

*Mark Kopytman - Voices of Memories: Essays and Dialogues*, ed. Yulia Kreinin, Israel Music Institute, Tel Aviv, 2004, 288 p.

A Doctor of Medicine who is also a composer is a rarity. A composer who is also a Doctor of Medicine is even rarer. Dr. Med. Mark Kopytman, however, is above all a composer, and one of Israel's foremost contemporary composers at that. "Mark Kopytman - Voices of Memories" is a Festschrift - a volume of collected essays edited by Yulia Kreinin, to celebrate his 70th birthday. It is a formidable literary monument to honour this outstanding personality.

The book consists of four sections, containing contributions by musicians and musicologists from Israel, Europe and the U.S. The first one deals with some of his most noteworthy compositions. Its eight articles are intended to assist the reader's understanding of the composer's musical language and style by mostly analytical discussions of his works. Special emphasis is placed on heterophony, a major sphere of Kopytman's creative experiments. This technique of creating a multi-voiced texture by superimposing several variants of one melodic line upon each other, making them proceed together in unison, splitting and merging simultaneously, attracted Kopytman's attention upon his arrival in Israel from Russia in 1972. A possible reason for this is that multi-voiced textures are characteristic of Middle-Eastern music traditions, including those of Jewish communities, but occurring also in early Western choral music in its intermediate stage between monody and polyphony. His quest for a stylistic synthesis of Western modern techniques with the fascinating local indigenous music cultures was likewise inspired by their structural principles, maqam tonalities, microtonality, embellishments, rhythms and improvisation. Unlike many of his musical predecessors, Kopytman did not indulge in superficial Orientalisms and simplistic folk melody quotations of the so-called Mediterranean music style current in the pre-state and the country's early statehood time. He adopted a folkloristic approach closer to Bartok's one and elaborated on it. This concept of heterophony, one of Kopytman's main stylistic characteristics, receives much justifiable attention in the book. Unfortunately, however, references to this stylistic feature appear scattered throughout its chapters. Grouping all of these valuable discussions together into proximity with each other would have provided a clearer orientation for the reader.

This first section, written by musicians and musicologists, contains minute and painstaking analyses of selected works, such as "Cantus II, V, VI", "Memory", "October Sun", "Letters of Creation" and several more. This is the most academic and professional part of the book, revealing significant characteristics of Kopytman's works by serious argumentation and with ample music examples.

The book's second section contains interviews, mostly by musicologists, with the composer on the role of folklore in the composer's style. These dialogues present Kopytman's versatile creative activities as composer as well as educator and music theorist. They explore his thoughts on many relevant subjects in a serious, thorough manner. These contributions are immensely valuable because they express Kopytman's ideas in his own thoughtfully formulated words. What remains unclear, however, is why

these articles should have been cast in the form of dialogues, despite the absence of a real give-and-take of ideas. The dialogue form is attractive if questions are provocative or thought-provoking and not just polite, commonplace stimuli for the interviewee's responses. If this is not the case, the interviewer's part had better be left discreetly in the background or omitted altogether, leaving only the composer's responses in monologue form. This is what actually happened anyway in the so-called dialogue with Michal Smoira-Cohn where her name inexplicably figures as author, although she herself appears nowhere in the "dialogue" itself, for which she may probably have functioned as a mere catalyzer.

In the third and fourth sections, differing mainly by the length of their contributions, more than by their content, some of Kopytman's friends, acquaintances, colleagues and former students attempt to portray his personality from a mostly personal angle. Their admiration and appreciation are occasionally quite cute and moving. In some cases they describe usually concealed character traits typical of their object of adoration, especially Kopytman's attention and devotion to his students as an encouraging teacher who takes his task most seriously. Of particular interest are, therefore, remarks by some of his former students. Yinam Leef, for instance, today himself a respected composer and teacher at the same music academy, makes one of the most revealing remarks: "Kopytman was very careful not to impose his own personal style and language" on his students. This is perfectly true and of singular importance. Kopyman's many students, today already active composers, did not turn out to be little Kopytmans, but are as different from their teacher as they are from each other. Leef proceeds to quote Kopytman as saying, "It's good that we argue" - illustrating his tendency to advocate plurality of opinions. Composer Haim Permont, another former student of Kopytman, confirms, "We, his students, do not share a common style or technique, and none of us would be considered as imitating or being stylistically influenced by Kopytman's music". All these are very positive comments on Kopytman as a person, composer and teacher. However, some contributions in these sections, on the other hand, indulge in hero worship-like effusions of platitudes that do not exactly contribute to their idol's prestige but might well make him blush. In some cases these border on objectionable inaccuracies and distortion of facts. We cannot expect Yevgeny Kletinich, for instance, a doctor of musicology, who immigrated to Israel in 1992, to be acquainted with Israel's music prior to his arrival. But then he should behave with some modesty and refrain from adopting an attitude as though this country was a musical wasteland until he arrived on the scene. An arrogant dictum such as "Try to recall the names of composers who came to Israel as mature artists, and then not only maintained the level of their creative work but even reached new heights in their professional career. I am afraid the list would be all too short" proves nothing but his own ignorance. Recalling the names of Paul Ben-Haim, Alexander Uriyah Boskovich, Abel Ehrlich, Arthur Gelbrun or Sergiu Natra, to name but a few, is possible only for someone who knows them. All these had orchestral, chamber and choral works, operas, lieder and prestigious prizes to their credit before they came to this country and continued their successful careers here. Kletinich's pronunciamento "Voices of forgotten ancestors must have been lingering in Kopytman's subconscious" is amateurish, as it is well known that in the eclectic Hassidic folk music, traditional melodic formulas were frequently not self-generated but developed in their non-Jewish

environment of music folklore. Consequently, while still in Moldova, Kopytman may well have heard, consciously or "subconsciously", Moldavian traditional melodic formulas that already had existed there long before they became at last absorbed into Hassidic folk music. Sentimental expressions abound also in the article by Russian-born American pianist Gregory Haimovsky who en route had made a stopover in Israel. His description of music as "the essence of my people's spirit captured in non-traditional yet not ultra-modern forms" or "the musical mind of the composer leads the listener to the tragedies familiar to every Jew of the 20th century" may, perhaps, be true on the personal level, but do not make much sense so long as the author does not take the trouble to point out where and how, in the music itself, he finds valid reasons to substantiate these allegations. Musings about the Jews as a "people with a chosen destiny" inevitably arouse the question - chosen by whom? One wonders whether, according to Haimovsky, the Jews really chose their own destiny themselves, and whether this is really what Kopytman had in mind when composing his music. Moreover, since the author owes no explanation to anyone for having left Israel for greener pastures in the U.S., and this book's subject is Mark Kopytman and not Gregory Haimovsky, his vague attempts at excuses or pretexts are out of context here.

Quite naturally, many contributors are Russian musicians and musicologists. This is an advantage, because they not only have known Kopytman in his pre-Israel period but also are familiar with his Russian cultural and musical background - all but unknown to the local reader, and therefore highly interesting. Nevertheless, some cases of unintentionally naïve Russian local-patriotism, such as Yevgeny Trembovelsky's complacent remark on "the cultural qualities of an intellectual who was raised and educated in Russia" are mildly amusing.

Before addressing issues of editing, let it be said that this book is an immensely valuable and reliable means for familiarizing the interested reader with one of Israel's prominent contemporary composers, on an admirably high academic level. The reader, however, encounters numerous, confusing editorial problems. The headings of the book's four sections, for instance, are clearly indicated in the table of contents, but not in the book itself. The numbering system in the text frequently does not correspond to the printed music examples but, presumably, to the score that is not available. Quotations are frequently given without mentioning their bibliographic sources as, for instance, in Dr. Elena Dubinetz' article (p. 133). Such omissions are particularly annoying when references to Russian authors are made. Trembovelsky's mentions T. Bershadskaya, V. Kholopova, Z. Vizel, B. Asafyev, for example, without providing bibliographic details for the non-Russian reader. Conflicting dates of compositions are also irritating, such as 1972 on p.249 and 1973 on p. 271 for the composition date of the same "Lamentation". Most user-unfriendly, however, is the absence of an index. Its presence is noted in the table of contents, but when one arrives on the indicated page one discovers, to one's dismay, that it contains only compositions, but no names of persons or subjects mentioned in the text. The list of recordings, though generously provided, does not include names of their performers, and the list of Kopytman's theoretical writings is arranged neither chronologically nor alphabetically. These may be mere minor details,

but their correction in a future second edition will no doubt increase the value of this recommendable and instructive book.

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