

# Gil Shaham • Orli Shaham

Orli and Gil Shaham's grandparents used to sing Joseph Achron's *Hebrew Melody* in their home in Jerusalem. "I felt so proud when, as a kid, I learned to play it on the violin," remembers Gil.

At the end of the 19th century, composers like Achron gathered folk material from their Jewish heritage and incorporated it into their music. Gil can't help thinking of his grandparents, especially after visiting their ancestral hometown in Poland. "Despite overwhelming poverty the Jewish shtetls were rich with music and arts. I imagine music must have been a welcome escape from the harsh reality of their lives. For me it's hard to hear this music without seeing the ghetto in my mind." Orli adds that "the linear connection from this world to the setting of Schindler's List, in 1940s' Poland, gives the music from John Williams' score a real personal relevance for us to include here."

The idea for the *Hebrew Melodies* project all started with our producer Eric Wen. He had published a collection of these compositions a few years back. "Eric taught us more about Jewish music than we ever knew," says Gil. "He is the most knowledgeable person I know regarding Jewish music, and he's not even Jewish!," agrees Orli. "He is so passionate and has a genuine love of Yiddishkeit in general and the music in particular."

In putting together this recording, the siblings felt it would be essential to find a way to emphasize the relevance of this tradition today. Thus the program includes a brand new work from Avner Dorman alongside classics by Ernest Bloch and Joseph Achron. "Avner reminds us of our father – he is brilliant and effervescent, part musician, part physicist..." says Gil. "When you commission a piece, you never know what's going to come out", says Orli. "We had great confidence in Avner, and we let him know we were looking for some sort of Jewish theme but left the rest totally up to him. When we first heard it, we were blown away immediately by the quality and the compositional virtuosity of the piece," says Orli, "To me it evokes the Middle East in its full glory, with its intermixing of cultures and sounds - you can almost smell the shwarma!" "We couldn't be happier," adds Gil, "he has created a masterpiece."

*Nigunim*, Hebrew for instrumental music-making, has been a soul-stirring custom at the heart of Jewish life for thousands of years. Here the Shaham siblings' selection offers listeners a small sampling of this beautiful tradition.

#### **NIGUNIM** Hebrew Melodies

By Eric Wen

The revival and interest in Jewish music at the beginning of the 20th century was in part driven by the enormous movement of Jews, mainly as a result of demographic and political consequences, from Eastern to Western Europe and to the US during the 19th century. In 1901 two Jewish musicians Saul Ginsburg and Pesach Marek published *Jewish Folksongs in Russia*, a collection of 376 Yiddish song texts presented in both Hebrew and Latin, the first such anthology of its kind.

Jewish Folksongs in Russia gave rise to inspiring Rimsky-Korsakov's composition students in St. Petersburg to instigate a formal society with the express purpose of identifying with their musical roots and heritage and promoting Jewish music. Encouraged by their teacher who declared, 'Jewish music awaits her Jewish Glinka', this group established the Society for Jewish Folk Music in 1908. The following year the Society gave its first concert, and issued its first publication, an arrangement of a Yiddish folksong for four-part chorus. By 1913 there were nearly 500 members of the Society with branches in a number of cities including Kiev, Riga, Odessa and Moscow. The Society's concerts were unusually popular and often featured performances by such celebrities as the violinists Jascha

Heifetz and Efrem Zimbalist, and even non-Jews like the Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin.

One of the most important figures in the Society for Jewish Folk Music was Joseph Achron (1886-1943). Beginning his musical career as a child prodigy violinist, he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1898 where he studied violin with Leopold Auer, and composition with Liadov. He became active in the Society for Jewish Folk Music, and, in the years immediately following the First World War, also composed for the Hebrew Chamber Theater. Achron spent several years in Berlin and Palestine, before emigrating in 1925 to the US, where he became an American citizen in 1930. He eventually settled in Hollywood, where he earned his living primarily as film studio violinist. Achron wrote three violin concertos, two violin sonatas, a piano concerto, songs, choral works, and chamber music as well as an orchestral suite *Golem*, but he is best remembered for his concert arrangements of traditional Hebrew melodies. *The Hebrew Lullaby, Hebrew Dance*, and *Hebrew Melody* are based on Jewish folk tunes that were transcribed by the Society for Jewish Folk Music and published in 1911.

Born in Pinsk, Leo Zeitlin (1884-1930) started out as a violin prodigy, enrolling at the age of nine in the Odessa Conservatory. After graduating in 1901, Zeitlin studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He joined the Society for Jewish Folk Music, and played viola in both the Sheremetyer Orchestra and a string quartet. In 1923 Zeitlin left Europe and immigrated to New York where he became a violist and arranger in the Capitol Theater Orchestra. Zeitlin's eloquent Eli Zion was originally written for cello and piano, and published under the full title of Fantasie über eine Volksmelodie und Trop von Schir ha-schirim (Fantasy on a folk tune and the cantillation for Song of Songs). This expressive work brings together a tune published by the Society for Jewish Folk Music and the Passover chant Song of Songs.

*Eli Zion* was first published in 1914; later that same year the violinist Joseph Achron transcribed the work for violin and piano.

Undoubtedly the most important composer to be inspired by 'Jewish' idioms was the Swiss-born Ernest Bloch (1880-1959). After beginning his musical career as a violinist, working with Eugene Ysaÿe in Brussels from 1897-99, Bloch went to Germany in 1900, where he studied composition and theory with Ludwig Thuille in Munich. He also spent a year in Paris where he met Debussy, before returning to Geneva in 1904. In 1917 Bloch accepted a teaching post at the Mannes School of Music in New York. He became an American citizen in 1924, and later served as director of the Cleveland Institute of Music and the San Francisco Conservatory. He returned to Switzerland in 1930, but came back to the US in 1939 to teach at the University of California at Berkeley, where he remained until his retirement in 1952.

Along with *Schelomo* (a 'Hebrew Rhapsody' for cello and orchestra), the *Baal Shem* suite is one of Bloch's most celebrated compositions. Subtitled 'Three Pictures of Chassidic Life,' this picturesque suite for violin and piano was composed in 1923. The second piece in the suite, entitled *Nigun* (Melody) is a powerful rhapsodic improvisation that is often performed on its own. The suite ends with *Simchas Torah* (Rejoicing of the Law), a musical depiction of the last day of festivities at the end of sukkot, a one-week autumn festival.

The Vilna-born Josef Bonime (1891-1959) was active as a composer, especially for the radio. In the 1930s he provided the music for a number of radio programs, including *Death Valley Days* (which became a 1960s' TV series featuring Ronald Reagan in the lead role) and the Marx Brothers' series *Flywheel, Shyster and Flywheel*. Earlier in his career, Bonime was the regular piano accompanist for the beloved Russian violinist Mischa Elman, one of the master violinists of the 20th century. Bonime's exotic *Danse hébraïque* was written especially for the violinist who often featured it in his concerts.

The New York-born John Williams, who at the time of this writing has already won five Academy Awards, is undoubtedly the most important film composer of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He wrote the score for the 1993 Steven Spielberg film *Schindler's List*, based on the heroic efforts of Oskar Schindler, a German factory owner who single-handedly saved the lives of over one thousand Polish Jews. Williams' score not only won the Academy Award, but that same year's BAFTA as well. The suite is in three movements. The opening theme is primarily a statement of the film's haunting, heart-wrenching main theme with mildly Jewish tonal influences. The second movement, Jewish Town (Kraków Ghetto, Winter '41) is, by contrast, deeply Jewish in character. After a rhapsodic violin introduction, the piano echos a Jewish dance, but cleverly in a much slower tempo, so much so, it is reminiscent of a funeral march. The final and poignant movement *Remembrances*, embraces a mood of fulfillment as the Williams' music focuses on Schindler's survivors.

Finally, the most recent work on this recording is by the Israeli-born composer Avner Dorman. Born in Tel Aviv in 1975, Dorman studied with the Georgian composer Josef Bardanashvili at Tel Aviv University, and later received his doctorate at The Juilliard School in New York where he worked with John Corigliano. In 2000 he was given the prestigious Prime Minister's Award in Israel, the youngest composer ever to be given this prize. Dorman's works have been performed by the world's major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Munich Philharmonic, and the **Avner Dorman**, commissioned by Orli and Gil Shaham and 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y for *Nigunim*. Gewandhaus Orchestra. *Nigunim* (Violin Sonata No.3) was jointly commissioned by Gil and Orli Shaham, along with New York's iconic cultural institution 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y. The majority of works on this recording have been composed by violinists with the violin being the focus. Avner Dorman, an accomplished pianist himself, reveals in *Nigunim* a work where the virtuosic demands of the piano are brought into full focus with the violin. The idea and inspiration behind *Nigunim* is best explained by the composer himself:

The Nigun is a fundamental musical concept of traditional Jewish music. According to Habbad literature, the Nigun serves as a universal language; it ascends beyond words and conveys a deeper spiritual message than words can; a Nigun sung in Yiddish will reach and affect someone who only speaks Arabic and vice versa. The Nigun may be short but since it begins and ends on the same pitch it may be repeated over and over. In this sense, the Nigun has no beginning and no end and is eternal. Nigunim (the plural of Nigun) may be secular or religious, fast or slow, and may be sung and played in a variety of social events and circumstances. When I was approached to write a new piece for Orli and Gil Shaham's Jewish Melodies program, my first thought was to write a piece that would explore the music of the ten lost tribes (the Hebrew tribes that were exiled after the first temple was destroyed). Since we know very little about the whereabouts of these tribes, I decided to explore the music of various Jewish traditions from different parts of the world and how they relate to larger local musical traditions.

To my surprise, after researching Jewish music from different parts of the world, I found that there are some common musical elements to North African Jewish cantillations, Central Asian Jewish wedding songs, Klezmer music, and Ashkenazi prayers. Though I did not use any existing Jewish melodies for Nigunim, the main modes and melodic gestures of the piece are drawn from these common elements. Moreover, different sections of the piece draw upon local non-Jewish musical traditions of each of these regions: for example, the second movement uses principles found in Georgian folk rhythms and harmonies, and the fourth is inspired by Macedonian dances.

# Gil Shaham violin

Gil Shaham is one of the foremost violinists of our time, whose combination of flawless technique with inimitable warmth and a generosity of spirit has solidified his legacy as an American master. He is sought after for concerto appearances as well as for recital and ensemble performances in the world's most hallowed concert halls and most prestigious festivals.

In addition to his many orchestral engagements, Gil Shaham is an avid recitalist and chamber musician, exploring new work including the world premiere of works written for him. He regularly collaborates with musical colleagues: pianists Yefim Bronfman, Akira Eguchi and sister Orli Shaham; cellists Truls Mørk and Lynn Harrell and his wife, violinist Adele Anthony. Gil Shaham's own chamber music series 'Gil Shaham and Friends' had its inaugural season at Carnegie Hall in 2007 and has subsequently been repeated.

Shaham's broad discography encompasses over 30 recordings including many award-winning discs, recieving multiple Grammys, a Grand Prix du Disque, a Diapason d'Or and a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice. Shaham's recent recordings have been produced for his own label, Canary Classics: Haydn Violin Concertos and Mendelssohn's Octet with Sejong Soloists; Sarasate: Virtuoso Violin Works with Adele Anthony, Akira Eguchi and Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León and Elgar's Violin Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and David Zinman.

Gil Shaham was born in Illinois in 1971. In 1982 he became a scholarship student at Juilliard, where he worked with Dorothy DeLay and Hyo Kang. He has also studied at Columbia University.

Shaham was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990, and in 2008 he received the coveted Avery Fisher Award, presented live on national television in the US by conductor Gustavo Dudamel. Shaham plays the 1699 'Countess Polignac' Stradivarius. He lives in New York City with his wife and their three children.

For more visit: www.canaryclassics.com

# **Orli Shaham** piano

A consummate musician recognized for her grace and vitality, Orli Shaham has established an impressive international reputation as one of today's most gifted pianists. Hailed by critics on four continents, Ms. Shaham is in demand for her prodigious skills and admired for her interpretations of both standard and modern repertoire. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has praised her "wit, passion, delicacy and humor", and London's *Guardian* has called Ms. Shaham's playing "perfection."

Orli Shaham's performance schedule brings her to major venues and recording studios around the world. Ms. Shaham is increasingly focusing her attention on recording a wide variety of repertoire. In addition to this recording of *Hebrew Melodies* with her brother, the violinist Gil Shaham, she has recently released Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* with the pianist Jon Kimura Parker and the San Diego Symphony, and a CD of chamber music including the Brahms Horn Trio featuring Richard King. Orli and Gil Shaham have collaborated on several other recordings including *Dvořák for Two, The Prokofiev Album* and *Mozart in Paris*.

Driven by a passion to bring classical music to new audiences, Orli Shaham maintains an active parallel career as a respected broadcaster, music writer and lecturer. Inspired by her enthusiasm for introducing young children to the pleasures of music, she created 'Baby Got Bach', a series of interactive classical concerts for young children, which has developed a devoted following in New York, St. Louis and other locations. She has taught music literature at Columbia University, and contributed articles to *Piano Today, Symphony*, and *Playbill* magazines. Ms. Shaham has also served as artist in residence on National Public Radio's 'Performance Today'.

In addition to her musical education, Orli Shaham holds a degree in history from Columbia University. Ms. Shaham lives in New York and St. Louis with her husband, the conductor David Robertson, stepsons Peter and Jonathan, and twins Nathan and Alex. nig·un /nlg'oon/ [Hebrew: meaning tune or melody, pl. nig·un·im /nlg'oo'nim/] or ניגון Nigunim are improvisations, secular or religious, fast or slow for instrumental music-making.

### Josef Bonime (1891-1959)

1. Danse hébraique	2:52
Joseph Achron (1886-1943) 2. Hebrew Melody Op.33	5:33
Avner Dorman (b.1975)	
Nigunim (Violin Sonata No.3)	19:47
3. i Adagio religioso	5:28
4. ii Scherzo	3:39
5. iii Adagio	6:42
6. iv Presto	3:58
Joseph Achron (1886-1943)	

	wo neorew rieces Op.35	0:1
7.	Hebrew Lullaby	2:3
8.	Hebrew Dance	5:4

#### Gil Shaham violin Orli Shaham piano

#### John Williams (b.1932)

Three Pieces from	
Schindler's List	12:29
9. Theme from "Schindler's List" <i>Slowly</i>	3:28
10. Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto, Winter '41) Andante	4:13
11. Remembrances <i>Moderato</i>	4:48
Leo Zeitlin (1884-1930) trans. Joseph Achron	
12. Eli Zion	5:08
Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) Baal Shem	
Three Pictures of Chassidic Life	13:00
13. Vidui (Contrition) Un poco lento	3:05
14. Nigun (Improvisation) Adagio non troppo	6:04

15. Simchas Torah (Rejoicing) Allegro giocoso 3:51

Total Playing Time: 57:07 Publishers: track 1 Carl Fischer, Inc., tracks 3-6 © 2011 G. Schirmer, Inc., tracks 9.11 © 1993 UMPG, tracks 13.15 Carl Fischer, Inc. Recorded: 92nd Street Y, New York City, NY, USA on April 13 and 25, 2011 Recording Producer and Editing: Eric Wen Recording Engineer: Jody Elff Mixing and Mastering: Dennis Patterson Photography: Marcia Ciriello Design and Artwork: Emily Davis, Knifedge