

The Orchestral Music of **MEYER KUPFERMAN** vol. 9

3
SYMPHONIES
(1980-'96)

Symphonic Odyssey

Quasar Symphony

Sound Phantoms #8
(SINFONIA BREVIS II)

Mindaugas Piečaitis,
conductor

**THE LITHUANIAN STATE
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

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The Orchestral Music of **MEYER KUPFERMAN • Vol. 9**

SYMPHONIC ODYSSEY (1990)

The first movement of Meyer Kupferman's SYMPHONIC ODYSSEY opens with a tremendous orchestral implosion of percussion and brass. This is immediately followed by an electrifying Toccata - a wild atonal voyage of instruments screaming and writhing with rhythmic force. Clearly, the entire movement was conceived as a driving, fast tempo structure, never lyrical and never forgiving.

After a long pause the strings, in slow, sustained pianissimo voicings offer an emerging ritual of gentle, "laid-back invocations..." This marks the beginning of the symphony's second movement. Slowly the winds and brass unravel Kupferman's unique "floating sound", a musical abstraction of seemingly free long-tones and expressive linear designs. A quiet brass choral is transformed by the strings and woodwinds into a contemplative mosaic of richly colored thematic fragments which are scattered throughout the remainder of Kupferman's symphony. Almost without warning the entire orchestra "pyramids" into a fierce pillar of sound dissolving into the quick retreat of a fade-away ending.

The vigorous opening of the finale returns us to a fast-paced energy which centers around the rhythmic drive of a Macedonian dance (in 4/4 + 3/8 time). For a while this almost blatantly tonal episode stands as the brightest moment of Kupferman's oeuvre but soon gives way to a more relentless symphonic battle. At midpoint the mood changes radically, like a ship sailing into a new haven after a storm. Everything becomes calm and meditative. Kupferman once again weaves together an evocative design culled from the magic of his "floating sounds". Quiet, melodic phrases merge in and out of each other with the focus on individual woodwind colors like the clarinet, the oboe, the English horn and the bassoon. A sudden surge of orchestral power near the end provides us with a reminder of the overwhelming granitic forces at work in Kupferman's odyssey - for this odyssey is surely a personal one! The distant, almost tearful voice of the English horn suspended over a string chord of nine tones closes the symphony with a whisper "a moment embodying the warmth and pain of a tragic drama..."

*Special Note: Meyer Kupferman's SYMPHONIC ODYSSEY was completed in 1990
and written in memory of a close friend who died that same year.*

QUASAR SYMPHONY (1996)

The four movement design of Meyer Kupferman's QUASAR SYMPHONY is clearly one of unusually sharp contrast. What binds these together is the commanding role of the atonal harmony: Kupferman's "Infinities" 12-tone row (G, F, A ♭, C ♭, B ♭, D, F#, E, C, E ♭, A, C#) - the same tone row has been used for over thirty years. The work, completed in 1996 approaches the orchestra as a giant chamber music or concerto vehicle. This, perhaps because the composer was in the midst of composing three concertos during that same year (for violin, guitar and flute). The first movement alone, for example, contains three little cadenza-like solos for oboe, almost at the very opening, for French horn and for violin at the close of the movement.

The second movement, conceived in the tradition of the classical scherzo, also boasts two cadenzas -

one for bassoon and marimba and the other, a shorter fragment, for three flutes. The rapid 5/8 tempo used in the movement propels the action forward in accents of humor and energy. The third movement is scored for strings, three clarinets and alto flute. The strings are divided into ten "divisi" groups featuring a contrapuntal texture of enormous complexity. This eventually provides the background for three clarinets which converge around a sustained and highly disjunct 12-tone melody, in absolute unison! Finally the solo clarinet breaks free into its own cadenza over the frenetic strings. The final episode is a duo between the clarinet and the alto flute, relaxing the rhythms and concentrating on microtonal sustained nuances between both instruments.

The epilogue, in the composer's words, is a "... Crazy Jazz movement binding together bits of archaic swing rhythms with a challenging array of sophisticated virtuoso orchestral jazz licks, circa 1996".

The rhythmic games here are "dizzying" and the instrumental approach is merciless in its solo and ensemble demands. The 12-tone harmony, the hot percussion, the sharply colored instrumental profiles and the shifting, unpredictable contrapuntal accents - keep everyone on their toes - especially the listener. I have heard plenty of jazz in my time but never anything like this!

SOUND PHANTOMS #8 / SINFONIA BREVIS II (1980)

SOUND PHANTOMS # 8 is a tiny symphony in five brief movements. Completed in the 1980's the work reflects Meyer Kupferman's renewed preoccupation with the 8-tone symmetrical scale: (C, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A, and B ♭). "I love this scale", says the composer, "because it reminds me of my father's Romanian heritage and also because it creates a truly natural mix of tonal and atonal reflections in every phrase. With the internal machinery of melody, harmony and counterpoint, for example, one can always discover a blend of tonal and atonal secrets in every bar. It is my job to unlock them and to direct them towards whatever intensity I need in my music".

The first movement opens with a slow, sustained solo by the soprano saxophone, a featured instrument in the texture of the symphony. The orchestral response which follows sets the stage for an expressive, neo-romantic fantasy derived from a motif heard in the opening solo. The short movement closes on a soft D Major chord in the trombones and strings ornamented with warm melodic dissonances in the bassoon and cello.

The second movement resembles a flamboyant orchestral fanfare featuring the percussion, brass and solo saxophone. An aggressive pattern of rhythms governs the entire episode. The end, however, raises a question about the four whispered string chords - so completely out of context. These sustained muted harmonies shift the mood abruptly and seem to float in space. The composer's explanation is merely "...it is a musical virus - a mystery or a Sound Phantom!"

The third movement is appropriately marked "slow and dreamy" because that is exactly what it is. The 3-note Beethoven motif, "Muss es sein?" (Must it be?) announced in the opening bassoon phrase, provides the key to each of the melodic solos which follow: the tuba, the flute, the cello and finally the solo violin - each over a sustained layer of harmony. Of all five movements the structure of the fourth is the most complex and clearly twice as long as any of the others. Here too, references to the "Muss as

sein" motif are heard in a disguised setting of muted trumpets and stopped horns. The pizzicato glissando along with a new saxophone flourish which launch the fourth movement, appear to suggest a Near Eastern timbre emerging from Kupferman's score at this point. A playful set of "chatterbox figurations" from the E \flat clarinet, the flutes and the xylophone, thrust us forward into a powerful fortissimo tutti which climaxes almost as quickly as it begins. This closes on an expressive string phrase which, like a haunting memory, brings back the notes of "Muss es sein".

The fifth and last movement is a powerhouse of orchestral rhythm, accent and counterpoint. It is designed as a march in 11/8th time and, like a phalanx of determined warriors, it plunges ahead with savage force and energy. The form is really an encapsulated crescendo: overwhelming from the beginning right up the closing D Major triad in the high trumpets. *Meyer Kupferman's "Sound Phantoms #8" won the Quinto Maganini award in 1986 and was premeired by the Norwalk Symphony that same year.*

Symphonic Notes by Valentine Fabian

MINDAUGAS PIEČAITIS

Mindaugas Piečaitis, born 1969 in Vilnius, Lithuania, began his music studies at the Ciurlionis High School for the Arts. He graduated from the Lithuanian Academy of Music in 1993 with a degree in choral direction, in 1994 with a degree in orchestral conducting and in 1995 with a master's degree in symphonic-operatic conducting.

In 1992 he won a prize at the international young choral conductor's contest in Tallinn, Estonia.

His orchestral debut took place in 1992 in Palanga, Lithuania, where he conducted Shostakovich's first Symphony. His debut at the Lithuanian Ballet and Opera Theater took place in 1994 where he conducted Dvorak's "Requiem", Verdi's "La Traviata", and the premiere of the ballet by Minkus "Don Quixote" in 1995. He conducted at new music festivals in Klaipėda, Druskininkai, and at the "Young Music"/"Gaida" new music festivals in Vilnius.

In addition to his duties with the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, he has conducted the Klaipėda Chamber Orchestra, Klaipėda Music Theater Orchestra, Kaunas Music Theater Orchestra, the chamber orchestra "Archi Vilnensis", Vilnius Chamber Orchestra, and the Lithuanian Opera and Ballet Theater Orchestras.

He has toured with the State Symphony Orchestra of Lithuania and the Latvian State Chorus "Latvija" performing Benjamin Britten's "War Requiem", Brahms's "German Requiem" and Orff's "Carmina Burana".

He currently conducts performances at the Lithuanian Opera Ballet Theater, the Kuanas Music Theater, and is the Assistant Conductor of the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra.

MEYER KUPFERMAN

Meyer Kupferman's father, Elias Staff-Cooperman, was born in Romania 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 Russian 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 clarinetist 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, Superflute 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.

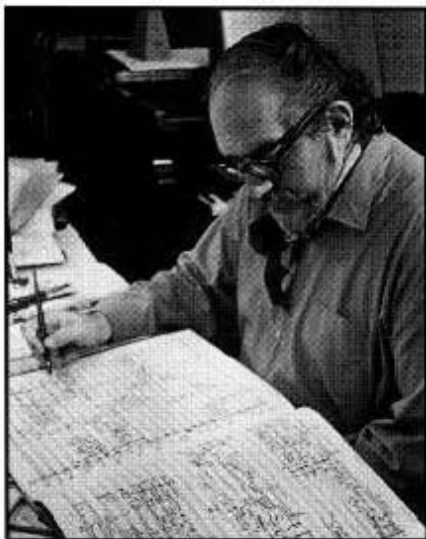
In the summer of 1990 the Lithuanian National Symphony recorded his "Jazz Symphony" and "Challenger" (Soundspells Productions CD 104). Mr. Kupferman made the heroic trip to Lithuania for that purpose during the time of the Russian blockade. In the 1991-92 season he celebrated his 65th year with the premiere of his seventh opera, "The Proscenium" and several piano retrospectives with pianists Morton Estrin, Kazuko Hayami, Sverlana 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 ATRIL's Contemporary Ensemble of Mexico, "Hot Hors D'oeuvres" 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. His "Winter Symphony", completed in 1997, will be premiered in Europe in 1998 along with his new "Percussion Symphony".

Kupferman Notes by Valentine Fabian

The Orchestral Music of **MEYER KUPFERMAN**
 V O L . # 9
3 SYMPHONIES 1980-'96



MEYER KUPFERMAN

1 SYMPHONIC ODYSSEY (1990)

Allegro agitato: 4:15

2 *Sussurando: 6:57*

5 *Agitato ma moderato: 13:09*

(TOTAL 24:24)

4 QUASAR SYMPHONY (1996)

Lento : 7:52

5 *Allegro molto e scherzando: 4:39*

6 *Adagio misterioso: 6:23*

7 *Crazy Jazz: 4:48*

(TOTAL 23:45)

8 SOUND PHANTOMS #8 (1980)
(SINFONIA BREVIS II)

Quite Slow 2:24

9 *With decisive energy: 2:09*

10 *Slow and dreamy: 2:26*

11 *Rubato: 5:42*

12 *Steady and strong: 2:50*

(TOTAL 15:32) Total CD duration:65:04



MINDAUGAS PIECAITIS

MINDAUGAS PIECAITIS: Conductor

THE LITHUANIAN STATE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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Kupferman Photo: Howard Dratch • Cover Art "Zeppelin and Bridge#III" by Meyer Kupferman (Oil Painting 1975)
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