TESTIMONIUM V, JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV OCTOBER 1979

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Testimonium is a festival of contemporary music which takes place every two or three years, modelled on the two-day scheme of Donaueschingen. The programme consists entirely of commissioned works, and the guiding spirit of the festival is Recha Freier, a woman of determination and vision who is also a well-known writer of poetry and prose. She founded Testimonium in 1966, in collaboration with the composer Roman Haubenstock-Romati, with the purpose of creating a body of contemporary music which would testify to the history of the Jewish people and draw for its subject-matter from folklore, the Bible, legend and history. The first festival took place in 1968.

'The Jewry of Spain' was the theme of Testimonium V, which was held in Jerusalem on October 16 and 17 and repeated in Tel Aviv the following week. The Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra played under the Chilean conductor Juan Pablo Izquierdo. Some texts were suggested by Recha Freier, but the composers were left entirely free in their choices and treatment of the given theme.

Yitzhak Sadai, from Tel Aviv, devised an audio-visual event called *Trial 19*, dealing with the persecution, trial and death of Leonor Gonzales, who was burnt in Zocodover Square in Toledo on October 15, 1492. The equation of ear-splitting noise with physical pain was as crude as the technical means were primitive, and the audience was subjected to a surfeit of decibels and a display of (socialist?) realism that was ill-conceived and out of place.

Gilbert Amy took an entirely different attitude to the Spanish theme. *Sin anim sha'ananim* is the setting of a liturgical poem by Ibn Gabirol, from the 11th century, for alto voice, clarinet, cello and instrumental ensemble. A sound-tapestry of arabesques, ornaments and melisma, delicately designed and beautifully textured, creates a climate of Eastern worship and ecstasy and catches the spirit of the words in all their agitation and urgency.

Emmanuel Nunes, from Lisbon, chose as the subject of his symphonic movement, *Hesed* (Grace), the description of the death of R. Simeon bar Yohai contained in the 13th century *Book of Splendours*, but in spite of a certain fluidity the music remained static and amorphous, and the extraordinarily sumptuous language of the text was nowhere matched by the score, which created little impact and was soon forgotten.

Not so the new work of Stockhausen's, which will long be remembered, if only for the shadow it cast and the stir it created. The word 'shadow' may be badly chosen, for *Michaels Jugend* ('Michael's Youth'), the title of Stockhausen's contribution, belongs to *Licht*, his present work in progress, which will eventually take the form of an opera based upon the seven days of the week, outdoing the *Ring* by three days and many extravaganzas.

And so it came to be that Jerusalem had, for a short time, its own Festspielhaus, an idea that was not to everybody's liking. Initially a text from the *Apocrypha* had been agreed upon with Recha Freier, but Stockhausen decided instead to write his own libretto and to dedicate to Freier the first scene of the first act of the fifth day ('Childhood'). The *Apocrypha* were relegated to a pre-recorded tape part sung in Hebrew, one of the most memorable features of this strange, though entirely predictable work.

As the text of *Michael's Youth* was written and performed in German, the audience, mostly non-German-speaking, was spared the more unpalatable details. The three basic figures — Mother, all kindness and love; Father, all evil and violence; and Archangel Michael, their son come down to earth to bring mankind nearer to God — are each enacted by a singer, an instrumentalist and a dancer/mime and most of the symbolism involved is as alien to Jewish thought as the image of the Holy Trinity, evoked again and again. Rather than a testimony, *Michael's Youth* was a lesson in superb discipline, total professionalism and the highest technical skill. Nothing was left to chance and all the performers, including Marjella and Markus Stockhausen (piano and trumpet), were brought to Israel from Cologne, where the tape had been recorded beforehand.

Other composers had to rely on the Vocal Ensemble of Hamburg, but the unfortunate last-minute cancellation of their visit brought about the cancellation of two performances, those of Alexandre Tansman's *Apostrophe to Zion* and Cristóbal Halffter's *Jarchas de Dolor de Ausencia*. Only one of the three choral works was saved, thanks to the combined efforts of the Rinat National Choir and the Chamber Choir of the Rubin Academy of Music. This was Mauricio Kagel's *Vox Humana?* for solo loudspeaker, women's voices and orchestra. The music presents itself as a slow ceremonial that unfolds gradually, gathers momentum, reaches a climax and breaks off, then starts again and changes as it touches new regions and wanders through strange lands, Spanish, Arab and further east. The text comes from Isaac Levy's anthology, *Chants Judéo-espagnols*, in which Kagel found a poem in Ladino, an ancient idiom still used by descendants of Spanish Jews and with which he had become familiar during his childhood in Argentina. An invented language, incomprehensible to the listener, and a repertoire of separate Ladino words are used by the choir, their singing punctuated by such unusual effects as the hiss of small cymbals or the 'shush' of hands rubbed together.

The text, a mere four lines of the poem, is heard only in the last part of the cantata, when an anonymous and unemphatic voice is heard over the loudspeaker and paraphrased many times. 'Madres, non sospirex, non sospirex màs,' says the voice, but how could bereaved mothers ever stop their sighing? A passionate 'No!' from the choir ends this very moving, very beautiful work. The echo of many strands, of many secret links between texts that are sung or spoken and invented or torn apart, and of a music so simple, so straightforward and yet so complex, fills the mind with awe and wonder. *Vox Humana?* must be repeated soon. For Recha Freier it was the fulfilment of a dream; for her audience it was a unique and unforgettable experience.