

Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano: Canaanite Fantasy No. 5 (2005)

Yinam Leef

"My *Trio for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano*, subtitled *Canaanite Fantasy No. 5*, was commissioned by the Verdehr Trio and Michigan State University and is dedicated to the Verdehr Trio. Completed in December, 2005, this *Trio* joins four previous pieces in a specific series of works titled or subtitled *Canaanite Fantasies*. The first two are for piano (written in 1981 and 1988), followed *Elegy* for harpsichord (1990) and *Cantilena* for guitar (1994). The *Trio* is therefore a part of an ongoing twenty-five-year-long preoccupation with certain musical characteristics that seem to continue to capture me with their freshness and immediacy.

The titles *Canaanite Fantasies* carry no biblical connotations whatsoever, but rather allude to ancient times and qualities, as envisioned in the composer's own mind, serving as a common thread that binds these different pieces together. Perhaps it is my choice of raw material—certain melodic cells, typical harmonic idioms, yet always direct and economical, even somewhat skeletal, as if resembling archeological findings of a culture long gone. Perhaps it is the relation to time—ancient, floating, yet sometimes intensely real, or maybe it is my desire to transform what I consider archaic into something which is still relevant, meaningful and continues to echo.

In writing the *Trio* I aimed to maintain these qualities. It is indeed a fantasy, one single, long-breathed movement of about seventeen minutes, alternating different moods and contrasting events—an introvert melody, a series of outbursts, several contemplative or agitated sections and so on, in an attempt to stretch time and its perception on different levels, as if opening a 'time capsule', observing its inner, ancient drama, then closing it, burying it again for the future to find."
—Yinam Leef

The world premiere of *Canaanite Fantasy No. 5* was on June 5, 2006 at the 18th New Music Festival of Krakow in Krakow, Poland.

Yinam Leef (born 1953, Jerusalem, Israel) grew up in a cultural melting pot, where East meets West, old and new coexist. His first published composition, *Gilgulim*, was a set of variations on a melody of the Jews of Iraq and pointed to an artistic direction that combines local and universal musical elements. In 1979, he and his wife Tanya went to study in the United States. Generous scholarships and grants enabled him to complete his doctorate in composition at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia) and participate as a Fellow in the summer sessions of the Composers Conference in Vermont, Yale University, and Tanglewood. Although he arrived in America with an already formulated style, the six years of residence there were important in the final design of his musical language.

Leef's creative work has received critical acclaim and won numerous awards. The *New York Times* hailed his "deft control of orchestral color." The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described his music as "attractive, colorful and richly expressive," while the *Luxemburg Wort* called his *Second Symphony* "a most beautiful and unconventional work." The *Jerusalem Post* simply labeled his *Threads of Time and Distance* "a masterpiece." His violin and viola concerti have both received the Acum Prizes and his haunting vocal work *A Place of Fire* received a Citation of Honor from the City of Haifa. In 1993 he received the Prime Minister Prize for Israeli Composers.

Leef has been commissioned by prestigious organizations such as the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Mannheim Society for New Music, and by numerous orchestras and ensembles. His works have been featured in many festivals worldwide, including the ISCM *World Music Days* in Oslo and Hong Kong, *Musical Spring* in St. Petersburg, Poland's *Wratistavia Cantans*, and the *Israel Festival*, Jerusalem. It has been performed at prestigious venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, Frankfurt's *Alte Oper*, and Zurich *Konzerthaus*. Leef's works have been released on CDs by EMI, Angel, MII, and JMC labels.

Leef has always found immense satisfaction in the artistic and human interaction between composer and performer. He also sees great importance in his pedagogical work, transcending those universal aesthetic values he received from his own teachers—Kopytrman, Wernick, Rochberg, Crumb, and Berio—and encouraging young talents in composition to find their own individual voice. Since 1985, Leef has taught at the Department of Composition of the Jerusalem Rubin Academy of Music and Dance. He was guest composer at the Berlin *Hochschule Der Kunste*, Munich *Hochschule fur Musik und Theatre*, and Maastricht *Konservatorium*. He was a guest professor at the University of Pennsylvania.