

Music from the Holocaust

VIKTOR ULLMANN ★ PAVEL HAAS
GIDEON KLEIN ★ KAREL BERMAN



Paul Orgel, piano

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KAREL BERMAN (1919-1995)

1938-1945. REMINISCENCES.

SUITE FOR PIANO

1. MLÁDÍ (YOUTH) 3:39
2. RODINA-DOMOV (FAMILY/HOME) 2:48
3. 15.3.1939 OKUPACE (MARCH 15, 1939-OCCUPATION) 4:17
4. TOVÁRNA-NEVECKO (FACTORY-GERMANY) 1:35
5. OSTVETIM-TOVÁRNA NA MRTVOLY (AUSCHWITZ-CORPSE FACTORY) 2:21
6. TYFUS V KZ KAUFFERING (TYPHUS IN THE KAUFFERING CONCENTRATION CAMP) 1:19
7. SAM-SÁMI (ALONE-ALONE) 2:30
8. NOVÝ ŽIVOT (NEW LIFE) 3:55

PAVEL HAAS (1899-1944)

SUITE FOR PIANO, Op. 13 (1935)

9. PRAELUDIUM 2:36
10. CON MOLTA ESPRESSIONE 2:26
11. DANZA 2:38
12. PASTORALE 3:03
13. POSTLUDIUM 3:15

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GIDEON KLEIN (1919-1945)

SONATA FOR PIANO (1943)

14. ALLEGRO CON FUOCO 5:01
15. ADAGIO 2:45
16. ALLEGRO VIVACE 2:44

VIKTOR ULLMANN (1898-1944)

PIANO SONATA No.7 (1944)

17. ALLEGRO GEMÄCHLICHE 4:07
18. ALLA MARCIA, BEN MISURATO 2:32
19. ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO 4:43
20. SCHERZO ALLEGRETTO GRAZIOSO 4:03
21. VARIATIONS AND FUGUE ON A HEBREW FOLK TUNE 6:40

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File under Classical/Ullmann



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The four composers represented on this recording reflect the rich diversity of Czech musical life during the 1930s and early 1940s. In their music one hears expressionist gestures, tonal lyricism, folk melody and rhythmic vitality, all interwoven in a manner that eschews superficiality or sentimentality. While each composer speaks with a unique voice, they share common national origins and love of country and will always be linked by the shared tragic fate that brought them to one of the Nazi realms of the damned, the Terezin concentration camp.

Of the four composers, only one, Karel Berman, would survive the war. Of the remaining three, Pavel Haas and Viktor Ullmann, would be murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz while Gideon Klein would disappear after several months of forced labor in Fürstengrube, a subcamp of Auschwitz. One is appalled at the loss, at this crushing and barbaric waste of talent, and yet somehow invigorated by the strength of will exemplified in the creative work of these artists in their final years and months. Paul Orgel's piano recital is part of a revival of interest in the music of these and other composers who were Holocaust victims. In discovering the music of this "lost generation" over a half century after it was written, its high quality demands that it be considered on its own merits, not just as an artifact of the circumstances in which it was created. Its preservation and performance counteracts the intent of the Nazis to eliminate it from human consciousness.

TEREZIN

Between November 1941, when an eighteenth century military garrison on the Czech-German border (known as Terezin in Czech, Theresienstadt in German) was turned into a concentration camp, and its ultimate liberation by the Soviet army in May 1945, close to 140 thousand men, women and children had passed through its gates. At the time of liberation barely 17 thousand were still alive, the remainder having perished as a result of starvation, disease, execution and deportation to the Polish extermination camps.

Yet Terezin was known as a "paradise ghetto" where the Nazis not only permitted but actively encouraged artistic endeavor. Under inhumane conditions and in an environment of sadism, the camp's prisoners, among them a high number of artists and intellectuals, established a busy music scene with performances ranging from solo recitals to full-scale productions of operas by Mozart and Smetana, and the Verdi *Requiem*. Perhaps most miraculous was the number of premieres of ambitious new compositions by Terezin's composers.

Concert life in the camp functioned under the jurisdiction of the *Fritzzeitgestaltung* or Committee for Leisure Time Activities. Originally operating surreptitiously in order to provide their fellow inmates with diversion, retreat and moral uplift, the *Fritzzeitgestaltung* became the officially sanctioned governing body for all cultural activities in the camp including Czech Theater, German Theater, Jewish Theater, cabaret, vocal performance, instrumental performance, chess, soccer and more. Professionals and amateurs were involved in the performances, some having it as their official work assignment while others volunteered their services. For those officially assigned to work for the *Fritzzeitgestaltung*, the four composers on this CD included, there was a degree of protection from participation in the labor battalions. For some, it also meant temporary protection from inclusion in the transports to Auschwitz.

Of all the statements made by participants about the importance of the cultural outpouring at Terezin, the most quotational and oft quoted comes from Viktor Ullmann who served as Terezin's music critic and wrote in his essay, *Goethe and Ghetto*, "it must be emphasized that Theresienstadt has served to *enhance*, not impede, my musical activities, that by no means did we sit weeping on the banks of the waters of Babylon, and that our endeavor with respect to Art was commensurate with our will to live."

Karel Berman 1919-1995

Karel Berman was born on April 14, 1919 in the small South Bohemian town of Jindřichov Hradec, and before his twenty-fourth birthday had gained considerable experience as singer, conductor and composer. He arrived in Terezin in March, 1943. Musical life was at this stage well established and Berman quickly became an important participant, primarily as performer. Several important works including Pavel Haas's *Four Songs to Texts of Chinese Poetry* and the role of Death in Viktor Ullmann's opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*, were composed for him.

On September 28, 1944, Berman was placed on a transport to Auschwitz. Being young and in good health, he survived the initial selection process and was sent to a forced labor camp in Kaufering where he contracted typhus and came perilously close to death. After liberation, Berman returned to Prague, completed his studies at the Conservatory of Music and went on to a long career as a principal bass at Prague's National Theater. A noted pedagogue, he was professor of singing at the Prague Academy of Music. One of his students recalled that he had "an overwhelming mix of melancholy and inner strength about him."

Berman turned to composition only twice which makes the high level of craft in the two works that he produced, both from Terezin in 1944, all the more notable. One was a cycle of four songs, *Paupata (Rosebuds)* and the other was a suite for piano entitled *Terezin*, the first version of what later became *1938-1945 Reminiscences, Suite for Piano*. *Terezin* was completed "for my own birthday, April 14, 1944" and consisted of only three movements. In the final version these became movements 3: *Occupation* (originally entitled *Terezin*), 5: *Auschwitz - Copse Factory* (originally: *Terror*) and 7: *Alone*.

In 1957, at the suggestion of the scholar Joza Karas, Berman composed what became the suite's first two movements, *Youth and Family-Home*, nostalgic music that evokes the vanished world of his youth, *Factory - Germany, Typhus In the Kaufering Concentration Camp* whose careening gestures describe Berman's efforts, at a weight of 85 pounds, at relearning to walk, and *New Life*, a touching summation with hints of hope for the future. In its final version, the movements that describe his Holocaust experience are at its core and the suite is Berman's autobiography in music.

Pavel Haas 1899-1944

Pavel Haas was born into a middle-class family in Brno on June 21, 1899. By the time he was fifteen, he had composed an orchestral overture along with several songs and works for solo piano. He enrolled in the Brno Conservatory and in 1921-22 studied in the composition class of Leos Janáček. Haas was possibly the most talented

of Janáček's disciples and was able to absorb the older master's mode of compositional construction while developing his own means of musical expression.

With the Nazi conquest, Haas formally applied for a divorce from his non-Jewish spouse to protect her and his young daughter. At that point the family was also looking after the son of Haas's brother Hugo, who had fled the country. Hugo, an actor, would ultimately have a career in the Hollywood film industry.

Haas was deported to Terezin on December 2, 1941, one of the first musicians of stature to arrive there. The separation from his family along with the terrible conditions of camp life brought him to a state of severe depression. It was only through the efforts of Gideon Klein that he eventually began to compose again. According to Eliška Kleinová, Gideon's sister:

"When Pavel Haas was deported to Terezin, he would not have a thing to do with music in the ghetto. He was miserable. His health was bad. Haas had eye problems. He missed his wife and daughter terribly. During the Nazi occupation he and his wife divorced. His wife was not Jewish. The divorce saved the wife and child from the transports. All this was too much for Haas. Gideon had a deep respect for Haas's creativity. He gathered scraps of paper. You know paper was very scarce in Terezin, and drew the music slaves like music manuscript paper. In giving the paper to Haas, Gideon urged, almost commanded, him to compose again. He spoke of artistic responsibility to oneself, one's muse, and to all of us in the ghetto."

Only a handful of compositions came out of this period, among them the masterful *Four Songs to Texts of Chinese Poetry* with its theme of longing for a homeland, common in the texts set by the composers of Terezin. Haas himself can be seen in the 1944 propaganda film *The Führer builds the Jews a City* where after a partial performance of his *Study for String Orchestra*, the camera focuses on the composer.

In October, 1944, shortly after the film was made, Haas was transported to Auschwitz and sent directly to the gas chambers upon arrival.

The *Suite for Piano, Opus 13* is the only work on this CD that predates the Holocaust. The work was composed in 1935 and was given its first performance by Haas's friend, the pianist Bernard Kalf who, like Haas, would also perish in Auschwitz. The premiere took place in Vienna on February 10, 1936 at a musical evening of the Club of Moravian Composers where it was enthusiastically received.

The suite's five movements, replete with polymeric rhythms, dance stylization, and folk-like lyricism, seem to reflect Haas's happy state of mind during its composition. One senses the influence of Janáček in the *Praeludium's* exuberantly repeating motive fragments and of jazz in the jaunty *Danza* and final *Postludium*.

Gideon Klein 1919-1945

Gideon Klein was born in Přerov, Moravia on December 6, 1919. A brilliant pianist, intellect, and immensely promising composer, his first compositions date from 1934, when he was only fifteen.

Klein studied piano at the Prague Conservatory with Vilem Kurz and composition under Alois Hába at the Charles University. These studies came to an abrupt end in November of 1939 when, after the German invasion, Czech universities were shut down. The immediate application of Nazi racial laws, among other deprivations, prohibited Jewish artists from performing publicly. As a result, Klein's only recourse was to participate in clandestine performances using a non-Jewish pseudonym, Karel Vranek. An opportunity to leave for England, where friends had arranged for a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, came to naught due to a denial of permission to leave the country.

On December 4, 1941, he was deported to Terezin where he would remain for close to three years, intensely involved in the cultural life of the camp as teacher, performer and composer.

In October 1944 Klein was included in one of the last transports to Auschwitz. Upon arrival he passed the selections, thereby escaping the gas chambers. He was then sent to Fürstengrube where he worked in the coal mines. The eastern front approached in January 1945, after which the camp was evacuated and at this time all traces of Klein end. It remains unknown whether he was sent on a "death march", succumbed to illness or starvation, or whether he fell victim to the SS commandos whose task was to liquidate those too ill to walk.

On the basis of his surviving compositions, it is clear that, had Klein survived, he would have been one of the leading post-war Czech composers. (His pre-Terezin compositions, presumed lost for many years, were discovered in 1990). Klein was eulogized by a fellow student of Vilem Kurz thus: "His outstanding intelligence, his great interest in many different branches of art, for literature, and especially for music, so impressed all who knew him that it seemed as if some strange magic emanated from his personality. All of us, without reserve, admitted the superiority of Gideon Klein, maybe just because he did not try to be better than we were: he was."

Composed in 1943, the *Sonata for Piano* is a work of passion and turbulence. Its style reflects the influence of Schoenberg's music during his expressionist period. On a psychological level, the music enables the listener to imagine the angst that permeated Klein's experience, particularly in the powerful rising motive with which the first movement opens and that recurs several times. It struggles to ascend, like someone attempting to break free of his bonds, but like Sisyphus, fails and falls back. The second movement, whose compression belies its large emotional range, has an aura of eerie discomfort about it and the third is marked by vehement energy. A fourth movement was apparently planned but never composed.

Viktor Ullmann 1898-1944

Viktor Ullmann was born on January 1, 1898 in the town of Teschen, at that time a part of Silesia. Two years earlier, his parents had been married in a synagogue in the inner city of Vienna, but shortly after the marriage, in order to facilitate the military career of his father Maximilian, the family converted to Roman Catholicism. After his conversion, Maximilian was posted to Teschen and in a series of promotions, eventually reached the rank of Colonel

and, for services rendered to Austria during WWI, raised to the nobility. Viktor himself inherited the title Baron Tannfels, though he rarely made use of it.

In 1914, his parents separated and Viktor returned with his mother to Vienna where he became part of the circle of students and followers of Arnold Schoenberg. Ullmann only spent one year as a student in Schoenberg's composition classes but his work must have impressed the older master who provided a recommendation to Alexander von Zemlinsky, at that time director to the New German Theater in Prague. From 1920 to 1927 Ullmann worked under Zemlinsky in preparing and conducting performances.

Around 1929, Ullmann became involved with Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical movement, residing in Zurich and Stuttgart, and abandoning music for several years as a result. In 1933 he returned to Prague where, as a freelance musician, he worked for the department of music of Czechoslovak Radio, wrote book and music reviews for various journals, gave private lessons, was involved with the Czechoslovak Society for Music Education and ultimately, continued his musical studies in the composition class of Alois Hába at the Prague Conservatory of Music.

On September 8, 1942 Ullmann was deported to Terezin which he referred to as "an education in form" and where, during the next two years, he composed over two dozen works, both large and small scale. Among these are the *Siring Quartet No. 3*, the opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*, lieder, choral settings, and the Piano Sonatas numbers 5 - 7. Ullmann's surviving literary writings present one of the most detailed sources of information about musical activity in Terezin.

On October 16, 1944, Ullmann was on one of the last transports to Auschwitz. Upon arrival, he was sent directly to the gas chambers.

The *Piano Sonata no. 7*, completed on August 22, 1944, is dedicated to his children. Completed less than two months before his death, Ullmann appended the following copyright notice to the manuscript: "Performance rights are reserved by the composer for the duration of his life." An orchestral version of the sonata based on notes concerning instrumentation left by Ullmann was prepared by Bernhard Wulff and first performed in 1989 as Ullmann's *Symphony No. 2*.

In this remarkable work, memory and musical quotation play a major role. The first movement, with its nostalgic, Viennese atmosphere, pays homage to the style of Gustav Mahler. The second movement, a sardonic march, also quite Mahlerian, includes a quotation of a motive from Ullmann's 1935 opera, *The Fall of the Anti-Christ* based upon an anthroposophical drama of Albert Steffen. The motive is associated with the person of the Regent, an all-powerful dictator, whose power is undone through the efforts of a poet. In the progression of the first two movements, we seem to have embarked on a musical journey not unlike that of Berman's *Suite* in which an ominous military intrusion displaces memories of a happier time. Unlike Berman's *Suite* with its specific programmatic depictions, the references in Ullmann's sonata are more varied and more allusive, but they do lead to the notion that the work is meant to be an autobiographical summing up.

As such, the third movement, a despairing lament, would seem to be the low point, Ullmann's acknowledgement of his imprisonment at Terezin. (The similar shape of its opening motive to that of the *Lichstad* from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* is surely intentional). Here, the harmonic language is at its most searchingly atonal, far removed from the first movement's D major and suggesting the strong influence of Schoenberg.

One might compare existence within Terezin to the progression of a serious illness where, at its onset one still retains the memory of health, but as it progresses, the memory fades until one is only aware of being ill. Under normal circumstances, the memory of health returns at the end of the illness signaling a healing process. But it was not intended that inmates of concentration camps experience the return to health, their imprisonment was designed to eliminate memory and to suppress all hope. In the *Sonata No. 7*, Viktor Ullmann's summoning of memory in creating music turns the composition into an instrument of resistance and in the final movement, a statement of revolt.

With the *Scherzo* movement (a parody of a Viennese waltz), memory and even humor seem to return. In its *Trio* section, Ullmann quotes a melody from Richard Heuberger's operetta, *The Opera Ball*, a work that Ullmann would have known from his work with Zemlinsky at the New German Theater during the 1920s.

The final movement is a theme and variations based on *Rachel*, a Zionist song composed in the early 1930s by Yehuda Sharett. In its text, the biblical matriarch Rachel is imagined, wandering in the desert. The theme once again concerns the search for a home. The slow, mournful melody, fragments of which have already appeared in different guises in other movements, is elaborated upon with increasing energy in a series of variations. Finally, it is transformed from minor into a powerful fugue in D major marked "*Allergo giocoso energico*".

The fugue is the culmination, both musically and philosophically, of the sonata. Here the *Rachel* theme, (which in its transformation to major resembles the Slovakian national anthem) is combined with part of a Czech Hussite hymn, a phrase from the Lutheran chorale, *Nun danket alle Got* and a motive using the notes B A C H. While on one level the use of *Rachel* signals Ullmann's identification with the religion of his parents, it also offers a powerful indictment of the entire Nazi ethos. The fugue illuminates the relationships that bind seemingly diverse national and religious elements, demonstrating that this synthesis, far from weakening the musical structure, strengthens it and provides greater textural richness. Ullmann is providing a universal truisim in sound, namely that the human experience thrives on diversity, not on the sterile and pallid field of racial purity so desired by Nazi ideologues.

Notes by Phillip Silver and Paul Orgel--April, 2005

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Piano: Steinway D-561097

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Photo: Willy Lamb-Orgel

Born in New York City, Paul Orgel has concertized throughout the United States and Eastern Europe as a recitalist, soloist with orchestra, and chamber musician. He has given notable concerts in such venues as New York's Merkin Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., Jordan Hall, and the Gardner Museum in Boston, the Ordway Theater in St. Paul, and the San Francisco Conservatory. Critics have praised his playing for its "subtlety and attention to nuance" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), "rare pathos" (*New York Times*), and "brilliant technique, sense of humor and fantasy" (*Bridgeport Post*).

A versatile musician with equal commitments to standard and contemporary repertoire, Orgel has been associated with many composers including Messaten, Cage, Rochberg, and T. L. Read. He can be heard on recent recordings of music by Louis Moyse on the CRI label (a 2002 Grammy nominee) and on the Capstone label (Keyboard Fantasies by Curt Cacioppo). He has specialized in Czech music, performing programs of the complete piano music of Janáček and music from Terezin; and, as a scholar of classical performance practice, Orgel has given recitals of Haydn and Beethoven on the Viennese fortepiano.

As a chamber musician, Paul Orgel has been associated with the Yellow Barn Festival, was a founding member of the Interlochen Trio, an original member of Music at Eden's Edge (an ensemble based in Boston's North Shore), and has collaborated with such artists as Jaime Laredo, the Chicago String Quartet, and the Quartetto di Venezia. He is a core member of the Vermont Contemporary Music Ensemble.

Orgel was educated at Oberlin, the New England Conservatory, and Boston University. He holds a doctorate in piano performance from Temple University. Among his piano teachers were Russell Sherman, Lillian and Irvin Freundlich, and Harvey Wedeen. He is currently a member of the music faculty at the University of Vermont and is Artist-in-Residence in the Humanities at Saint Michael's College. For further information goto www.paulorgel.com