

THREE FACES OF ELECTRA

and

RHAPSODY for
guitar and orchestra

The Orchestral Music of
MEYER KUPFERMAN
Vol. 7

Roberto Limón, guitar
Gintaras Rinkevičius, conductor
**The Lithuanian State
Symphony Orchestra**

DDD

Soundspells
CD 120 Productions

THREE FACES OF ELECTRA (1955-95)

(...a symphonic poem for an imaginary ballet...)

The original version of Meyer Kupferman's ELECTRA was conceived as a modern dance ballet-drama almost forty years ago. At that time the score included a chorus and a chamber orchestra of thirteen instruments. The work was commissioned by Sarah Lawrence College, produced under the direction of Bessie Schoenberg and conducted by the composer. Designed as a three act music drama, Kupferman's early scenario focused on the central image of Electra and the violent chase of Orestes by the Furies.

A decade later the composer decided to expand the work and re-orchestrate it for large symphony orchestra – but this time without chorus. For years nothing came of the piece even in this expanded version. Finally the work was put aside and nearly forgotten.

During the next twenty years, after renewing his interest in ballet by composing new dance scores for Martha Graham ("O Thou Desire"), Pearl Lang ("Persephone", "The Dybbuk" and "Icarus") and Jose Limon ("Sonata"), Meyer Kupferman abandoned his earlier versions of ELECTRA and again embarked on a full scale revision. Armed with a new scenario and a totally fresh orchestral conception based substantially on the original music, an intensely powerful symphonic poem evolved. This neo-romantic score which Kupferman now called THREE FACES OF ELECTRA was completed in 1995. It is in three movements, or in the composer's words, "...three imaginary acts of non-reality."

THREE FACES OF ELECTRA

(A scenario for an imaginary ballet in three acts...)

by Meyer Kupferman

Electra	Ladies of the Court
Clytemnestra	Festival Dancers
Agamemnon	Agamemnon's Palace Guard
Egisthus	Egisthus' Soldiers
	The Furies (The Wild Birds)

Act I: The Conspiracy and Murder

Scene 1

The curtain rises to a darkened stage engulfed in an air of mystery. A strange configuration of shadows slowly gives way to the dawn revealing the classical gardens of Agamemnon's palace. Clytemnestra embraces her king as she leads him to his favorite bench, making sure that he lies down in a comfortable position. As he falls asleep Clytemnestra signals her lover, Egisthus, who rushes out with his own troop of soldiers. They ambush Agamemnon's men, kill them quickly and drag them off. Egisthus hands the queen a vial of poison which she pours into Agamemnon's ear as he lies sleeping.

With the old king dying before her the queen shudders and begins to weep. Terror suddenly takes hold as she contemplates her deception, her conspiracy and her act of murder. Egisthus consoles Clytemnestra, indicating that all will be well when they marry and he will be crowned the new king. They embrace and he escorts her into the palace.

Scene 2

Electra is seen in her own chamber surrounded by ladies of the court. Her brother, Orestes, arrives. Neither knows of the death of Agamemnon but Electra senses that something unusual has taken place. Orestes is full of energy and eager to boast about his recent adventures. Electra moves from window to window and door to door looking for some sign of her father. For a moment her body erupts into a spin, as if possessed. She falls to the floor and frantically tries to rise up again and again. Orestes and the ladies of the court, utterly confused, help her to her feet. She commands them all to leave. Finally alone, she goes into a ritual of meditation.

Act II: The Festival of Games

Scene 1

As the curtain opens the stage is dazzled in brilliant sunlight. It is the opening of the annual Festival of Games which take place on the huge court and steps of Agamemnon's palace. At the top, three large Greek columns mark the entrance to the palace. A series of festive dances follow in rapid succession. Each is clearly a celebration of Spring – Electra, dressed in a virgin white gown, does a

beautiful welcoming dance which is transformed into a duet as Orestes joins her.

Little by little the games and dances build in intensity as the entire company grows more frenetic in the blinding sunlight.

Scene 2

Suddenly, a cloud covers the sky. Everything stops and the dancers look up at Clytemnestra who appears at the top of the three column entrance. Egisthus is not too far in the background. Clytemnestra opens her arms in a pseudo-tragic gesture indicating that Agamemnon has died in his sleep. Electra dashes up the steps and confronts Clytemnestra accusingly. Egisthus and his bodyguards try to intercede but Electra spits at him in a violent gesture of hate and "finger-points" him away. All depart as the sky darkens to deep red.

Electra and Orestes descend to the bottom and kneel. With her face lined in tragedy and tears Electra vows vengeance. The stage turns to black as the curtain falls.

Act III: The Furies and the Labyrinth

The entire stage is enclosed in a labyrinth-like construction, symbolizing the killing ground of the "Furies." The lights, which alternate blues, yellows and greens, shift constantly. Orestes, who has been running, as if possessed by a demon, stumbles into the labyrinth. One by one the Furies emerge and follow him. Electra tries to show Orestes the way out. She warns him that he is in great danger. Orestes now seeks refuge in the shadows around him only to find himself hopelessly trapped. The Furies, massed as an army of wild maniacal birds, surround him and taunt him with their wings and beaks.

Electra intercedes once again. Orestes breaks free into a desperate flight around the outer reaches of the maze. Egisthus and his men break through the entrance and bar his way. Egisthus draws his sword and challenges Orestes who turns to flee. He stumbles and soon finds himself hopelessly caught in the labyrinth again. The Furies swarm over Orestes and seem to be eating him alive! There is a flash of lightning as Electra witnesses the horror of the death of her brother. In great sadness she reaches out to him. Under the tragic image of death, there on her knees, she invokes the gods. She will seek the ultimate revenge for her father and her brother – this to the end of her life. In a last frenzy of hate she tears all the clothes from her body and sets fire to the labyrinth as the curtain falls.

RHAPSODY FOR GUITAR AND ORCHESTRA (1980)

by Meyer Kupferman

Meyer Kupferman's "Rhapsody for Guitar and Orchestra" was commissioned by David Starobin who premiered the work in 1980 – conceived as a one-movement essay the piece emerged as a passionate dialogue between guitar and orchestra.

Although the rhapsody is based on only one principle theme, which is tonal and quite lyrical, the body of the work is generated by tiny, nervous motivic lines which are highly chromatic. On close scrutiny one is bound to discover moments of sheer atonality pitted against harmonic phases of a neo-romantic, even impressionistic genre.

Important in Kupferman's approach to the work is that the amplification of the guitar makes it possible for the guitar to hold its own against the orchestra's most powerful outbursts. Also, the contrapuntal writing for the guitar and the complexities of the evolving musical textures in the orchestra suggest a philosophical stance for both.

These are deeply inherent to the probing and often passionate musical styles of the rhapsody. In the overview the one-movement compositional design may be likened to a journey which leads us through a circuitous path to one quiet plateau "...a peaceful *tranquillo* where the spirit can relax and dream awhile."

ROBERTO LIMÓN, GUITAR

Born in Mexico City, he studied guitar with prestigious guitarists Manuel López Ramos and Angel Romero. His musical studies were made with outstanding musical researcher Pedro Michaca.

Considered one of the most active and versatile guitarists, he has developed intense activity throughout Mexico, the United States, Russia, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Korea, and Lithuania.

As a soloist he has participated with the following orchestras: Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, St. Petersburg Orchestra, Orquesta Filarmónica de la Universidad Nacional de México, San Diego Symphony, Orquesta de Baja California, Seoul

Philharmonic, San Antonio Symphony, and Lithuania State Symphony.

He is founder of the Ensemble "Atril 5," a group in which he experimented in contemporary music. Many composers have dedicated their works: Meyer Kupferman, Manuel Enriquez, Ernesto Cordero, Dmitri Dudin, and Ernesto García de León. His most recent recordings have been with Soundspells Productions, which are *Three Concertos for Guitar and Orchestra* by Meyer Kupferman.

In 1989 he was selected by the National Fine Arts Institute of Mexico to become a lifetime member of the exclusive group of artists of this institution. In 1991 and 1993 he was awarded by the National Fund for Arts and Culture for his work as soloist and chamber music. In 1994 he was named the National Counsel for the Arts director of the Centro Hispanoamericano de Guitarra, a cultural institution dedicated to research, education and promotion of the guitar, that also include an annual guitar festival in November at the Centro Cultural Tijuana. At the present moment he is soloist in residency of the Orquesta de Baja California.

Gintaras Rinkevičius, Conductor

Gintaras Rinkevičius was born in 1960. He studies in Vilnius M.K. Ciurlionis Gymnasium of Arts and graduated from St. Petersburg Conservatoire in 1983. He undertook post-graduate studies in Moscow Conservatoire in the class of professor Yuri Simonov.

He was a winner of the Fifth All-Union Conductor's Competition of the former USSR in Moscow. In 1985 he was a winner of the International Competition in West Berlin of Herbert von Karajan Fund. And in 1986 he became a laureate of Budapest Competition *In Memoriam Janos Ferencsik*.

In June of 1992 Gintaras Rinkevičius staged and conducted Verdi's *Nabucco* in the Lithuanian Opera Theatre in Vilnius. This opera was also shown in the Verdi Roncole Festival in Italy (1992), in the first International Theatre Festival (LIFE) in Vilnius, and in the Savonlinna Music Festival in Finland. In 1994 Rinkevičius staged A. Dvorak's *Requiem* in the Lithuanian Opera Theatre. The latest of Rinkevičius's work in the field of opera is a series of staged performances of *Der fliegende Holländer* in three Lithuanian theatres in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipeda. This project was realized with the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, the Latvian State Academic Choir *Latvija*, and guest soloists and dancers.

Gintaras Rinkevičius has toured several times in France, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal. He gave concerts in the major halls of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Paris. He also toured Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, and neighboring Latvia.

Since 1988 Gintaras Rinkevičius has been the chief conductor and artistic director of the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra. It was with this orchestra that he gave concerts in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Paris, and Salzburg. Maestro Gintaras Rinkevičius and the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra participated in various international music festivals, such as Antibes, Kortrijk, Estoril, Warsaw Autumn Festival and *Europamusicale* in Munich. In the latter the orchestra was the only ensemble to represent Lithuania. In addition, in 1994 and 1995 the orchestra was invited to participate in the Festival Costa do Estoril in Lisbon, Portugal. It gave several performances here including the ones with well-known Brazilian pianist and composer Egberto Gismonti and a concert with the renowned English composer Michael Nyman. In 1994 there were concerts in other European music festivals – Wiltz (Luxembourg), Pontivy (France), Sisteron Festival in France and the Nyon rock music festival in Switzerland. In October 1995 several concerts in Switzerland and Germany were given with the pianist Nikolaj Petrov and in Vilnius with one of the most famous violinists of the world, Viktor Tretjakov. In December 1995 a tour in Holland was made together with S. Petersburg's ballet company consisting of *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* in the most famous venues in Holland. It also made a successful debut in Great Britain taking part in Chichester Festivities.

The first CD of the orchestra was released in October 1992. Compositions by M.K. Ciurlionis, the classic of Lithuanian national art and music – tone poems *In The Forest* and *The Sea* – were recorded there. The orchestra has recorded its second CD, with Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5 and 6 CD's of popular symphonic music for the PolyGram company. The ensemble also recorded a CD in Vilnius with the Brazilian composer, pianist, and guitarist Egberto Gismonti. The company ECM will release this disc in 1997. His most recent CD is Meyer Kupferman's *Fantasy Concerto For Violin and Orchestra* (Soundspells CD119).

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“My Music...”

by Meyer Kupferman

The music I love to write often crosses over a broad spectrum of styles usually characterized by tonal and atonal positions. Since I have been doing this sort of thing for fifty years, the notion of mixing opposing elements which is very natural for me has included thematic and athematic materials, jazz and non-jazz ideas and a host of rhythmic and textural opposites that I would prefer to describe as dynamic or creative polarization. As for performing artists, my best players and interpreters are those who have a real feel for these aesthetic games; they must be artists who command considerable virtuosity and a deeply rooted expressivity, since my work often touches on neo-romantic performance traditions. I suppose I should admit at this point that in the early days I was very quickly hooked on the challenge of big, romantic forms. This became evident as soon as I started composing for orchestra: My first symphony, first piano concerto, first cello concerto and first opera were all completed before I was twenty-one. Although these were never listed as tone-poems, it was for myself alone that these symphonic pieces were based on folk legends, fragments of mythology or the rich passions of epic poetry.

After working in a free chromatic style during the 1940's, the twelve-tone system gradually occupied more and more of my attention. Since I was totally self-taught in music composition and wore no academic handcuffs to hold me back or keep me in line, I plunged right in and freely adapted the whole dodecaphonic system to my own selfish needs. Thinking that I had stumbled upon a gold mine, I created a form where each new work was based on a rotating series of tone centers – clearly a contradiction of atonality! This kind of re-invention soon led to what I then regarded as my first major innovation: all forty-eight permutations of the row were employed in a symmetrical distribution of tonal centers, each seven bars long and each coordinated by and evolved from the pitch sequence of the basic row. MY CHAMBER SYMPHONY (CD112) was an early example of this tone-center rotation procedure. Since the symphony had a bit of success and was premiered on an important ISCM concert along with John Cage's LANDSCAPES FOR TWELVE RADIOS I was happy to continue in this direction...for a while.

The 1950's represented a period of many swings back and forth between this form of private atonality and my 'old reliable' chromatic tonality. Perhaps my LYRIC SYMPHONY (CD110) and FOURTH SYMPHONY (1955, Louisville) are the best examples of the latter approach. My SONATA ON JAZZ ELEMENTS (1958, Serenus), a freely twelve-tone, hard-hitting jazz sonata, clearly showed that although I might have taken leave of my senses writing such an enormously difficult keyboard work, I had not abandoned the jazz world. Dreaming about the mind-boggling operatic success of Menotti, many young American composers like myself were caught up in the operatic explosion of the 1950's. Stravinsky's THE RAKE'S PROGRESS was an important contribution and urged us on still further. Although none of us really succeeded, I did manage to compose four operas during this crazy decade: DOCTOR FAUSTUS LIGHTS THE LIGHTS, VOICES FOR A MIRROR, THE CURIOUS FERN and DRAAGENFOOT GIRL.

The 1960's marked the beginning of my CYCLE OF INFINITIES, a series of related twelve-tone works spanning nearly four decades all based on the same tone row. I became totally committed to this direction, discovering along the way that my 'Infinities' tone row was like a magic tune that could yield anything I required in terms of melody, counterpoint, texture or harmonic organization. My CYCLE OF INFINITIES started out with four different solo instrument concerts: unaccompanied flute, viola, cello and coloratura soprano. Each concert became a spectacular tour-de-force for the artist, particularly since new echo techniques, theatrical illusions such as lighting and choreography, and an array of electronic devices which enabled these solo instrumentalists or singers to perform live against their own pre-recorded sounds, were all part of each 'Infinities' event.

Also, I composed many 'Infinities' jazz works like my JAZZ STRING QUARTET (premiered at the White House when Johnson was president), CONCERTO FOR CELLO AND JAZZ BAND (CD114), INFINITIES PROJECTIONS (for chamber orchestra – CD114), INFINITIES FOR STRINGS, JAZZ INFINITIES THREE for sax, bass and drums (premiered at the Library of Congress during the First International Jazz Festival) and MOONCHILD AND THE DOOMSDAY TROMBONE, a jazz concerto for oboe (Ronald Roseman) and a small group of versatile artists including the wonderful Jan DeGaetani who sang jazz onstage for the first time with this 'Infinities' piece. A highlight in my evolving CYCLE OF INFINITIES was an opera without orchestra, THE JUDGMENT, composed in 1968. The libretto was based on the Biblical story of Lot in Sodom. Conceived in gigantesque proportions, THE JUDGMENT, in three long acts, called for huge stage sets, nineteen soloists, five choruses and absolutely no supporting instruments. I never concerned myself about where my poor singers would get their pitch or how they would maintain the twelve-tone intonation. Each singer had to have perfect pitch or a remarkable sense of relative pitch. Since I had worked with artists of this type before I could foresee no great difficulty. Now, however, I believe that I must have been wrong since THE JUDGMENT has still not seen the light of day.

The early 1970's marked the beginning of a major turnabout for me. My music embraced a new multi-style approach which I

soon wound up calling 'gestalt' form. Today I can safely say I wasted many hours hopelessly trying to explain to my academic cronies why I gave it such a name. My lecture in Aspen, for example, proved to be a bust until I played some tapes of my new 'gestalt' music. Suddenly there was a glimmer of understanding. "Why does music always have to be consistent?" I asked. "Life certainly isn't except when it chooses to be!" My new 'gestalt' idea provided me with a great *raison d'être* to explore expansive musical conceptions of changing elements or, in fact, totally contrasting styles so incongruous that they had no business being near each other, let alone in the same composition! Thus armed with the chameleon-like aesthetic of my 'gestalt' idea, I could not only combine tonality with atonality but create a believable blend of music which could include touches of aleatoric, romantic, minimalist, jazz, electronic and even folk-like materials in the same piece. Eventually I discovered that the 'gestalt' traffic flowed better in large forms. As a result an avalanche of massive 'gestalt' works followed: YIN YANG SYMPHONY, CONCERTO FOR SIX INSTRUMENTS AND ORCHESTRA, TWILIGHT SYMPHONY (CD 117), THE CELESTIAL CITY (CRI) and CONCERTO FOR CELLO, TAPE AND ORCHESTRA (VOX).

The 1980's and 1990's reveal a continued expansion of my 'Infinities' cycle. I would not be exaggerating if I said my 'Infinities' row was like an old friend with whom I enjoy a visit a few times a year. My weakness for atonal jazz provides me with other aesthetic 'pals and cookies.' Speaking about 1990, it would appear I opened a Pandora's box with my new book titled ATONAL JAZZ. The book explains my ideas about twelve-tone improvisation and is published with an 'Infinities' play-along CD (Dorn Publications). I scribbled the first draft of the book on my way to Lithuania that scary summer of 1990. Our nervous little caravan of soloists, engineers, producers and wives sneaked into Vilnius to record my JAZZ SYMPHONY (CD104) without Soviet visas! Very dangerous – so was the music! But that's another story.

I do not wish to give the impression that I abandoned my grandiose 'gestalt' fantasies, for the 'gestalt' form eventually did emerge as the central preoccupation of my music from 1980 through 1996. The compositions of this period were centered around two instruments: the piano and the amplified guitar. The major keyboard works are THE MOOR'S CONCERTO (piano and orchestra, CD110), A LITTLE IVORY CONCERTO (piano and chamber orchestra, CD100), MASADA (piano and five instruments) and four big piano sonatas: THE CANTICLES OF ULYSSES, RED SONATA, TWILIGHT SONATA and SONATA OCCULTA. The works for amplified guitar are CONCERTO FOR GUITAR AND ORCHESTRA (CD113), ICE CREAM CONCERTO (for eleven players and ice cream vendor, CD109), THESE SUNS ARE DARK and HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK, both for solo guitar, GOING HOME (for guitar quartet) and ICARUS (for guitar, viola and cello).

Just to show that I am still keeping my hand in there, I should explain that I do play my instrument, the clarinet, every day, and conduct once in a blue moon, or whenever it is less of a hassle for me to do it. My musicians are very sensitive individuals, often high-strung or just plain strung-out from too much concentrated work on my music. It is good, therefore, that I hold myself in high esteem as an excellent coach (I haven't killed anyone yet, but I have been tempted to many times!). I try to impress upon my artists that they should enjoy the challenge of 'impossible' passages, arguing, making revisions, and planning important musical events.

In closing let me say that music has been my life and I am very grateful to have lived it. Although the hardships, struggles and disappointments are never forgotten, the real joy of making something out of nothing is always there in front of me.



Photo by Dainius Labutis

Meyer Kupferman, 1997

A play-back study pause between recording sessions for "Three Faces of Electra" in Vilnius, Lithuania.

From left to right:
(standing) Peter Aglinskas,
(seated) Meyer Kupferman,
James Bond,
and D.B. Griffith.



MEYER KUPFERMAN



GINTARAS RINKEVIČIUS

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CD 120



The Orchestral Music of MEYER KUPFERMAN Vol. 7

1 THREE FACES OF ELECTRA (1995)

...music for an imaginary ballet... (29':43")

Act I Misterioso (10':16")
(Conspiracy and Murder)

2 Act II Allegro con brio (11':46") (Festival of Games)

3 Act III Allegro molto (7':35") (The Furies)

4 RHAPSODY FOR GUITAR AND ORCHESTRA (20':28") (1980)

in one movement

TOTAL TIME: (50':16")

ROBERTO LIMÓN, guitar
GINTARAS RINKEVIČIUS, conductor

THE LITHUANIAN STATE
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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ROBERTO LIMON

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Assistant Engineer: D.B. Griffith
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Rinkevičius Photo by Anatas Surkus
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