

### Am Grossen Wannsee – Introduction

Israeli and German musicians perform the works of Jewish composers in the room where the infamous Wannsee conference took place 67 years earlier.

### Am Grossen Wannsee – Synopsis

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, a group of young Israeli and German musicians led by Ensemble Meitar, a Chamber Ensemble from Israel, performed the works of contemporary Israeli and Jewish composers, along with an unfinished composition by Gideon Klein, a composer who was killed during the Holocaust. This unique program was performed at the House of the Wannsee Conference and Educational Site. These performances were recorded and filmed, intended for future theatrical release, broadcast and a commemorative DVD Box Set.

**Wannsee Conference:** Our project takes its name from the Wannsee Conference, a meeting of senior officials of the Nazi German regime, held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942. The purpose of this conference was to inform the heads of German Government Departments which had responsibility for various policies relating to Jews, of the "Final solution to the Jewish question", to obtain their agreement and to subordinate their activities to the official German State policy. In essence, this was the meeting at which the Final Solution was ratified and put into motion as state policy.

**Recordings:** With the generous help and cooperation of the House of the Wannsee Conference Memorial and Educational Site, The Wannsee Memorial Recordings were performed on the same day (January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009), took place in the same room, and in its edited form will be the same duration (approximately 80 minutes) as the infamous Wannsee conference. This is the first time that a project of this kind has been allowed inside the Wannsee Villa conference room. This is not meant as historical irony, nor simply as a measure of revenge or justice. It is meant to be a forceful assertion by these composers and musicians, through their music, of not being absent from history, but being an active participant in the making of this world.

**Composers and Poets:** Just as the choice of the location and the date of the concert was not a coincidence, so is the choice of the music for its originality, diversity, and haunting beauty. The concert will establish a link between the music of Gideon Klein, a composer who perished during the Holocaust, and the contemporary Israeli and Jewish composers whose music explores German culture and language and its relation to the Jewish experience.

An important aspect of this project is its range, and the diversity of its individual voices. From Gideon Klein, who explored modernism while modernism was a dark question mark, to Arie Shapira, an avant-garde Israeli composer controversial in his own country, to a group of younger Israeli composers who meet these new musical paradigms on their own terms, the Wannsee Recordings, are above all a concrete expression of the diversity of Jewish life, and the richness of contemporary music today. One would not expect to find the music of Arie Shapira, and Ernest Bloch, or Josef Bardanashvili and Gideon Klein on the same program. Our choice in selecting these pieces, whose diversity may seem extreme, was not to create a program which only explored the edges, but to create a space, a larger space because of the distance which exists between these various compositions, in which the individuality of each composition would have the necessary room it needs to take its unique form.

Perhaps it is in the words of the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld (himself a Holocaust survivor) that the core of this project can best be explained: "Who can return the violated honor of the self? I cannot claim that art is all-powerful, magic, or pure faith, but one virtue cannot be denied it: its loyalty to the individual, its devotion to its suffering and fears ..." We would like this project to be an expression of this loyalty and commitment.

**Musical Program of the Film**

- Maurice Ravel** “Kadish” for soprano and piano. (6 minutes).
- Arie Shapira** “**Achtung Rapunzel**”, for soprano, violin, cello, clarinet and bassoon (4:28 minutes). Based on the stories from Brothers Grimm.
- Arie Shapira** “**Todesfuge**”, based on Paul Celan’s poem “Death Fugue (Todesfuge)”, performed by the Berlin Choir. (4:30 minutes). The text to the poem in the English translation is attached.
- These pieces by Arie Shapira are by far the more difficult and daring pieces, exploring atonality by attributing new values to tone and language, in this case the German language.
- Ernest Bloch** “**Nigun for Baal Shem**” for mandolin and piano. Arranged by Avi Avital. (6 minutes).
- Alexander Tamir** “**Ponar**”, arranged by Nahav Cohen for mezzo-soprano, flute and cello. A Resistance song commemorating the Ponar Massacre. Arranged by Nadav Cohen.
- Ayal Adler** “**At the Gate of Darkness**”, for voice and ensemble, based on the poetry of David Vogel. (7 minutes).
- Josef Bardanashvili** “**Song for Sara**”, for voice, mandolin, clarinet, violin, cello and piano. (6 minutes). Based on Ladino poetry and Spanish musical themes.
- Gideon Klein** “**String Duo**”, for violin and cello (11 minutes). Composed by Gideon Klein, who perished as he was being transported to Auschwitz. The String Duo, a composition in two movements, was written immediately prior to Gideon Klein being deported to the Terezin concentration camp in 1941, and was left unfinished by the composer. Gideon Klein was murdered by the Nazis on January 27, 1945. He was twenty six years old. We are performing the String Duo in its original, unfinished version.

Am Grossen Wannsee  
The Wannsee Recordings