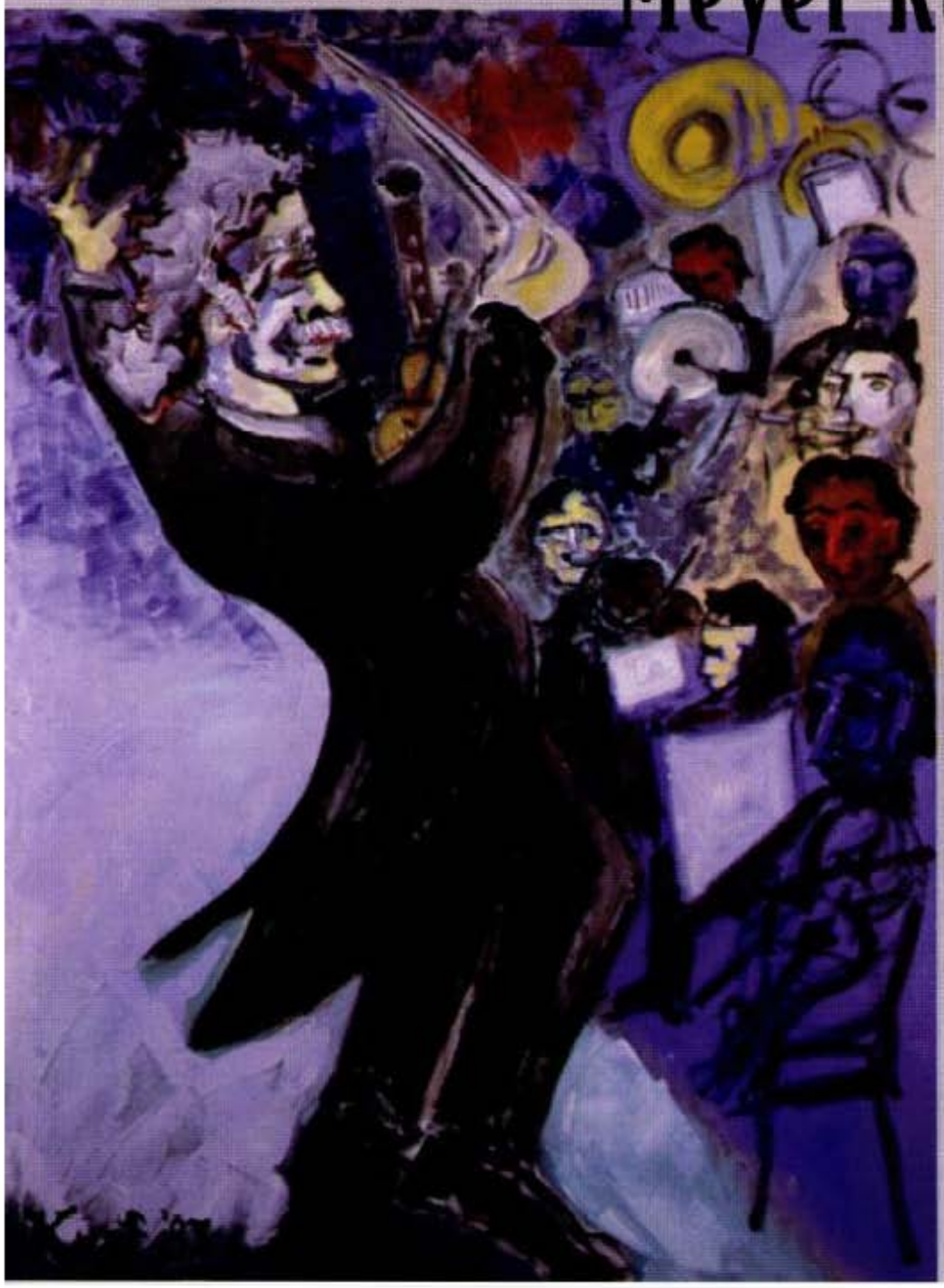
The Orchestral Music of Meyer Kupferman Vol. 8



Fourth Symphony

The Louisville Orchestra
Robert Whitney,
Conductor

Little Symphony

The Vienna State
Opera Orchestra
Franz Litschauer,
Conductor

AAD

CD 121

Soundspells Productions

THE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC OF MEYER KUPFERMAN, VOL. 8.
Fourth Symphony (1955)
by Meyer Kupferman

The Fourth Symphony, commissioned and recorded by the Louisville Orchestra, was composed in the mid-1950's during a period of intense musical exploration for Meyer Kupferman. Works during this time include the Little Symphony (on this CD) and the Chamber Symphony (CD112). All of these works were well received by critics and audiences, but the Fourth Symphony represented a major turning point in Kupferman's musical style and in his expressive aesthetic. Indeed, its staggering passion, its boundless thematic invention and its curious timbral colorations all combine to make it unique.

The Symphony is based on a chapter of Dostoevsky's great novel, "The Brothers Karamazov," called "The Legend Of The Grand Inquisitor." It is said to be the greatest section of the greatest novel ever written. The story is told by one of the brothers about halfway through the novel. In brief, it recounts the terrible days of the Spanish Inquisition when the Grand Inquisitor hears that someone posing as the Christ is performing alleged miracles for the poor. The Grand Inquisitor ventures into the streets and sees for himself that this individual is performing genuine miracles and, amazingly, is indeed the Christ Himself, resurrected and returned to the earth. Rather than fall upon his knees in worship, the Grand Inquisitor has Him arrested and jailed. There follows a long scene in prison in which the Grand Inquisitor pays a visit to the Christ and explains why He not only must be incarcerated, but must be executed a second time, this time by His own Church. After the Grand Inquisitor has condemned his prisoner, Christ lovingly, forgivingly, bestows upon the Grand Inquisitor a mysterious kiss which will be reflected at the pianissimo climax of the symphony.

Played without interruption, the Fourth Symphony is divided into three large movements. It details in a somewhat programmatic way the events of Dostoevsky's story and also contains several musical devices which have become favorites to Kupferman over the many years of his composing career. For example, the "Muss es Sein?" motive from Beethoven's String Quartet in F Major, Opus 135 is woven throughout the piece. Another theme constructed from the wonderful cruciform shape of the name of Bach (B-flat, A, C , B-natural, or "H' in German music) is used here extensively; this theme has been a favorite motivic device of countless composers, J.S. Bach certainly prominent among them.

The Symphony concerns itself not so much with the physical details of the Dostoevsky novel, but with its emotional and spiritual repercussions. The first movement serves to set this tone as an extended dark essay. The atmosphere is clearly felt as an oppressive, self-righteous and stifling one, tinged with a narrative tragedy. This is accomplished at the outset of the piece with an entrance of the low strings in a theme based on the "Muss es sein?" motive, but greatly transformed. The effect is that of a gathering storm, dark, brooding, and threatening to explode. The tension of this spiritual storm is paralleled throught the accumulation of pitches and instrumental colors as low brass and surging timpani glissandi and tremolandi are countered by plaintive, sustained woodwind phrases. The dark themes are periodically punctuated by violent outbursts which erupt into faster tempi but

always fall back to the pervasive brooding of the initial mood.

A call to arms, the opening French horn signals of the second movement in agitated, rising fifths, exhibit a sharp, militaristic character. Spanish pomp and the clashing of swords and armor can be heard. This is undoubtedly a musical depiction of the Spanish Crusades, exemplified by brutish, bullying statements in the brass and smoky string trills countered by angry staccato woodwind phrases. Here the "Muss es sein?" motive returns in counterpoint with the cruciform Bach motive.

The third movement, an exquisite adagio finale, is a giant fugue based on the name of Bach and suggests the long discourse of the Grand Inquisitor to Christ in prison. Kupferman possesses here a seemingly inexhaustible knack for motivic transformation, sustained and rising linear designs and varied orchestral color. The long journey of the fugue contains dozens of entries and episodes which express the spectrum of passion and horror. This puts the human condition on an epic level as the fugue reaches for its incredibly gentle climax in the highest and most distant regions of orchestral sound. The composer has asked himself for many years, "What is the meaning of the kiss? The depiction I have made at this point in the fugue is still unsettling and doesn't answer all the questions." A brief coda follows in which the three notes of the "Muss es sein?" motive is once again stated, as if all of this "must be," and the symphony dies away into silence and inconsolable sadness.

Little Symphony (1952)

Meyer Kupferman's Little Symphony, commissioned by Daniel Saidenberg for his classical orchestra called "The Saidenberg Little Symphony," was premiered at the 92nd Street YMHA in New York City. Its orchestration was drawn from the other main work on the program, a Haydn piano concerto.

The spirit of Kupferman's Little Symphony is infused with a sense of youthful playfulness and good humor. This is immediately apparent in the first movement, a traditional sonata-allegro, as the opening chords establish the tonality of the piece (D major) in no uncertain terms with a sturdy low F-natural in the bass to attack the tonality. Gradually rapid string arpeggiations work against the orchestral chords and allow the more gentle second theme to emerge in a graceful cross-rhythm. Certainly the influences of Stravinsky and Prokofieff's neo-classical works are apparent here, especially in the unsettled character of major-minor harmonic juxtapositions. The dancelike nature of the first movement is often punctuated by delightful contrapuntal episodes. The development section is full of intense harmony not unlike what one would find in a Mozart development. The finale of the movement is capped off with an exaggerated hammering gesture on the tonic D major in the tradition of Beethoven.

The second movement, an idyllic essay, was written to celebrate the birth of Kupferman's daughter. It is filled with joyful melodies of an expressive innocence. Of particular note is the reminiscent children's tune in the oboe and flute which returns in various guises. A lyrical descending melody in the violins contributes to the gentle character and culminates in trills not unlike the representation of natural sounds in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. Throughout the

movement there is a play between sustained sounds and staccato woodwind phrases and this counterpoint becomes more apparent at its close.

A cadenza interlude which connects the second and third movements begins with an abrupt orchestral recitative and introduces a cello cadenza which the composer years later admitted he wrote because the conductor, Daniel Saidenberg, was a great cellist and Kupferman conceived it as a tribute to him.

Suddenly the finale jumps out at us in a flying presto. There is a particularly Italian, even Rossiniesque, character to this movement, especially in the ornate and rapid violin melodies which are prevalent throughout. A demonic flurry of figurations carries the movement through to the end until a surprise F major cadence insinuates itself and whips us back to the final D major.

Meyer Kupferman wrote the Little Symphony "out of character," that is, against the mold the musical world had expected of him. A trailblazing atonal composer was not supposed to write a tonal, unapologetic, classically constructed work. But this composer was beginning to realize he needed to follow his own convictions and not the expectations of the world around him. In his own words, Kupferman needed to "get this large work on paper and get the need to satisfy traditional gestures out of my system once and for all, in order to move onward without a sense of missed opportunity."

The Little Symphony premiered to favorable notices, but one critic chided Kupferman for daring to write tonal music when he was known as the exponent of an opposite genre. It should be understood that stylistic rigidity was as strong forty years ago as was the Great Wall of China. The critic need not have wasted his breath. Kupferman soon became a composer who was all to willing to play with, rather than give in to the expectations of an audience. It is only recently that prevailing trends allowed American, European and Asian composers to adopt a freewheeling juxtaposition of stylistic influences. If one were to look back, one could see that Kupferman, simply by following his personal muse nearly a half-century ago, became the harbinger of the poetics we now enjoy as a culture.

Notes by Christopher Vassiliades

Meyer Kupferman

Meyer Kupferman's father, Elias Staff-Cooperman, was born in Roumania in 1900. A runaway youth, he fled from his stepfather and traveled throughout Europe as a gypsy folk singer, street musician who played the accordion, wrestler, cook and baker. He was conscripted into the Austrian-Hungarian army and wounded in World War I. Elias settled in the United States with his sister Clara in the early 20's. He joined the baker's union while living in New York City and changed his name to Elias Kupferman, thus severing all connection with his hated stepfather. He married a young Russion emigré, Fanny Hoffman, whose family had been decimated by cossack raids and pogroms in Nemirov, a little Jewish village moving on the "pale" between Kiev, Odessa and Eastern Poland. Fanny's flight to America first brought her to the mid-west where she worked in the mills and factories of Kansas. Later she joined her aging aunt in New

York where she found work as a seamstress. Fanny and Elias were introduced by some friends at a wedding where Elias was hired as singer and entertainer. They fell madly in love and were soon married.

Meyer Kupferman was born on July 3rd, 1926 in New York City. The little family soon moved to Brooklyn because there were more and better jobs available for bakers. Also landlords had lowered their rents on all apartments; they were, in fact, giving away three months rent-free concession on all new leases. Through the Depression and nearly the next ten years Kupferman's family moved to a new apartment each year. Thus as a child he had to attend a different school each year and make new friends as well as abandon old ones very often.

At age five he was given the violin, a study that was so premature and uncomfortable he has little memory of it. At age ten, almost as a joke or a dare while fooling around with his friends already in the school band, Meyer Kupferman began taking clarinet lessons. Music soon became an important part of his life and he became good at it. The idea of writing music grew more and more fascinating for him. Eventually he began teaching himself the piano, which provided a basis for his curiosity about composing and arranging music for his friends. As he grew older he worked as a young jazz musician in clubs and bars in the Coney Island area of Brooklyn. He lived through the "Big Band Era" which provided a source of rich stimulation for him as well as all budding musicians interested in composing or arranging jazz.

Although Meyer Kupferman was entirely self-taught in music composition he received his education in theory, chamber ensemble and orchestral music at the High School of Music and Art. He also studied at Queens College. Kupferman's father encouraged his son in music and taught him many East European, gypsy and Hebrew melodies. The flavor of these tunes not only stayed with Meyer Kupferman for the rest of his life but influenced his compositional style from time to time.

As a young composer still in his twenties Kupferman became Professor of Composition and Chamber Music at Sarah Lawrence College in 1951. He continued as member of the faculty until his retirement forty three years later in 1994. During his tenure at Sarah Lawrence College he was chairman of the music department for five terms, conducted the orchestra, chorus and chamber improvisation ensemble, taught theory and music for film and wrote many experimental theatre and dance works for performing arts students at Sarah Lawrence.

Mr. Kupferman has been awarded grants and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment of the Arts, the Library of Congress, the US State Department and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He is a virtuoso clarinettist who has premiered over sixty solo and chamber works composed especially for him and his 'Music By My Friends' ensemble.

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 concertos 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 these works an integral part of his "Cycle of Infinities" – a series of concert and jazz works evolved from the same 12-tone row begun in 1962. He has received commissions 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 U.S. Constitution, and the Nassau Symphony for his Double Clarinet Concerto. His cantata, "Comicus Americanus," was commissioned by the Kansas City Philharmonic in 1970. 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 Vassiliades. Some of his experimental works in tape-gestalt form include such pieces as Celestial City, Angel footprints, Super-flute and illusions. Among his many film scores are such pictures as Black Like Me, Halleluja The Hills, Blast of Silence and Truman Capote's 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 Estrin, Kazuko Hayami, Svetlana Gorokhovich and Christopher Vassiliades. Kupferman's book, Atonal Jazz, a two volume, in-depth study of new chromatic techniques in contemporary jazz was released in 1992 by Dorn Publications. His "Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra" was commissioned by the Orquesta de Baja California and premiered in Mexico in 1994 with Roberto Limón as guitar soloist and Eduardo Garcia Barrios, conductor.

Recent commissions are his new "Chaconne Sonata" for flute and piano, written for Laurel Ann Maurer, "Pipe Dream Sonata" for solo guitar commissioned by Robert Phillips, "Ice Cream Concerto" and "Flavors of the Stars" both for the virtuoso ARTIL^5 Contemporary Ensemble of Mexico, "Hot Hors D'ouevres" for the Hudson Valley Philharmonic and "Hexagon Skies" for guitar and orchestra commissioned by the Orquesta de Baja California and guitarist Roberto Limón.

In 1976 Itzak Perlman gave the New York premiere of Kupferman's "Fantasy Sonata" and Martha Graham created a new ballet based on this same violin score called "O Thou Desire," which her company took on a European tour the following year. During this period cellist Laszlo Varga premiered Kupferman's "Concerto for Cello Tape and Orchestra" which he later recorded on a Vox CD (VoxBox CDX5158). Other recent commissions are his "A Faust Concerto" for French horn and chamber orchestra, "Moonfinger's Demon" for orchestra and "Acrobats of Apollo" for marimba, guitar and chamber orchestra, all three works composed for the Orquesta de Baja California, with Eduardo Garcia Barrios, conductor. Flutist Laurel Ann Maurer commissioned a work for the Utah Contemporary Chamber players for flute, clarinet and piano called "O North Star." Mr. Kupferman has also written a solo guitar piece for the Mexican guitarist, Roberto Limón, called "O Luna O Sol." The composer's latest project is his "Concerto Brevis," for flute and orchestra commissioned by the National Flute Association.

Kupferman Notes by Valentine Fabian

The Orchestral Music of
Meyer Kupferman
Vol. 8

MEYER KUPFERMAN

Cover Art : oil painting by Meyer Kupferman called "The Toscannini Legend."
Kupferman photo : by Howard Dratch.

This CD is a reissue of both symphonies first released on LP in the late 1950's by the Louisville Orchestra Recording Series and Vanguard Records.

Fourth Symphony [22':04"] (1955)
The Louisville Orchestra
Robert Whitney, Conductor
[in three movements played without interruption]
1 Lento misterioso [5':23"]
2 Allegro con brio [7':29"]
3 Largo [9':12"]

Little Symphony [22':04"] (1952)
The Vienna State Opera Orchestra
Franz Litschauer, Conductor
4 Allegro [7':15"]
5 Andante [7':05"]
6 Finale [7':40"]

Total Duration: [44':18"]

CD 121
AAD
COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

7 61793 12132 6

Visit our web site:
//www.designsys.com/soundspells/

Rhinebeck, NY 12572

Soundspells Productions