

Kim Kashkashian and Lera Auerbach An interview with NHK radio, Tokyo

Where did you two first meet?

LERA AUERBACH: Verbier!

KIM KASHKASHIAN: I met Lera at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. We got along very well, we had the same sense of humor and the same perceptions about what was going on around us in many cases. And she knew me to be someone who tried to champion new music of living composers. I think our conversations about working together started then.

LERA: I had heard Kim Kashkashian's recordings on ECM for many years. So I felt I really knew her even before we met. And so it was really organic and natural. We just felt we had known each other for a long time.

So you've known each other for quite some time. What do you think is the specialty of each other's music-making?

LERA: I think Kim is a very special and sensitive person, who puts the maximum of artistry into each performance. There is a quality of life-or-death-intensity to her performing, which is rare and wonderful. Kim is a very deep musician.

Kim, how do you find the music making of Lera Auerbach as a pianist and as a composer?

KIM: It is interesting to differentiate, and to realize that Lera performs any piece of music as if she had composed it. And that is the extraordinary thing! For me, she has a way of understanding and a perspective of a piece of music and its structure and its character and the colors that go with it. She is

able to execute, to produce those things at the piano in a way that seems completely without resistance. I'm sure it is sometimes a struggle, but it comes out so clearly, so effortlessly, and the major point of the piece of music is transmitted.

Lera, could you tell us about the idea behind the program this evening? What is the concept? You will be playing Shostakovich's '24 Preludes', which were originally for the piano, but you two will be playing it. And you also included your own work.

LERA: The heart of the program is actually the recording which we did based on Shostakovich's '24 Preludes' and my 'Sonata Arcanum' - so this is how the concept of this program started. I love Shostakovich's piano preludes and the thought of making a transcription for viola and piano was that it could be an important addition of Shostakovich's repertoire for viola, because of course we all know his 'Sonata', which is a very, very late work, and the 'Preludes' are a very early work and very different from the 'Sonata'. So I think they give violists both sides of Shostakovich and also the journey through the '24 Preludes' gives so much opportunity for colors, for experimentation of different characters, for humor - there is a lot of humor in these 'Preludes'.

And how about your own work, the 'Sonata Arcanum'? What inspired you to compose this in the first place?

LERA: I wanted to create a sonata for piano for viola and piano, and I was writing it for Kim Kashkashian. 'Arcanum' means 'mysterious knowledge', and I was fascinated by the inner voice within each of us, some may call it perhaps intuition, some may call it may be guided meditation, but there is some knowledge that we have, which we may not necessarily verbalize or rationalize, but that allows us to see the truth, to be guided, to seek answers.

And also 'Arcanum' deals with questions about death and what

is behind it - we don't know it, nobody knows it. But each person asks these questions: what is behind, what is beyond? And in many ways those questions define our life. So it is quite a tragic work with this constant tension between something inescapable that is beyond our control and yet our attempts to find meaning or perhaps find freedom from those frames that we are placed within. So it is a quest ion, it is a work that poses questions, it doesn't have answers, but it poses those perhaps essential questions.

Do you also have these titles in mind before you start composing? Or did this title come after you composed the piece?

LERA: I can't quite remember the moment when I thought of the title, but usually the titles are quite independent from the work in a sense that music comes first and the titles, or the subtitles for the movements for example, are simply an invitation for the listener to use his own imagination, to make up his own stories, to answer or ask questions. So it is just an invitation to access one's own imagination.

So in other words, you don't specifically attach any images or stories through a subtitle, it is only a kind of hint for the audience to listen to...

LERA: It is only an invitation. because I would like them to stay abstract so that they can become personal for each listener.

KIM: I would like to add something to this: Lera just spoke about mystery, inner voice, and that there is no substance to that inner voice, and she also spoke about lack of control. I believe she found the manifestation of those ineffable ideas in concrete form in the viola. Because that is exactly sensually expressed, that is what the viola can do best - it is mysterious, more than the violin or the cello. The sonority itself has not the same kind of drive or control - so you're always operating with things that aren't quite clear. And so I think part of the magic of this piece was that she

found the right instrument to express these ideas.

Anything else you would like to say to the listeners?

LERA : I've always believed that going to a concert could be an experience of transformation, and what I hope will happen, is that the music touches something within one's soul that allows it to reach some places that maybe we are scared to reach in everyday life . So I very much hope that people would be connected to this music and would make their own journey with it.

KIM: I would like to remind everyone of the first function of a musician, which was not to be in a concert hall, but to be a troubadour who travelled from town to town and told the news. So our biggest goal, our most important goal is to continue in that function. So when we walk onstage, we want to be telling a story, a new story to whoever is able to open their hearts and minds and ears to listen, and we hope that we are telling the news, whether it is with a piece that was written 200 years ago or with a piece that is being premiered today.

Lera Auerbach

Lera Auerbach is a poet, composer, concert pianist and visual artist. She has published more than 100 works for opera, ballet, orchestral and chamber music, and performs as concert pianist throughout the world. Her work is championed by leading artists, conductors, stage directors and choreographers, with recent works staged by the San Francisco Ballet, Stanislavsky Theater, Hamburg Opera, Theatre an der Wein, National Ballet of China, Finnish National Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, Netherlands Dance Theater, Semperoper and Staatskapelle Dresden, and New York's Lincoln Center.

Lera is a regular contributor to the Best American Poetry blog, has published three books of poetry and prose in Russian, and is the author of several librettos. Prizes for her works include two Golden Masks and the Hindemith Prize. She holds degrees from the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media and The Juilliard School, where she received the P. and D. Soros Fellowship. The World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, selected Lera in 2007 as a Young Global Leader and in 2014 as a Cultural Leader, where she lectured on borderless creativity, a topic that she also presented at the University of Michigan, Harvard University, the Open Society Institute and other venues.

Kim Kashkashian

Kim Kashkashian, internationally recognized as a unique voice on the viola, was born of Armenian parents in Michigan. She studied the viola with Karen Tuttle and legendary violist Walter Trampler at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore.

Kashkashian has worked tirelessly to broaden the range of technique, advocacy, and repertoire for the viola. A staunch proponent of contemporary music, she has developed creative relationships with Gyorgy Kurtag, Krzysztof Penderecki, Alfred Schnittke, Giya Kancheli, and Arvo Part, and commissioned works from Peter Eotvos, Ken Ueno, Thomas Larcher, Lera Auerbach, and Tigran Mansurian.

As a soloist, she has appeared with the great orchestras of Berlin, London, Vienna, Milan, New York, and Cleveland, and in recital at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, Kaufmann Hall, New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall, as well as in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Frankfurt, Berlin, Paris, Athens, and Tokyo.

Kim Kashkashian has been an ECM recording artist since 1985. Following Grammy Award nominations for several previous

recordings, Kashkashian received a 2012 Grammy Award in the "Best Classical Instrumental Solo" category for Kurtág and Ligeti: Music for Viola. Kashkashian's recording, with Robert Levin, of the Brahms Sonatas won the Edison Prize in 1999. Her June 2000 recording of concertos by Bartók, Eotvos and Kurtag won the 2001 Cannes Classical Award for a premiere recording by soloist with orchestra.

In 2016, Kashkashian was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.