

# 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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REVISTA DE INVESTIGACIÓN MUSICAL: TERRITORIOS PARA EL ARTE

REVISTA INTERNACIONAL

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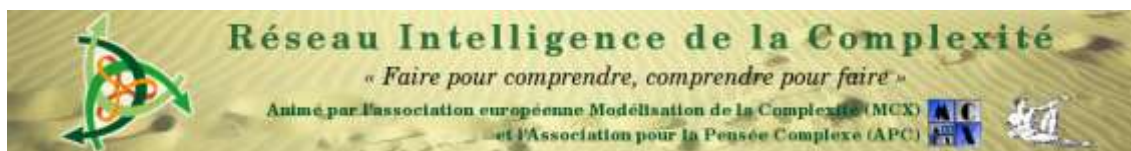
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# ***Territorios Compositoras***

## The snail

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

We always meet at weddings, in fact, we meet every morning, bringing closer nose-to-nose and look directly to discover some wrinkle. But at weddings the meeting is more meticulous: raising eyebrows, examining the accuracy of the eyeliner, the direction of the pony, and an artificial smile, with shiny teeth, to make sure 'Sarah didn't call'.

Our codes always work, and are especially critical at public events like weddings. After all, it's unpleasant to shout in the middle of the round table, "Hey, you've got something stuck between your teeth, no, not here, left, left I said, that is right, yes, yes, there!", And then: "No, it's still there, still there, farther to the left I said, yes, yes, right there, right there!", To hear the sigh, the pushed back chair, the slow walk with mouth closed to the mirror in the women's WC or in the foyer.

The elevator-music that accompanied the serving of the first course was being repeated for the third time, the same drab harmonic pattern. The waiters and their black neck ties, the women's lace, high heels and their fur - blended well into the trite social picture.

Sometimes "Sara is in a redial ring", with the dirt between the teeth being particularly stubborn, and sometimes "Sara called twice today", when two suspicious focal points appear between the shiny teeth.

Tonight, too, first thing I went to greet her. I stood in the foyer, bringing my nose closer to the mirror and smiled warmly at her, making sure the pencil line under the eyes was exact, the direction of the pony, and of course: that Sarah hadn't called.

"I think you really look my age", she complimented me out of the glass.

That's right, I thought, a little overweight and that's all, despite the 20 years that have passed.

"And how is Grandpa, still preparing scrambled egg with lots of salt? Is there anything new in the kibbutz?"

How to explain to her, I thought, that Grandpa was barely walking, and egg is prepared for him.

“Mama told me you abandoned the cello and signed up for physics studies... what does Grandpa say about that?”

I was silent.

45 is a beautiful age, I repeated to myself quietly and just smiled at her, while scraping a crumb that was stuck to the mirror. "You are too young to notice that the eyes have changed", I wanted to tell her. They had seen too much, much too much for the age of 45, and also the ears went deeper, having absorbed far too much, far too much. And the heart.

But I was silent, and only touched her at the end of her nose, feeling the cold glass of the mirror on my fingertip. I touched her exactly at the pointed tip of her nose, like mother used to do when I was three years old, as if I was a snail.

Her eyes were instantly laughing.

\*\*\*

- “No, the clinician does the test, so you have to make an appointment”.
- “But I did a test, here...”
- “Sir, this is a test from four years ago”.
- “What?”
- “This is a test from four years ago”.
- “I don't understand, I don't hear well”.
- “This is an old test. You have to have a new one”.
- “New?”
- “I'll make you an appointment, we will set a date and time, the clinician will give you a new examination. Can you come on Wednesday in a week's time?”
- “I want to know how much a new device costs”.
- “We do not give prices at the front desk, you have to make an appointment”.
- “How much? I can't hear well”.

- “Sir, We do not give prices at the front desk, you have to make an appointment. We work with several types of devices from several different companies. You have to make an appointment. The clinician will give you a new test and then will be able to offer you a suitable device with all the cost details”.

- “But I've already done a hearing test, here...”

- “That was four years ago”.

- “Four what?”

- “F o u r y e a r s”.

- “No, no! I didn't do the test at your clinic, I did it at a health fund”.

- “When to set another appointment for you?” The secretary approached in a low voice to the couple standing behind us”.

I held my grandpa's free hand, the sweaty crumpled test paper in his other hand, his eyes troubled. I leaned down a bit and examined my flushing cheeks reflected on the clinic's glass desk.

- “What to set? I can't hear well”.

- “Please wait, Sir, in fact, actually they were standing in line before you, I will finish with them and will then be with you”.

- “I didn't ask for an appointment, I just wanted to know how much new devices cost”.

\*\*\*

I threaded my body through the narrow doorway and quickly closed the door. The hasty retreat because of my entrance instantly became a noisy huddle. Fashion and political debates with each other were neglected and the moving mass carried its head to the bowl at my hands.

I squeezed my legs gently in the tangled crests and spread sprouts in a straight line as I moved on.

A mock silence prevailed. As a magic trick, games of grace and society mannerisms melted away. All of the attention was focused on the existential preoccupation which is called 'dinner'. The thumping sounds of the bullies pushing their way through vied with the lustful pecking sound of their friends who had already begun their meal.

When the bowl was empty, I made the final round for the day. No crumb remained on the ground, and the social cacophony flamed again. Crests-crests were huddled in prolific social discourse, one boasting her views, the other one her accomplishments, carrying their heads simultaneously in a pointed motion and trying to overcome each other in their shrieks.

"I sunbathed a little, didn't I?" I asked her through the snail eyes flickering in front of me, "Two weddings in one week are an achievement for us."

The sight of the hall was reflected through the mirror, crests, furs and laces, deafening my eyes in a garish carpet.

"What are they chatting about so much, as if they analyzing Mozart's Grosse Fuge?" I asked her, spreading lipstick to the angles of my lips. I closed my eyes for a moment, trying to catch the harmonic pattern of the theme melody from 'Titanic', but I swirled in the unceasing pustule sounds on top of the elevator music and the cocktail that sealed the evening.

\*\*\*

Trembling with fear  
I sagged into the quilt, sinking  
Stopped-up ears in front of walls of the world that were tearing  
Blast mane of the thunderstorms.

Had I tried to dim it  
This curvature  
I would have failed much less  
Than the same helplessness  
When I'm sinking in the crimson seat  
A match in a silent crowd  
The last chord of  
Mozart's Grosse Fuge -  
In the same electrifying quiet,  
A moment before the thunder of applause.

\*\*\*

I longed to stick my two fingers into my ears. Mama was right.

"Understand my friends? The auditory bones shake the oval window at the cochlea's orifice. The oval window shakes are shaking the fluid that fills the cochlea. The fluid oscillation drives the hairs that are on the hair cells. The hair cells create electrical potential that activates the auditory nerve cells and those nerve cells pass through the eighth nerve directly to the brain. The cochlear structure helps to decompose the environmental sounds into frequencies: As you move away from the oval window along the cochlea, the basilar membrane fluctuations correspond to the lower hearing frequencies more and more".

I stared at Professor Bernstein, mummified in a brown burgundy suit, full of rhombuses that seemed to be sewn before the war. Just the bow-tie is missing, I giggled to myself and stretched my eyelids in a desperate attempt not to fall asleep. Just not like Mama! I remembered myself gently pulling at her sleeve at the last concert, trying to stop her snoring.

“Understand my friends? If I could I would have invited Freud to our physics class. On top all of the twists of our elaborate communication organ, add the twists of the soul in a simple conversation between two people ...”

Professor Bernstein shook himself and pointed the plastic stick in his hand at the screened presentation.

“The cochlea's name may be misleading - it's not just a thin bone in the form of a snail, but a spiral space inside the skull bone. That is, the cochlea has no external wall, the illustration here may be misleading”.

I stretched my eyelids expecting to see a cute snail wrapping into itself. Any music, even simplistic 'Titanic'-elevator, would be a better substitute for the dreary monotony of this lesson.

“Sometimes I'm sorry I'm not a bat”, Professor Bernstein said, and I really appreciated him for his touching try in waking the class up.

“Which of you know how to differentiate between frequency and intensity?” It didn't seem he expected an answer, “The frequency of sound is measured in units of Hertz, after the German physicist Heinrich Rudolf Hertz. The frequency range that a human ear can receive is 20Hz to 20,000Hz. Sounds that their of frequency lower or higher are not heard”.

Since I was a child, Mama told me that when you hear a long 'ting' in your ear, the beep indicates the moment that a hair drops in the cochlea's inner ear, and with it a frequency that will no longer be heard.

I stuck my two fingers in my ear deeper and heard the professor's voice bubbling up like from water: “Bats have the ability to hear higher frequencies than humans, in fact, they use less sense of sight and dispatch sound waves and their repetitive echoes to learn about location, shape and movement of the objects around them. It's a type of biological sonar”, He touched the thick lenses of his glasses, “Some kinds of bats have skin membranes on their noses and ears, which improve the ability to hear sounds and absorb the echoes”.

I removed my fingers quickly and the professor's monotone voice continued, too loud for my taste: “The volume of the sound is measured in decibel units, discovered by Alexander Graham Bell, who also invented the telephone. A person's hearing range is in the domain of 10 to 150 decibels. Exposure to higher than 110 decibels for more than a few minutes can impair hearing ability”.



Professor Bernstein looked with satisfaction at the black screen which announced the end of the presentation.

“At our next lesson, we will summarize the subject of the outer ear, the middle ear, the inner ear - it can be a title for a lesson in the mental structure, can't it?”

\*\*\*

I arrived at the cafe about fifteen minutes late  
They sat around a corner table under the black lamp  
Strange silence  
In the decade-old glasses I had difficulty in identifying my high school friends  
Not because of the graying hair ends  
Not because of the crease of the neck

'45 is a beautiful age', I repeated to myself,  
More banal than this I can't find, I resented the harmonic pattern,  
Or about the artificiality of actually playing such elevator-music in such a cafe  
45 is a beautiful age, I repeated to myself and got closer to the table, mentally  
prepared for the greeting

The gravity of the heads  
Sunken  
Each one  
in her inner attention  
An intimate dialogue with the flickering screen

No more crests-crests  
No more laces-fur  
Not even a profound discussion on Mozart's Grosse Fuge

Eyes bulging down.  
Fingers ticking.

\*\*\*

Muteness dominated. The last encore, everyone felt. The curly-haired pianist, face of a child, sat down thoughtfully, distantly, almost detached. His head bowed down, and his hands on his knees.

Half a minute of silence.

Then, he lifted his head, closed his eyes, and his fingers sank onto the keyboard.

I will never forget those moments. Note after note, pairs and threes, came to me modestly, lucidly, growing, thickening, embroidering each other with an evolving masterpiece of choral. The melodic lines leaked with shrinking chromatics and crystallized into a harmonious meaning that grew constantly.

His body froze, his head tilted back, his eyes closed, and so he played – an act of magic.

It was a recital of a connoisseur. Not for nothing were tickets sold out two weeks in advance and the event became all the talk. After Scriabin, Musorgsky and Rachmaninoff, the audience was enthusiastic. Evgeny Kissin bowed, sweating away, repeatedly stepping backstage and again being called to the front, bowing, bowing again, and so on. But the applause did not stop. Male calls of 'Bravo' and 'Bravissimo' echoed alternately, and the entire audience stood up and cheered.

I looked at Grandpa who was on his feet despite his years, his hearing aids in his ears, his palms sweaty. Only a few times did I see Grandpa cheering like that, his palms met each other at a moderate and steady tempo, unabated. Two lines in front of me stood the figure of Professor Bernstein, mummified in a plain blue suit. This time with a bow-tie. Also Professor Bernstein stood up and clapped, in a faster tempo. I was expecting to see a kind of bat peeking out of his pocket, or at least a cute snail.

'We succeeded!' The audience sat contentedly as Kissin approached the piano, the third time since the concert was over, sharpening their ears for the honestly-earned encore. The traditional wit, that only after the concert ends begins the real concert, had proved itself again. Grandpa raised a silent right hand to his ear and pressed the button that increases the sound of his hearing aid.

The walls of the auditorium, the thousands of listeners, the distant stage, the bulk of the piano, the hands of the pianist and the composer's heart, all became one piece – an act of magic. A silent and pure act of magic.

Not a cough was heard, not even a simple clearing of the throat, everyone stiffened and held their breath in a supernatural blend with the sanctity of the notes of music.

All this took only a few minutes, the drops of sound grew quieter, dying, and in the stillness that prevailed the soft lift of the pedal could be heard. The curly-headed Kissin, with his child face, remained frozen, his eyes closed, his head tilted back, for half a minute of silence.

I looked at Grandpa, his head bent, his forehead wrinkled, his eyes closed, for a moment I wondered if he'd fallen asleep. I brought my face closer to his face. A second before the applause, my ear caught the creaking of his hearing aid, and the tear at the corner of his eye.

\*\*\*

- "Dear bathers, in another half an hour the lifeguard's hut will be closing, bathing will be prohibited".

- "Dear parents, please take care that the children do not pass the black flags".

- “Pay attention, pay attention, after seven o'clock jellyfish with teeth jump to the beach”.

I lay on my back on the sand, the sun upon my closed eyes, echoing the sounds of yesterday, deliberately avoiding putting the hat on my eyes to protect them. I enjoyed the distant voices of babbling that came to me, and I let myself get used to the strange geometric shapes that were embroidered in front of my darkened eyes.

- “Hey boys, don't go in from there, get out! Children, o u t! Whose kid is that in blue?”

- “I ask, please, dear bathers, the sea is stormy today, stormy. What is my job? That you should safely enter the water and safely leave it and return home. What more do I ask?”

- “You hear two whistles - you have to look! Who is whistling, why is he whistling?”

Achhhh, what a great cacophony! I relished and filled my lungs with the whistle. The roll with the sausage settled into my stomach satisfactorily, and I moved my tongue over my teeth in an accustomed motion, making sure 'Sara didn't call'.

- “You go in there, you risk other kids coming in after you. Please, I ask, dear bathers, stay away from the black flag, go ahead, move further north. Do you wish to get caught up in the whirlpool?”

- “The boy with the red ring, more to the north, I said, t o t h e n o r t h. What, are you a swimmer, boy? More to the north I said!”

- “Oh Moses, what he has been through! We are dealing with two thousand, how many did he deal with - tens of thousands?”

- “To me it will not happen, to me it will not happen”, but you are to blame for those coming after you! “Can't you hear the whistle?”

- Dear bathers, bathing after 7pm is prohibited! I emphasize, b a t h i n g i s p r o h i b i t e d, a f t e r 7 p m, b a t h i n g i s p r o h i b i t e d! Hey, you, get the whole group out of there!

The dim geometric shapes kept moving constantly. For a moment I imagined a snail turning into a jellyfish, and the thundering-waves echoed in addictive circuits, coming and going, coming and rounding, coming and smashing.

- “The boy with the red ring, I don't know who is watching you, get out now! Papa is in the deep? But you will stay here. What is here? Here is here! He is there, and you are here. Don't yell, don't yell, you are disturbing me hearing the waves”.

- “Dear bathers, the lifeguard's hut is closing, can you hear? We also need to sleep. I emphasize no lifeguard! Bathing in the sea is forbidden! I emphasize, f o r b i d d e n”.

The evening wore on in depth, the cellphone rang stubbornly with pointless ringtones, unanswered. The, crests- crests, the laces and the high heels , the thunderous- applause, Mozart's Grosse Fuge, the bow-tie and the rhombus, and the boy with the red ring, all became a wonderful vibrating vision merging with the thunderous-waves, not stopping for a moment, carrying millions of snails.

I opened my eyes at once. Darkness was all around. The beach was completely empty.

45 is a beautiful age, I smiled at her.