

Neharót New
Mansurian *Tagh for the Funeral of the Lord*^a. Three Arias (Sung out the window facing Mount Ararat)^e.
Komitas *Oror* (adapted Mansurian)^b.
Olivero *Neharót Neharót*^d.
Steinberg *Rava Deravin*^c.
Kim Kashkashian (viola); ^d**Lea Avraham**,
^d**Ilana Elia** (voices on tape); ^d**Philipp Jungk**,
^a**Robyn Schulkowsky** (percussion); ^d**An Raskin**
 (accordion); ^b**Tigran Mansurian** (piano); ^c**Kuss Quartett** (Jana Kuss, Oliver Wille, violins; William Coleman, viola; Felix Nickel, cello); ^d**Münchener Kammerorchester/Alexander Liebreich**;
^e**Boston Modern Orchestra Project/Gil Rose**.
ECM New Series 476 3281 (full price, 1 hour 1 minute). Website www.ecmrecords.com 
 Producer Manfred Eicher. Engineers ^{ab}Lech Dudzik,
^{ab}Gabriela Blicharz, ^cJohn Newton, ^cBlanton Alspaugh,
^dPeter Laenger, ^eJoel Gordon. Dates ^cJanuary 2006,
^dOctober 2007, ^eMarch and ^eMay 2008.



Kim Kashkashian

Silvia Lelli/ECM Records

Presenting works based on traditional laments, Armenian chant and Hasidic melody, Kim Kashkashian's 'Neharót' typifies why ECM continues to be such a vital force in contemporary music, with yet another imaginatively programmed disc of beautifully written, subtly emotive music. Tigran Mansurian (b.1939) has, of course, been extremely well served by the label, with a number of outstanding releases of his music, but both Betty Olivero (b.1954) and Eitan Steinberg (b.1955), as far as I'm aware, here make their ECM debuts.

Scored for solo viola, accordion, percussion, two string ensembles and tape, Olivero's *Neharót Neharót* makes an indelible impression, even on first hearing. The composer commenced work on the piece in July 2006, in response to the suffering caused by the war in Lebanon. The title, as she reveals in the booklet note, means 'Rivers, Rivers', in reference to the floods of tears which are too often shed by mourning women in disastrous situations. Out of the queasily shifting, tenebrous chords in the strings a highly ornamented melodic line emerges, first in the accordion and then – even more impassioned – in the viola.

A dramatic dialogue then ensues, with both accordion and viola spinning out the most enraptured, soaring filigree, strongly flavoured with folk-like ornamentation, counterpointed with a chordal string backdrop which shifts as slowly as an iceberg.

However, it's upon the reprise of the discordant opening, at around the nine-minute mark, that Olivero springs her surprise. As if from nowhere, the taped voices of Lea Avraham and Ilana Elia singing laments in Arabic and Kurdish suddenly cry out into the firmament. Kashkashian's viola, which here sounds at its most vocal-like, movingly adds its voice to their laments. It's the supremely understated and sympathetic way in which Olivero blends her 'found objects' – fragments of Kurdish and north African laments, quotations from Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and Book 8 of his Madrigals, the taped voices – that imbues *Neharót Neharót* with such an electrifying charge. The whole effect is achieved thanks to the meticulously well-balanced recorded sound.

Two brief pieces, Mansurian's *Tagh for the Funeral of the Lord* – in which Robyn Schulkowsky's vibraphone and Thai gongs ritualistically mark the phrase endings of Kashkashian's darkly wrought, modal melos – and his touchingly pared-down arrangement of a folk-like lullaby by Komitas (1869-1935), *Oror*, serve as preludes to the main work by the composer. Recorded in the New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall in May 2008, where Kashkashian, conductor Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project had given its world première the previous month, the very title of Mansurian's *Three Arias*

(*Sung out the window facing Mount Ararat*) conveys the vocally inspired nature of the work. Expressing the Armenian people's longing for ancient sites – Mount Ararat, the mountains of Sasun, the ruins of Ani – that lie across the border in Turkey, the three-movement piece is by turns anguished, contemplative and infinitely tender. Kashkashian's supplicatory tone in the concluding 'Lento, ma non troppo' is heart-stopping.

Taking its name from the kabbalistic term for the third meal of Sabbath, Steinberg's singularly atmospheric *Rava Deravin* ('Favour of Favours') is rich in textural detail and elegiac insight. It was originally scored for voice, flute, clarinet, string trio and piano, but Steinberg's transcription of the piece for the homogeneous timbres of solo viola and string quartet (here the excellent Berlin-based Kuss Quartett) allows for Kashkashian to be enfolded within the string texture one moment, surging above it the next.

The 28-page booklet features a typically thoughtful introductory essay by Paul Griffiths ('Memories We Did Not Know'), plus photos and short biographies of the composers and Kashkashian.

Peter Quinn