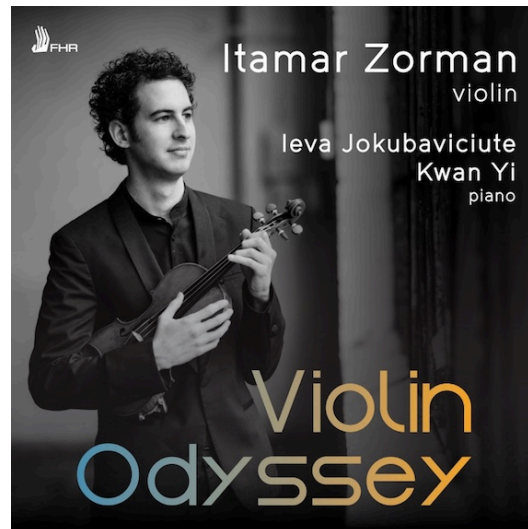


ITAMAR ZORMAN' S VIOLIN ODYSSEY

Musical Globetrotting in a Quest for New Repertoire

First Hand Records FHR119
Release date: 20 May 2022



The worldwide lockdowns of 2020/21 proved highly fruitful for US-based violinist **Itamar Zorman** in his quest to seek out new repertoire. A virtual voyage around the world yielded a discovery of many lesser known and rarely played works for violin, which he presented in 2020 as a live-streamed video series entitled *Hidden Gems*. From this musical treasure trove he selected 10 pieces for his new album *Violin Odyssey*, his first solo album* on the **First Hand Records** label. The recording was made with pianists **Ieva Jokubaviciute** and **Kwan Yi** by Grammy Award-winning producer **Judith Sherman** at America's Baldwin Auditorium, Duke University in Durham, North Carolina last year.

The far-reaching geographical origins of the repertoire - from New Zealand to the United States by way of Sudan, China, Russia, Poland, Croatia, Czech Republic, Israel and Mexico - reveal a fascinating variety of styles and cultural diversity in these seldom-heard works. As part of his research, Itamar also consulted musical experts or talked with the composers themselves. Lockdown allowed time for deeper thought on global issues in society and the environment and these played a part in mapping out the repertoire, which also bears traces of family ties at home and abroad: Itamar chose a piece composed by his father Moshe Zorman on the other side of the world in Israel, explored pieces written for children with his small daughter and collaborated closely with his wife, pianist Liza Stepanova, who accompanied him on the first *Hidden Gems* live-streams.

Two larger works set the framework of the album - *Slavonic Sonata* (1917) written by Croatian noblewoman **Dora Pejačević** and the *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1927) by Czech composer **Erwin Schulhoff**. While sharing Eastern European flavour, the two sonatas, written only ten years apart, are worlds apart stylistically. Pejačević's sonata continues and expands on the Romantic tradition of works for violin and piano, while Schulhoff's draws from a wide range of sources from jazz to expressionism.

These particularly dramatic works are complemented by a programme of shorter pieces with evocative titles that suggest little adventures and encounters on a traveller's journey, starting with *Wanderings* by leading Israeli composer **Moshe Zorman**. More time spent with his little daughter opened Itamar's ears to the *Children's Suite* by Russian born **Joseph Achron** - a collection of miniature scenes from childhood, from *March of Toys* to chirping *Birdies*.

Lively encounters with street vendors in Mexico are apparent in *Il Afilador* and *Tierra p'a las macetas* by Mexican composer **Silvestre Revueltas** in which one hears urban sounds and

costermongers' cries, while the exhilarating pulse and pace of folk dancing resound in **Grazyna Bacewicz's** virtuosic *Oberek No 1*. Dance tempos are also apparent in Sudanese composer **Ali Osman's** *Afromood* with its African rhythms and jazz influences, while a mysterious glacial lake with a rising and falling tide (caused by the breathing of an ancient monster living in its depths according to Maori legend) is the inspiration for **Gareth Farr's** *Wakatipu*.

More poignantly Chinese composer **Gao Ping** takes a folk song as the theme for his contemplation of the earthquake that tragically devastated his Sichuan homeland in *Questioning the Mountains*. Finally, the journey ends with *Summerland*, a vision of beauty in the afterlife, composed by American **William Grant Still**, a major historical figure whose achievements included being the first African-American to conduct a leading symphony orchestra in the US and the first to have an opera produced by a major company.

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Notes to Editors

* *Mirrors – 21st Century Piano Trios* was released on the First Hand Records label in December 2020 featuring the **Lysander Piano Trio** (Itamar Zorman violin, Michael Katz cello, Liza Stepanova piano, Sarah Shafer soprano) with a programme of premiere recordings.

ALBUM REPERTOIRE

Violin Odyssey (FHR119)

Itamar Zorman violin • **Ieva Jokubaviciute** piano ¹ • **Kwan Yi** piano ² • **Julia Thompson** tambourine *

Judith Sherman producer / Chris Boerner engineer. Recorded February 2021, Durham NC, USA

Moshe ZORMAN *Wanderings* (1994) ¹

Joseph ACHRON *Children's Suite, Op. 57* (c. 1925) (arr. **Jascha HEIFETZ**) ²

Dora PEJAČEVIĆ *Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 43, "Slavonic Sonata"* (1917) ¹

Silvestre REVUELTAS *El afilador* (1924) ¹ & *Tierra p'a las macetas* (1924) ¹

Grazyna BACEWICZ *Oberek No. 1* (1949) ¹

Gao PING *Questioning the Mountains* (2008) ¹

Gareth FARR *Wakatipu* (2009)

Ali OSMAN *Afromood* (2010) ² *

Erwin SCHULHOFF *Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2* (1927) ²

William Grant STILL *Summerland* (1935) ¹

COMPOSERS

Dora Pejačević (1885-1923) A member of the Pejačević noble family, she is considered a major Croatian composer. She left behind a catalogue of 58 opuses (106 compositions), mostly in late Romantic style, including songs, piano works, chamber music, and several compositions for large orchestra. Her Symphony in F-sharp minor is considered by scholars to be the first modern symphony in Croatian music. In her homeland she is known simply as 'Dora' and is particularly beloved for her volunteer work as a nurse during WWI.

Joseph Achron (1886-1943) was a Russian-born Jewish composer and violinist who settled in the US, spending the last decade of his life in Hollywood where he also composed film scores. A member of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in St Petersburg, he is especially renowned for his preoccupation with combining features of Jewish folk music within classical forms. A violin student of the celebrated Leopold Auer, he was a successful concert violinist and performed across Russian and Europe. Schoenberg wrote of him in his obituary "Joseph Achron was one of the most underrated modern composers".

Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942) was a Czech pianist and composer of German-Jewish origins whose successful career was prematurely terminated by the rise of the Nazi regime and whose works were rarely noted or performed until recent years. The likes of Dvorak and Debussy encouraged his early work and he later became one of the first classical composers to find inspiration in the rhythms of jazz music. An eclectic composer, he was also interested in the Dadaist movement, socialism and folk music.

William Grant Still (1895-1978) Born in Mississippi, he was a composer of nearly 200 works including five symphonies (the most popular of which was the widely performed *Afro-American Symphony* of 1930), four ballets, nine operas, over 30 choral works, art songs, chamber music and works for solo instruments. Due to his close association and collaboration with prominent African-American literary and cultural figures, he is considered to have been part of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and '30s.

Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940) was a Mexican violinist, composer and conductor born into a large family of artists. He did much to promote contemporary Mexican music and wrote film music, chamber music and song in his endeavours to represent working class Mexicans. His orchestral work *Sensemaya* (1938) is considered to be his masterpiece, while his best-known work is a suite by José Ives Limantour drawn from his film score for *La Noche de los Mayas*.

Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) was a Polish composer and violinist whose teachers included Carl Flesch and Nadia Boulanger. She blazed a trail in her homeland, considered to be only the second female Polish composer to achieve international recognition (the first having been Maria Szymanowska in the early 19th century). Being an accomplished violinist, she was laureate of the legendary 1935 Wieniawski Competition and wrote seven violin concertos, several symphonies and many piano works, including her 2nd piano sonata which she premiered herself.

Moshe Zorman (1952-) is an award-winning Israeli composer, arranger and musicologist whose teachers have included George Perle and John Cage. His catalogue includes nine operas as well as works for symphony orchestra, chamber groups and choirs. He has composed music for theatre productions at the Habima and Cameri theatres in Israel and for the Inbal and Bat-Sheva dance companies. Zorman has also written nearly 2000 arrangements in a wide variety of styles, from popular music to jazz.

Ali Osman (1958-2017) was a Sudanese composer of mostly orchestral, chamber and vocal works that have been performed in Europe and the Middle East. From his beginnings as a self-taught rock musician, he became a significant force on the contemporary classical music scene in Egypt where he lived from 1978 until his death. He performed (guitar, drum kit and double bass), taught music at the Conservatoire in Cairo and worked regularly with the Light and Hope Orchestra for blind female musicians as artistic director and conductor.

Gareth Farr (1968-) is an award-winning New Zealand composer and percussionist whose music is characterised by his extensive study of percussion, both Western and non-Western, with distinctive links to the complex rhythms of Rarotongan log drum ensembles, Balinese gamelan and other percussion music of the Pacific Rim. His output is widely varied; he has composed works for the concert hall, dance, theatre, television, film and a variety of major events of national significance.

Gao Ping (1970-) A Chinese pianist and composer who is known for fusing eastern and western musical idioms, combining traditional Chinese and western instruments, and reflecting elements of China and its multiple pasts in his work. His 1988 album *Jazz in China* was one of the first domestic jazz-classical albums released in China. He is described as a leading member of the 'sixth generation' of Chinese composers, following on from the 'fifth generation' which includes such luminaries as Tan Dun.

Hidden Gems: livestreams of performance and interviews with music experts and composers can be viewed online: <https://www.itamarzorman.com/hidden-gems>

ITAMAR ZORMAN BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

<https://www.itamarzorman.com>



- **Born** in Tel-Aviv in 1985 to a family of musicians. Currently lives in the US.
- **Studies** began aged six with Saly Bockel at the Israeli Conservatory of Music in Tel-Aviv. Graduated in 2003 and continued studies with Prof. 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.
- **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 Juilliard Berg Concerto Competition. Also won a scholarship from America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

- **Performances** as soloist around the world include with 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 Atlanta Symphony with conductors such as Valery Gergiev, Zubin Mehta, David Robertson, James DePreist, Yuri Bashmet, Karina Canellakis and Michael Tilson Thomas.
- **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.
- **Chamber music** appearances include at Lincoln Center, Zankel and Weill Recital Halls in Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center in Washington DC, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, Musicians from Marlboro tours, plus performances with such artists as Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode, Steven Isserlis, Yefim Bronfman, Emmanuel Pahud and Jörg Widmann.
- **Recordings** include *Portrait* (Profil - Editions Günther Hänssler) featuring works by Messiaen, Schubert, Chausson, Hindemith (2014) and highly acclaimed *Evocation*, featuring works by Paul Ben-Haim (BIS 2019).
- **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.
- **Instrument** plays on a 1734 Guarneri Del Jesù from the collection of Yehuda Zisapel.

CRITICAL ACCLAIM for *Evocation* (BIS), the music of Paul Ben-Haim (also supported by BBT)

"You will not meet many unheard concertos [Yizkor – Evocation] of such wistful and appealing qualities, passionately evoked by an emphatic soloist... I don't think I've ever heard a warmer or more enjoyable Ben-Haim program."

Norman Lebrecht, Ludvig van Toronto

"The young Israeli violinist Itamar Zorman (born in 1985) attends to all these works with the utmost conviction, shining with a clear, always expressive tone... Technically, of course, this is completely flawless, which is immediately evident, especially in the cadenzas and etudes." **Martin Blaumeiser, Klassik Heute**

"...superbly played by the young violinist Itamar Zorman." **Fiona Maddocks, The Observer**

"The one constant throughout this entire collection is violinist Itamar Zorman, who performs all of this music with passion and excellence... This is a very enjoyable collection of music from a lesser-known composer."

Mark Novak, Fanfare

"This project has obviously been a labour of love for Itamar Zorman, whose playing – on a 1734 Guarneri 'del Jesu' – is technically impeccable. Zorman is attentive to the music's humorous ... but also achieves great expressive heights, while being always conscious of a piece's larger shape. ... A rousing Toccata, skilfully arranged from a piano showpiece, brings this rewarding recital to its exciting close." **Carlos Maria Solare, The Strad**

"A peach of a work [Evocation] reflective but troubled, it's the earliest piece in this rewarding collection of works ... Zorman retraces Ben-Haim's musical journey with plenty of technical panache, passion and colour."

Geoff Brown, BBC Music Magazine