

Itamar

REVISTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN MUSICAL: TERRITORIOS PARA EL ARTE



AÑO 2021

7

 Facultat de Filosofia i Ciències de l'Educació



VNIVERSITAT
DE VALÈNCIA

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Facultad de Filosofía y Ciencias de la Educación. Universitat de València (España)

Territorios Compositoras

YIZKEREM.
May Our Lord Remember Them (from Hebrew), for a-
cappella mixed choir

Bracha Bdil
Composer, Conductor, Music Educator
Zmora Women Orchestra
Ron Shulamit Conservatory, Jerusalem, Israel
<http://brachabdil.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>

Abstract. The work YIZKEREM (from Hebrew: May Our Lord Remember Them) is a memorial to the Holocaust of the Jewish nation. Since the composer – Bracha Bdil - belongs to the Eastern European Orthodox community, many of her works are based on the musical tradition of the Jewish Eastern Europe modes and texts from the sources.

The fusion of contemporary compositional technique with the elements of ancient Jewish tradition leads the composer to a personal authentic compositional language.

Keywords. YIZKEREM, May Our Lord Remember Them, Bracha Bdil, A-Cappella, Holocaust, prayer of remembrance, Jewish text, Jewish modes, Jewish traditional music, Cantorial style, Synagogue prayers, Heterophonic texture, thematic counterpoint.

Resumen. La obra YIZKEREM (del hebreo: Que nuestro Señor los recuerde) es un monumento al Holocausto de la nación judía. Dado que la compositora, Bracha Bdil, pertenece a la comunidad ortodoxa de Europa del Este, muchas de sus obras se basan en la tradición musical de los modos judíos de Europa del Este y los textos de estas fuentes.

La fusión de la técnica compositiva contemporánea con los elementos de la antigua tradición judía conduce a la compositora a un lenguaje compositivo muy personal.

Palabras clave. YIZKEREM, May Our Lord Remember Them, Bracha Bdil, A Cappella, holocausto, oración de recuerdo, texto judío, modos judíos, música tradicional judía, estilo cantoral, oraciones de sinagoga, textura heterofónica, contrapunto temático.

I will not forget the chilling story Alexander told me about the murder of his father in the concentration camp in Estonia - Noah Wolkowyski (the author of the first stanza of the poem "Ponar"). The Nazis led his father, the doctor, and other Jews with important jobs to be shot. On the side of the empty truck that

had returned to the camp was left an inscription written with a finger dipped in blood: "They are killing us, Take revenge!"

The work "Yizkerem" is written for an A-Capella Choir and deals with the tragedy of the Holocaust for the Jewish nation.

This composition is dedicated to Prof. Alexander Tamir (Wolkowyski) o.b.m, a Holocaust survivor who, as an 11 year old boy in the Vilna ghetto, composed the song about the massacre of "Ponar", which became one of the symbols of the Holocaust.

There are mortal sins that are not forgiven, and even in the holy scripts can be found legitimacy for the act of revenge that does not bear the inconceivable human tragedy. Despite this, the purpose of the work is not only to express feelings and to sanctify the memory of those who perished, but mainly for the sake of remembering, so we will live in a world that raises the banner of peace and brotherhood of nations.

Is this to be a vision only?

The texts on which the composition is based are using a number of Jewish prayers (From the Jewish memorial prayers: "Merciful Father" ("Av HaRachamim"), "Our Father, Our King" ("Avinu Malkeinu"), "G-d full of Mercy" ("E-L Malei Rachamim"), some of which are recited in times of troubles, some in memory of the dead, etc.

At the top of the work is an instruction to read the words of Gideon Hausner – chief prosecutor - at the trial of Adolf Eichmann (Israel 1961) who was the main executor of the Nazi's policy:

"Where I stand before you, I do not stand alone. With me here, at this time, 6 million accusers. But they cannot rise to point an accusing finger at the glass booth and shout at one sitting there, I blame. The ashes piled high on the hills of Auschwitz and were scattered in the fields of Treblinka, have been washed away by the rivers of Poland and the graves scattered across the length and breadth of Europe. Their blood cries out, but their voice is not heard. Therefore I am here and speak on their behalf the terrible indictment."

The composition consists of three sections and confronts chromatic dissonance that expresses the sorrow of the tragedy and a clear harmonic cords that expresses the holiness and the faith in the G-d. In addition, there is a certain modality influences originating from the Jewish prayers.

Section A (bars 1-53):

The composition begins with four voices sounding one word over and over again: "**Yizkerem**" – meaning: "May our Lord Remember" – those who perished and the reason for their death. The word "Yizkerem" opens with a half-

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diminished chord and repeats itself in different ways, in various lengths, in chromatic flowing, in a whisper, in shouting, etc. (bars 1-23).

A *Larghetto* $\text{♩} = 75$

p

Soprano
yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem

Alto
yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem

Tenor
yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem

Bass
yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem yiz - ke - rem

pp

S
re - mem - ber yiz - ke - rem

A
re - mem - ber yiz - ke - rem

T
re - mem - ber yiz - ke - rem

B
re - mem - ber yiz - ke - rem

00:10 sec. **Heterophonic Effect**
(fill line 38) **ppp** repeat whispering with accented diction

S May He red-ress the spilledblood of His ser-vants

A May He red-ress the spilled blood of His ser-vants

T May He red-ress the spilled blood of His ser-vants

B May He red-ress the spilled blood of His ser-vants

Heterophonic Effect - Join gradually, one by one (singer by singer) with the given text in your own variation of diction and tempo, to make an heterophonic texture as a crowd. Recite naturally, not measured
Make sure not to be synchronized!

repeat expressively *Shout!* **ff** *attacca* **f** *approximate pitch*
gradually increasing intonation and tempo *Shout! do not sing*

S He will red-

repeat expressively *Shout!* **ff** *attacca* **f** *approximate pitch*
gradually increasing intonation and tempo *Shout! do not sing*

A He will red-

repeat expressively *Shout!* **ff** *attacca* **f** *approximate pitch*
gradually increasing intonation and tempo *Shout! do not sing*

T He will red-

repeat expressively *Shout!* **ff** *attacca* **f** *approximate pitch*
gradually increasing intonation and tempo *Shout! do not sing*

B He will red-

$\text{♩} = 120$ *Alla breve*

The following is an explanation of the notation that creates the free heterophonic texture - according to what appears before the composition:

The image contains musical notation and performance instructions. At the top, a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat is labeled 'Approximate pitch (Sprechgesang)'. Below this, a horizontal line with an 'x' above and below it is labeled 'Recite naturally (low/mid/high) - not measured'. The next section shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, followed by an arrow pointing right and the text 'Repeat the given patterns with accented diction'. Below that, a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat shows a melodic line with a crescendo hairpin and a fortissimo (ff) dynamic marking. To the right of this staff, the text reads: 'Continue repeating the given patterns gradually increasing expressively intonation and tempo (untill the given pitch)'. At the bottom left, a double quote symbol is followed by the text 'lengths of caesura/comma'. The section is titled 'Heterophonic Effect' and contains the instruction: 'Join gradually, one by one (singer by singer), with the given text in your own variation of diction and tempo to make an heterophonic texture as a crowd. Recite naturally, not measured - Make sure not to be synchronized!'.

Upon reaching the climax, all the voices are in unison scream and continue in a homophonic-choral texture for the following words: **"He will retaliate against His enemies, and appease His land and His people"**. The words of vengeance are expressed in forte in chords which are built of perfect intervals which are gradually compressed and become dissonatic (bars 41-45). The last sentence of consolation is expressed in piano, trickling with sustained lines until a solution which is not satisfying - a half-diminished chord - corresponding to the chord that opened the composition (bars 45-49). The bass-baritone soloist concludes the section with a quiet, serious recitation of the words: **"He who exacts retribution for spilled blood remembers them, He does not forget the cry of the humble"** (bars 49-53).

43

meno mosso *pp* *legato* *ppp*

S
foes - and a - ppease His land and His peo - ple

pp *legato* *ppp*

A
foes
and a - ppease His land and His peo - ple

pp *legato* *ppp*

T
foes - and a - ppease His land and His peo - ple

pp *legato* *ppp*

B
and a - ppease His land and His peo - ple

45

Solo B

p

He who ex - acts re - tri

Section B (bars 53-122):

Immediately after the soprano solo begins a melodic line that expresses prayer pleading: **"Our Father, Our King, this do for the sake of those who were slain for Thy holy name, This do for the sake of those who were slaughtered for Thy unity, This do for the sake of those who went through fire and water for the holiness of Thy name"**. The soprano is accompanied by the 4 voices in a homophonic-choral texture in pure minor cords. The choir reminiscents the word "Yizkerem" from time to time and occasionally repeats-responds and strengthens the words of the soloist (bars 53-88).

The harmony gradually becomes compressed and chromatic till the climax where all the voices merge into a major chord on G. That G major corresponds with the same half-diminished G chord that opened the work (bars 83-88). But immediately after that clear moment appears a dissonant cluster reminiscent of the circumstances of writing the work - a vision versus reality (bars 89-91).

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The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system (bars 83-90) features a Solo Soprano line and four-part choir parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are: "name Thy name". The tempo markings are "poco a poco cresc. poco a poco piu mosso" and "rit.". The second system (bars 90-102) continues with the Solo Soprano and four-part choir parts. The lyrics are: "re - mem (m) o na-tions make His peo-ple re - joice for He will red-". The Solo Soprano part includes a key signature change to D major and a tempo marking of quarter note = 140. The piano accompaniment includes various dynamics and articulations: "ff", "pp", "accented", "gliss.", "dim.", "marcato Solo", "agliato", and "p".

From that dissonant chord, Cannon in fourths grows in the following words: "**O nations, make His people rejoice, For He will redress the blood of His servants**" (bars 90-102).

92 *p marcato agitato*
S o na-tions make His peo-ple re-joice for He will red-ress the

p marcato agitato
A o na-tions make His peo-ple re-joice for He will red-ress the blood of His

Tutti articulate *keep the excitement and p*
T ress the blood of His ser-vants He will re-ta-li-ate a-gainst His e-ne-mies may He red-ress the

B na-tions make His peo-ple re-joice for He will red-ress the blood of His ser-vants He will re-

The counterpoint texture becomes chromatic, growing stronger in an heterophonic texture, suggesting a mass of people (bars 102-108), until the climax - repeating the same words but in a definite choral texture with a pedal point added: "**For He will redress the blood of His servants**". The consolation words in piano ends in a cord based on C, but this time - in a pure minor cord in a root position - hoping for stability after the 'soprano prayer' section (bars 108-116).

112 *rit.* *PPP* *al niente* $\text{♩} = 80$
S pprase His land and his peo-ple

rit. *PPP* *al niente*
A pprase His land and His peo-ple

rit. *PPP* *al niente*
T pprase His land and His peo-ple

rit. *PPP* *al niente*
B pprase His land and His peo-ple

117 *mp recito slowly and solemnly*
Solo B He will e-xe-cute judge-ment a-mong the

Once again, the bass-baritone soloist quietly 'seals' the section with the following words: "**He will execute judgment among the corpse-filled nations, He will crush the rulers of the many lands**".

Section C (bars 122-end):

The final section of the composition uses three different materials in parallel - a thematic counterpoint:

1. The men whisper in an heterophonic texture the text of the "G-d full of Mercy" prayer. Their whispers simulate special moments from the atmosphere of a synagogue where everyone prays privately in a whisper in a personal style, when all the murmurs merge to a sort of a 'bubbling mass whisper'.
2. The women quote the beginning of the work in the word "Yizkerem" and repeat it in different ways.
3. Above these materials, the tenor soloist is singing as a cantor the "G-d full of Mercy" prayer - a version of the prayer of remembrance of souls which is recited for the sake of those souls which are deceased.

These three materials move in complete independence - tonal, rhythmic, textual, directional.

The tenor soloist prays a melodic expressive line with the following words: **"G-d, full of mercy, judge of widows and father of orphans, provide a**

sure rest upon the wings of the Divine Presence, for all the souls who were murdered, slaughtered, burned, strangled, buried alive, who died in all manners of unseemly deaths and went to heaven for Thy sanctification".

The accompanying of the choir with the word "Yizkerem" deliberately opens in a very high register, in a complex range for vocal production and even for listening. The range gradually reaches the lower register but at the same time grows in intensity and chromatically (bar 122 till the end). The male voices join the female voices (bar 137), but in spite of this the "Yizkerem" disappears slowly in a long morendo. The piece ends with the same word repeated over and over again - in the same chord -G half-diminished - with which the composition began – in a low register and dense voicing.

The solo tenor melodic line which sounds parallel begins on the F minor (the tonality in which the piece is written) and sometimes creates a sharp bi-tonality with the choir material. The line finishes at the Bb tonality with the words: **"The Everlasting One is their heritage, the Garden of Eden shall be their resting place, Amen"** (bars 144-170).

The image shows a musical score for a choir and solo tenor. The top section is for the word "Yizkerem" and includes staves for Solo T, S, A, T, and B. The Solo T part features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *ppp* and a tempo marking of *al niente*. The choir parts (S, A, T, B) have lyrics "yit - ke - rem" and also include a *ppp* dynamic marking and *al niente* tempo. The bottom section is for the word "Amen" and includes a Solo T staff with a melodic line and lyrics "Vit - gal - del - ve - Yit - kadash - Shemei - Rabba - rap - noi - Led - no - men - ber - Osh - Vit - ke - rem". This section has a dynamic marking of *ppp* and a tempo marking of *Ad libitum*. Below the Solo T staff, there are empty staves for S, A, T, and B.

In the "Amen" word the soloist remains alone. In the silence that prevails, he says 4 words in Aramaic (ancient language): **"Yitgadal veYitkadash Shemei Rabba"** - 4 important words that begin the prayer of the "Kaddish" – a prayer

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in memory of the departed which sanctifies G-d's rule in his mysterious ways
(bar 170 till the end).

After these 4 words, the soloist tenor quietly mentions the final word "**May our
Lord Remember, Yizkerem**", and seals the composition in silence.

Score&recording:

<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=OB8u7yIPbThIIYlZkUGtaRzlr28&usp=sharing>