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## The Sound of a Paradox



Pictured: Amir Shpilman  
Credit: Keren Ben Zion

By James Burdick

Since graduating in 2011, Amir Shpilman, a product of Brooklyn College's music conservatory, has made impressive strides in the dynamic world of

contemporary music.

Four years ago, Chad Walther, a writer for The Kingsman did a piece on Shpilman. In his closing remarks, Walther wrote, “one can only imagine where his (Shpilman’s) career will go from here.”

After getting the chance to sit down with Shpilman and hear about his work so far and the work that has yet to come, imagination isn’t needed anymore. After all, when Shpilman was still attending Brooklyn College he was still involved in lobbying for funds to replace the now demolished Gershwin Hall.

Last year Shpilman won first place in a competition in the Young Composer’s Academy at Heidelberg Spring Music Festival in Germany with his piece “Hedef.” This year, as part of the prize for winning the competition, Shpilman will premier his new work, commissioned by the festival, titled “Echad.”

“I was intrigued by the idea of something that explodes in all dimensions and in all directions and the energy that it carries with it,” Shpilman explained about his piece “Hedef.”

“Basically I took an explosion” Shpilman continued, “and I stretched it over 12 minutes of music with all the details of what happens inside there. This is a good example of what I do.”

The Heidelberg Spring Music Festival which began in 1997, is a month long event which showcases some of the most talented musicians, performers, and composers in the world. During the festival there are a number of performances held throughout Heidelberg’s concert halls and venues. Joshua Bell and David Fulmer are just some of the big names, which have made appearances at this festival.

In addition to his success in Heidelberg, Shpilman has been commissioned by The Ensemble Intercontemporain to compose a larger work. The ensemble is widely considered to be one of the most prominent new music ensembles in the world and was founded by the composer and conductor, Pierre Boulez. The new piece will be premiered at the Venice Biennale in October 2014.

Shpilman’s ensemble, which he initiated with other alumni from Brooklyn College, Ensemble Moto Perpetuo, has also continued to perform for three years now and has received a sterling review in the New York Times. Nicholas Nelson, a professor in the music department here at Brooklyn College is also the co-founder and tech director of the ensemble.

Despite his success in recent years however, Shpilman has turned the attention back to education and now studies conducting at the Hochschule für Musik in Dresden and now resides in both Germany and Brooklyn.

While working on his new piece “Echad,” Shpilman has continued to explore various dimensions of contemporary music; an interest that he says, first took root while studying at Brooklyn College.

Jason Eckardt, a professor at Brooklyn College, in particular was a source of musical influence. According to Shpilman, the immense precision, which Eckardt he possessed was fundamental in developing his style. On the other hand, while in Germany, Shpilman also experimented with improvisation where he learned to appreciate “the intuition of the performer.”

In Shpilman’s work both of these elements inform one another and actually help the other to be complete and even transcend the sum of its parts.

“I am very much interested in conflict and conflicting ideas and looking at it as a phenomenon,” Shpilman said.

While explaining his interest in the idea of conflict as a musical theme, Shpilman’s said his theme was inspired by the city, particularly the subway system.

Shpilman spoke on how he liked to photograph various signs of rust and disrepair in the stations and trains while he traveled around the city.

“Many people consider New York City to be the center of the world,” Shpilman said, “artistically, musically, economically, socially, and yet its heart is rotten so to me that is very interesting. Something small that expresses a lot.”

“Echad,” which translates from Hebrew into the number one, will make full use of this engineering of themes according to Shpilman. The name itself implies a cohesive unit with the number one but while discussing the composition of the piece, Shpilman describes it as a paradoxically unified amalgam.

“In my music,” Shpilman said. “I explore a lot of categories. Whether it’s perception of time, perception of gesture, or deployment of energy in a performance. I categorize them and I see how they relate and how they differ and I try to merge them; merge them to create something whole that has an extra dimension.”

The result of Shpilman’s attention to detail yields provocative and often thrilling results where a solitary phrase can at the same time transcend that singularity into a paradoxical gesture of unity through multiplicity and variety.

“I spent a lot of time in research for this piece,” Shpilman confessed. “Two lines may sound similar but they are being deployed on stage with

different types of energy. So I was interested in merging these energies and constantly switching them.”

With such an abundance of influence and talent, it is not surprising to see that Shpilman’s schedule is completely filled for the next several months, with projects taking him from all over Europe, Israel, and America. Whatever the future holds in store for Shpilman it is safe to say that at very least, it is bright.

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