

Press release: 18 March 2019



BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: PAUL BEN-HAIM AND HIS WORLD
ITAMAR ZORMAN'S DEBUT RELEASE
ON BIS INCLUDING BEN-HAIM PREMIERE RECORDINGS

BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Philippe Bach
Amy Yang piano

BIS-2398 SACD Release date: 29 March 2019

Israeli violinist **Itamar Zorman's** love for the music of **Paul Ben-Haim** (1897-1984) is unquestionably founded on emotion, intellect and a shared cultural heritage. With the support of his 2014 **Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award**, he has been able to research and record repertoire from four decades of the composer's works, including pieces never recorded before. The album, **Evocation**, will be released in March 2019 on the BIS label and fulfills Zorman's wish to bring the work of Paul Ben-Haim to a wider international public. In addition to the quality of Ben-Haim's music, Zorman points to its relevance today, as it tells the story of an immigrant in a new culture, and makes a remarkable effort to bring Eastern and Western music traditions into dialogue with one another.

Itamar Zorman first came across the music of Ben-Haim in his late teens while still studying at the Tel-Aviv Conservatory of Music. Born to secular Jewish parents in Munich as Paul Frankenburger, Ben-Haim's early music was distinctly western-European in style, but after he fled Nazi Germany and moved to the British Mandate of Palestine in 1933 at the age of 36 (where he changed his name), he eagerly absorbed the Arabic and Jewish folk music of the middle east and reflected these in his music.

For this CD, Zorman has deliberately chosen a span of 40 years to chart the development of Ben-Haim's style and how it synthesizes cultural influences from east and west: *"Much like Mahler, Ben-Haim composes what he hears from the outside world, the music of the time and place, which he then integrates with his personal thoughts and feelings to become the music on the page."* Historically, he serves a similar role in Israel to that of Bartòk and Kodaly in Hungary and was one of the founders of a new national style, which later became known as the Mediterranean Style in Israeli Music. Personally, the evolution of his music was part of Ben-Haim's desire to build a new life in a new country after his departure from Europe.

The earliest work on the disc is **Evocation** from 1942 and has not been recorded before. It was written in memory of violinist Andreas Weissgerber and is essentially a work in the great tradition of Romantic pieces for violin and orchestra with echoes of the tragic events in the world at the time. The other premiere recordings are the **Etudes for solo violin** which Ben-Haim wrote in 1981 towards the end of his life for Yehudi Menuhin, by then completely at home with the musical influences of east and west. Zorman notes that, unlike the carefully detailed notation on his earlier symphonic works, Ben-Haim offers very little direction on these pieces. They are therefore quite open to interpretation - also because they have not been recorded.

The **Three Songs Without Words** from 1950 portray three scenes from middle eastern daily life; the heat of midday in the Judea Hills, the babbling of a middle-eastern story teller, and an actual Sephardic Jewish tune to which Ben-Haim provides harmony and counterpoint. The **Violin Concerto** from 1960 is classical in form but many of the tunes and harmonies are most definitely middle-eastern, full of dances and arabesques.

Berceuse sfaradite for violin and piano (1945) was commissioned by the celebrated folk singer Bracha Zefira and is based on a Sephardic folk song with harmonies sometimes reminiscent of French music of the early 20th century. In its vocal version it became one of Zefira's most celebrated songs and the instrumental version is one of Ben-Haim's most beloved works. The CD recital ends with, **Toccata**, from *Five Pieces for Piano* (1943) - a virtuoso piece combining baroque form with an imitation of an Arabic string instrument, the *qanun*, arranged for violin and orchestra by Itamar's father, composer Moshe Zorman.

BBT has made a short film in which Zorman talks of Paul Ben-Haim's life and work and the special affinity he feels: <https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/itamar-zorman/video/>

Further press information:

Debra Boraston at Borletti-Buitoni Trust T. 01424 883307 M. 07989 434388

E. debra@henrymoorestudio.co.uk W. www.bbtrust.com

For review copies of the CD

Eden Hammond E. ehammond@selectmusic.co.uk

Notes to Editors

CD REPERTOIRE

Evocation

Works by Paul Ben-Haim for violin and orchestra (* Premiere recordings)

Recorded December 2017, Hoddinott Hall, Wales Millennium Centre

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Yizkor (Evocation) - Poème for Violin and Symphony Orchestra (1942)*

Three songs without words (1950)

Violin Concerto (1959-1960)

Three Etudes for solo violin (1981)*

Berceuse sfaradite (1945) for violin and piano

Toccata from *Five Pieces for Piano*, Op.34 (1943) arranged for violin and orchestra by Moshe Zorman

Conductor: Philippe Bach

Violin: Itamar Zorman

Piano: Amy Yang

BBC National Orchestra of Wales



Biographical notes <https://www.itamarzorman.com>

- Itamar Zorman's prizes and awards include Avery Fisher Career Grant, Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award (2014), International Tchaikovsky Competition (2011 joint winner) and first prizes in 2010 at the International Violin Competition of Freiburg and the Juilliard Berg Concerto Competition.
- Has performed as soloist around the world with, among others, the, German Radio Philharmonic, HR-Sinfonieorchester Frankfurt, Israel Philharmonic, Kremerata Baltica, Camerata Nordica, KBS Symphony Seoul, Mariinsky Orchestra, New World Symphony, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse and Utah Symphony with conductors such as Valery Gergiev, Zubin Mehta, David Robertson, James DePreist and Yuri Bashmet and Michael Tilson Thomas.
- Has performed as a recitalist at Carnegie Hall's Distinctive Debut series, People's Symphony Concerts, the Louvre Museum, Suntory Hall and Frankfurt Radio, and has taken part in festivals such as Verbier, Marlboro, Rheingau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Radio France.
- As a chamber musician, has appeared at the Lincoln Center, Zankel and Weill Recital Halls in Carnegie Hall, and at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Chamber music appearances include the Kravis Center, Billings Symphony Orchestra recital series, Dublin-Laurens Arts Council, Juilliard School, Pro Musica (San Miguel de Allende), Hudson Valley Music Club, String Theory at the Hunter Museum of Art, Argenta Concert Series, and returns to Marlboro and Swannanoa Festivals.
- His first solo CD, *Portrait* (Profil - Editions Günther Hänssler) was released in 2014 and featured works by Messiaen, Schubert, Chausson, Hindemith and by Profil - Editions Günther Hänssler.
- He is a founding member of the Israeli Chamber Project, and a member of the Lysander Piano Trio, with which he won the 2012 Concert Artists Guild Competition, the Grand Prize in the 2011 Coleman Chamber Music Competition, 1st prize in the 2011 Arriaga Competition, and a bronze medal in the 2010 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition.
- Itamar Zorman is a recipient of scholarships from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and has taken part in numerous master classes around the world, working with Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zuckerman, Shlomo Mintz, Ida Handel and Ivry.
- Born in Tel-Aviv in 1985 to a family of musicians, Itamar Zorman began his violin studies at the age of six with Saly Bockel at the Israeli Conservatory of Music in Tel-Aviv. He graduated in 2003 and continued his studies with Professor David Chen and Nava Milo. He received his Bachelor of Music from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance as a student of Hagai Shaham. Received his Master's of Music from The Juilliard School in 2009, where he studied with Robert Mann and Sylvia Rosenberg, and received an Artist Diploma from Manhattan School of Music in 2010 and an Artist Diploma from Juilliard in 2012, studying with Ms. Rosenberg. He later continued his studies with Christian Tetzlaff and Mauricio Fuks at The Kronberg Academy. He is currently based in the USA
- Itamar Zorman plays on a 1734 Guarneri Del Jesù from the collection of Yehuda Zisapel.

Paul Ben-Haim: Born into a secular Jewish family in Munich as Paul Frankenburger, he began playing the violin and piano as a child. His youthful early compositions were *Lieder* set to poems by Eichendorff and Hofmannsthal. During the First World War, Frankenburger was drafted into the German army and served on the French and Belgian fronts. After the war he studied composition and piano in Munich. Starting in 1920, he worked for four years as Bruno Walter's rehearsal pianist at the Munich Opera House and in 1924 he joined the Augsburg Opera House as third *Kapellmeister*, eventually becoming first *Kapellmeister*. His reputation as both composer and conductor grew steadily until in 1931 he was suddenly dismissed from the opera house, in line with the wave of anti-Semitism that swept Germany in the early 1930s. Up to this point, he had been fully immersed in the German music tradition, following in the footsteps of the great German post-Romantics like Mahler, and had scarce acquaintance with middle-eastern or Jewish folk music. Unable to find work in Germany owing to his Jewish background, he travelled to the British Mandate of Palestine as a tourist in 1933 to test the waters for possible immigration. During his voyage, he met the violinist Shimon Bachman, an orchestra leader in Geneva, who invited him to be his piano accompanist in forthcoming concerts in Palestine. As Frankenburger's tourist visa did not allow him to work, his name was changed to Paul Ben-Haim for the concert programmes. Thereafter, he settled in Tel-Aviv and so began the profound changes in his work as he assimilated the music and culture of his new homeland.