

Dr. Hartmut Hain, Klassik.com (April 2017)

To Aeneas – Piano composition by Clementi, Mishory and Tartini

From Dido to Aeneas: Gripping Changes of Perspective

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A fascinating concept album: In his own composition Gilead Mishory places Aeneas as ‘the Leaver’ in the center, surrounded by Clementi’s and Tartini’s observations of Dido as ‘the Abandoned,’ using contrasting sonata movements to express the different affects.

Instead of an introduction, the CD booklet provides a conversation between Gilead Mishory, the pianist and composer, and Simon A. Rosenbaum, who is not introduced. This dialogue of perfect length successfully sums up the program and the ideas in a nutshell: Mishory obviously recognizes many autobiographical themes in the Trojan refugee Aeneas. Amid all the compassionate historical focus on Carthage’s mythic founder Dido – robbed of perspective love, her identity and material existence fully destroyed – Mishory searches for identification potential in Aeneas, as a victim of a necessary, tragic decision between his own desire and the social, divine obligation to his family to remember his people. The final operatic image of the suffering heroine (found in Henry Purcell’s famous Baroque version, in Metastasio’s 18th century libretto “Didone abbandonata” and reflected in the titles of both Tartini’s (1731) and Clementi’s (1821) sonatas) stands in contrast to Mishory’s five-part piano cycle “To Aeneas” (composed 2013-2015) which presents a psychological, almost seismographic, study solely through the expression of music. Yes, Mishory’s work is an attempt to internalize the intrinsically human conflict between personal preference and moral duty without the use of linguistic expression, yet somehow supplying a narrative. The titles of Mishory’s five movements each lasting between six to eight minutes indicate the way followed informatively in the artist’s discussion, yet room is also given for the listener’s own ideas and sentiments to unfold.

Surely the one that leaves also suffers

How carefully the mirror-self manly visions are drawn up at the beginning of “**you.** Nocturne” at first recitative-like and thematic within an atmosphere of fever-fraught repetitive tones. “she. Delirium” participates in this thematic thought-world, but remains fleeting at the same time: mostly soft, elusive, isolated and cold in its halting movements; loss of self, forgotten sleep, then an outburst as declamation – short, with a stroke of fury, overwhelmed; so envisions Mishory Dido on the verge of self-destruction; yet then, immediately after “totally exhausted”. Just as vivid is the “Labyrinth” which moves over the diverse registers of the keyboard, at first isolated-pointillistic then expressively bruitistic.

Next, surprisingly seamlessly, the move to “Father. The Touch” which begins with a deep cluster of chords over which a death bell begins to toll: distant and lonely, yet also comforting and powerful as in reclaimed memories. In his conversation with

Rosenbaum, Mishory recalls the load of the father that Aeneas bears and carries with him out of Troy; an image of those fateful conditions that drove him to a new unknown home: the influence of tradition which in the Finale drives Aeneas out into the dark, uninviting “Sea”: “many shades of black and blue.” But there is also a biographical context: the composer’s father who once told Virgil’s story of the Aeneid sitting at the edge of the child’s bed and played Tartini’s violin sonata “Didone abbandonata” with his son: this specific sonata, which Mishory takes into the program, arranged in his own version for solo piano. Perhaps something Freudian is lurking, but rather, and more directly evident, is the ancient and the present day innate humanness which can be found on all corners, at every beginning and end.

Tartini without violin, Clementi interpreted very personally on the piano

Mishory shortened Tartini’s violin sonata “Didone abbandonata” by removing the Largo movement which most vividly calls to mind Purcell’s lament “When I’m laid in earth”. (An exciting version for violin and organ with Galina Barinova and Leonid Royzman (1961) is referred to excursively.) The ‘Presto’ thus moves into the middle of a triptych, as a partly hesitant outburst of rage. The first part of the triptych expresses enormous suffering (“Affetuoso”) and at its end an almost pastoral, surprisingly peaceful “Allegro”, which in Issac Stern’s version (CBS/Sony 1952) evokes an idyllic retrospective to the time when they were in love. At the end of the recording, these painful yet beautiful memories are ultimately what remain for Aeneas. Mishory plays his arrangement of Tartini mostly as counterpoint, especially heard in the first movement as a duet between the descant (the violin, or Dido) and the equally important, expressively lively formulated bass melody. Here Mishory again inserts an operative double perspective. On the other hand, Clementi bases his last piano sonata Op. 50/No. 3 on the romantic salon-like perspective of a suffering woman: The introduction of the first movement is graceful, much like the waltzes of Beethoven and Chopin, followed by similarly pleasing Chopin-like figurations of a “female” first theme of the sonata, which Mishory agogically designs, rather freely and individually. Mishory’s piano playing is convincing and full of nuances, only the manually complicated figures at the beginning of the closing group slow down somewhat too much, before the emotional contrasts of later **variants** and conflicts are announced. Everything relating to affects is well portioned, more intimate and more directly played compared to other recordings of the sonata (Spada, Shelley or Mastroprimiano). At the beginning of the program, both the “Adagio dolente” and the “Allegro agitato” articulate the anger and despair, actually presenting the idealized image of Dido’s affects, those which will meet later Aeneas’ feelings in Mishory’s interpretation in a most fascinating, contrasting way. And with the Tartini idyll as conclusion, Dido and Aeneas in mind and ear, confronting a double-vision of passion and suffering, one would like to agree with the viewpoint expressed at the end of the interview in the booklet: “To sum up: don’t abandon women! – Exactly. Never!”