kazuko Hayami plays Kupferman

CD102 Stanley Drucker and Maomi Drucker play Meyer Kupferman

CD103 Images of Chagall (with the Bronx Arts Ensemble)

CD104 Jazz Symphony and Challenger (Lithuanian National Symphony)

CD105 Cello Music of Meyer Kupferman, Laszlo Varga, cello

Produced and recorded by John Yannelli

Assistant, John Washburn

Edited by John Yannelli at New York Digital Recording, Inc.

This is a composer supervised recording

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- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Part I: Prologue and Aria (10:11) | 5. Part III: The General (11:29) |
| 2. Gertrude's Vision (11:02) | 6. Appassionata (aria) (7:59) |
| 3. Part II: Prelude (8:19) | 7. Part IV (5:03) |
| 4. Simple Silence (4:04) | 8. Epilogue (2:53) |

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