

TWO PIECES BY ELAINE BARKIN AND A MEMOIR

SONG FOR SARAH

Elaine's quest for her authentic identity and essence, long after "On the way to becoming", brought her to the portal of a spiritual medium, not a discourse for others to listen to, or to try her self on, or even for herself to listen to, but to carry her into a shamanic journey on a thread of sound, of sounding song, entering on a long thin whispered soundbeam of a violin singing in a vastly empty sky, descending to materialize as the presence of the avatar-grandma, the one in whom the deepest self-identification was lodged, Sarah the wise, Sarah the giver of meaning, Sarah the tormented soul, Sarah the ultimate culmination of sensibility, desire, fear, despair, all the ramifications of long suffered, long lived Yiddishkeit, alienation, yearning, the fury of futility furiously resisted, internalized, regurgitated, denied, defied in the act of ultimate self-expression, self-annihilation...not Elaine's piece, or Mark Menzies' performance, but Sarah's Song, of Sarah, about Sarah, to Sarah, for Sarah, resounding the echo of her persistent presence in the soul of her only selfother within, her legacy, her unextinguished ferocious energetic soulful life-devouring being, screaming under suppression, singing the signature of life into a living affirmation of her – of any – existence:

Oifn priptichuk

Brent das feirl

Un in stub is heis

Un der Rebbe lernt kleine kinderlech

Den alef beis

Un der Rebbe lernt kleine kinderlech

Den alef beis

Zet zhe kinderlech, gedenkt zhe tayere,
Vos ir lernen do,
Zogt zhe nokh a mol un take nokh a mol
Komets-alef: uh
Zogt zhe nokh a mol un take nokh a mol
Komets-alef: uh

But you have to listen carefully.

ELAINE'S QUARTET

Sonata Form it ain't, this seething mass of edgy sensibility: (first movement) a first movement from yes a cauldron of composition, fracturing the very concept of continuity not in a Webern or post-Webern way because the signals are pointing backward to phrasing and gesture that are as direct as dance and song but diffracted and angularized and impetuously repositioned with a persistent impulse of intense energy intensely wanting to know what itself is to be but diverting at each moment of almost-sentience.

A second episode (epicide?) (second movement: Variations) superimposing its multiple contradictories, temporally adjacent antonyms becoming evermore starkly dialectical simultaneities, songs of ever-higher aspiration abruptly by jagged setpieces, renegade rowshards, mudvolcanic microruptions bopblopping, actually devolving itself into a final wideyed catwary equilibrium. And such an innocent little outmove to end, you're not going to believe and aren't supposed to.

A Long Story

I was 14 years old, sitting at the piano in the dark old theater of my summer camp, dwelling in the *Pathétique* Sonata, a shaft of toobright light from the outside summer sun blazed across my keyboard, because a fellow camper had opened the door to see who it could be who was playing Beethoven in our Yiddish summer camp. So that was how we met, though just barely, until the evening in 1953 when we converged in the studio of our mutual piano guru Rebecca Davidson, gathered with all of her current students to set up a recital of us all. We did recognize each other, after pursuing divergent paths through New York City high school and college educations, and were amazed to learn that we were both about to decamp to Brandeis University's graduate music department to learn composition from Irving Fine, Arthur Berger and Harold Shapero. Which we did, more or less happily, coexisting there as almost family (that was the quality of the Brandeis graduate music commune) before Elaine's defection on a Fulbright to West Berlin to work with her Tanglewood mentor Boris Blacher. As I emigrated to UCLA to understudy with Lukas Foss, and Elaine came back to marry George Barkin, we were detached – until on a visit home (NYC) I saw in the Times that there was a reading in the Barnard library of a piece by Elaine Barkin – so I showed up, startlingly for her. That was 1958, and our connection has been overt and continuous ever since. Although soon after she retreated from composing to be a mother and wife. So in 1962, when I started and became co-Editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, I thought of asking Elaine to do a really challenging job: translating Stockhausen's *Die Einheit der musikalischer Zeit* for the first issue of *Perspectives*. And then to stay to work with us, first as Assistant Editor and then as Co-Editor, in which relationship we remained until I retired as Editor in 1983, when she helped John Rahn establish *Perspectives* at the University of Washington. In between Elaine returned to Brandeis to complete her Ph.D., became significantly involved in new-music activism in New York (ISCM, APNM) and taught

at Sarah Lawrence College. Until she was recruited to teach, first, in Ann Arbor (U. Michigan) and then, to become the first woman composer on the faculty of UCLA, where she lodged until retirement. We remained laminated, doing interesting things together, until, sharing ideas about composing, teaching, remaking ourselves as composers and thinkers periodically, exploring new ways of communalizing our music-creative energies (lots of improvisation sessions with students, colleagues, friends) Elaine brought us (Jim Randall, Elaine, me) back into practical musiclife with the idea that has become Open Space Music, *The Open Space Magazine* (and Web Magazine), issuing CDs as a cooperative enterprise with fellow composers. She has published two anthologies of her writings, curated two CD albums of work by her and other women composers, and very recently edited a beautiful memorial book for Chris Mann. And now, 73 years on, here we are.

Song For Sarah was composed in 2000, recorded on Open Space CD 29.

String Quartet was composed in 1969, recorded on New World Records NW CRL 338

The work played at Barnard was a String Trio composed 1957