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DANIEL ASIA' S PIANO MUSIC AND HIS ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT WITH A FOCUS ON *WHY (?) JACOB* FOR SOLO PIANO

A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

DANIEL ASIA'S PIANO MUSIC AND HIS ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT WITH A FOCUS ON *WHY (?) JACOB* FOR SOLO PIANO

The purpose of this study is to offer an overview of Daniel Asia's piano music written before 2020, with an emphasis on his character piece for solo piano, *Why (?) Jacob*. The work has been performed by the writer in Tennessee (2015), Oklahoma (2020), and Taiwan (2021).

Having been commissioned by seven American symphonies, Asia has received numerous accolades for his wide-ranging and substantial catalog of solo, chamber, vocal, orchestral works, and opera. Serving as an original study of Asia's piano compositions, this document is intended to generate public awareness and deeper appreciation of both technical and spiritual aspects of his musical works.

Chapter one includes an introduction that provides a contextual outline of Asia as a composer, his output to date, and his stylistic evolution. This is followed by the need for, purpose, scope, methodology, and design of the study, as well as related literature.

Chapter two comprises a complete biographical sketch, including Asia's educational background and professional career.

Chapter three traces Asia's artistic development through three stages of his piano works: Early (1970s), Exploratory (1980s), and American (1990s and beyond).[1] This is followed by the discussion of his connection with Judaism and involvement with Musical Elements, a New York-based contemporary ensemble he co-founded.

Chapter four presents an in-depth analysis of the solo piano work *Why (?) Jacob*. Chapter five summarizes the findings of the study and makes suggestions for further study with a

[1] These delineations are generated specifically for this study with the purpose of referencing their stylistic elements and contexts. Asia agreed with these stylistic periods, *Personal Correspondence*, April 3, 2020.

reflection section. Following the bibliography, three appendices include Asia's complete listing of compositions by category, a full discography of the works analyzed and a link to the writer's recorded performance of *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, and electronic correspondence with the composer.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Daniel Asia (b. June 27, 1953, Seattle, Washington) is described by Hurwitt as "a genuine creative spirit, an excellent composer, and a welcome addition to the roster of our strongest group of living composers."[2] In addition to his six symphonies, Asia has formed a substantial compositional catalog of solo, chamber, vocal, orchestral works, opera, and oratorio.

Asia's contributions to the contemporary classical music literature have been acknowledged by the numerous awards and grants he has received: Meet The Composer/Reader's Digest Commission, UK Fulbright Arts Award Fellowship, Guggenheim Fellowship, NEA Composer Grants, Koussevitsky Commissions, Fromm Commission, Rockefeller Grant, MacDowell Colony and Tanglewood Fellowships, and ASCAP and BMI composition prizes.

Asia has written works for solo piano, two pianos, four-hand piano, and piano with orchestra. The solo piano works include *Piano Set I* (1976), a five-movement piece; *Why (?) Jacob* (1983), a memorial piece for solo piano based on his choral work of the same title; *Scherzo Sonata* (1987), a seven-movement composition written for pianist Jonathan Shames and serving as the foundation for Asia's orchestral works Symphony No. 1 and *Black Light*; Piano Variations (1998-1999), a four-movement work dedicated to pianist Tannis Gibson; *Ragflections* (2004) and *No Time* (2004), published under the title of *Two Rags*, identified as the composer's "interaction with the world of pop music."[3] His piano ensemble works include *Piano Set II (*or *Popsicle Upside Down on the Pavement)* (1977) for two pianos and *Iris* (2017) for four-hand piano. With the support of the Meet the

[2] Elliott S. Hurwitt, "Asia: Ivory," *Schwann Opus* (Vol. 7, No. 2, Spring 1996), quoted in James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997).

[3] Daniel Asia, program note for "*Ragflections* and *No Time*," Music + Festival 2018: Claude Debussy and Daniel Asia, accessed January 3, 2020, https://wpu.cfa.arizona.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/10/22231605/ProgramMusicPlusFestival2018-DebussyAsia.pdf, 13.

Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program, his Piano Concerto (1994) was commissioned for pianist André-Michel Schub by seven American regional symphonies (Phoenix, Milwaukee, New Jersey, Grand Rapids, Jacksonville, Chattanooga, and North Carolina Symphonies). The Piano Concerto, one of his most frequently performed keyboard pieces, is described by Jeffrey Kaczmarczyk as "a remarkable pastiche of colorful orchestration surrounding jazzy rhythms and dark romanticism with an internal depth, almost a brooding intensity, propelling it forward."[4]

Asia's chamber music includes the Piano Quartet (1989), Piano Trio (1996), Sonata for Violin and Piano (2001), and *A Lament* for Cello and Piano (2001). His works for solo instruments other than piano include the *Dream Sequence I* (for solo trombone), *Orange* (for solo viola), *Marimba Music* (for solo marimba), *Your Cry Will Be a Whisper* (for solo guitar), *The Alex Set* (for solo oboe), *Guitar Set I* (for solo guitar), *Songs of Transcendence* (for solo guitar), Cello Suite (for solo cello), *Unicorns are Fireproof* (for solo flute), and *Ragflections* (for solo organ or piano).

Drawn to the Jewish philosophical, cultural, and religious tradition, Asia seeks a better understanding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane through his music. The immediate influence of Judaism can be best felt in his vocal works that include, to name a few, the *Amichai Songs* (for baritone, flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, and piano), *Pines Songs* (for soprano, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon, and piano), *Breath in a Ram's Horn "Songs for My Father"* (for high voice and piano), *Purer than Purest Pure* (for four-part choir), *Why (?) Jacob* (for eight-part choir and piano), and *In Honor of the 60th Birthday of Israel* (for tenor, mezzo-soprano, chorus, and

[4] William Phemister, *The American Piano Concerto Compendium*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 13.

orchestra). Use of Jewish prayers, Hebrew texts, and literary association with modern poets, particularly E. E. Cummings,[5] Paul Pines,[6] and Yehuda Amichai,[7] abounds in his vocal oeuvre.

Recent additions to Asia's compositional catalogue contain *The Tin Angel* (opera), *Divine Madness* (oratorio), and Symphony No. 6 "*Iris*." A complete listing of his compositions by category as of 2020 is included in Appendix A.

Asia has developed a distinctive voice that transcends technical considerations and allows him to express himself in a direct and confident manner.[8] His piano works by themselves reveal his stylistic evolution from minimalistic, Avant Garde, and nontonal qualities of his early works to quasi-tonal, neo-romantic,[9] and "American" qualities of his later works. As the first survey of Asia's piano works, this study aims to provide a closer look at those compositions and to generate interest in further study of his music.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to introduce Asia's piano works to a wider audience within and outside the United States. As Jan Swafford has written, "What has happened to Asia's music in the

[5] Edward Estlin "E.E." Cummings (1894–1962): American poet, painter and author known for his mastery of unconventional phrasing and punctuation. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/E-E-Cummings.

[6] Paul Pines (1941–2018): American-Jewish poet, writer and founder of the Lake George Jazz Weekend. *Lake George Arts Project*, accessed February 1, 2020. https://www.lakegeorgearts.org/paul-pines/.

[7] Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000): Israeli poet, whose works have been translated into 40 languages. *Poetry Foundation*, accessed February 20, 2020. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/yehuda-amichai.

[8] Peter Burwasser, "Daniel Asia: Music as an Encounter with the Sacred," *Fanfare* 32, no. 2 (2008).

[9] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 16.

past thirty-five years is what has happened in new music."[10] Through his piano works, professional musicians will encounter the stylistic variety of this composer of their own generation, and music-loving audiences will have a broader understanding of the composer's musical voice. It is a privilege to call musical connoisseurs and amateurs alike to witness Asia's unfolding contributions to contemporary musical thought, hoping to invite continuing studies and performances of his music as well as those of other living composers.

Scope of the Study

Although Asia's output is wide-ranging in medium, form, and content, this study will focus specifically on his piano works written before 2020.

Need for the Study

Growing interest in Asia's works is manifested in the inclusion of his Piano Concerto in the second edition of Phemister's *The American Piano Concerto Compendium* (2018)[11] and its appearance in Phemister's presentation "Beyond Rhapsody in Blue: Other Great American Concertos" at the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) national conference in 2019.[12] Not only have his piano works been reviewed in scholarly journals and major newspapers, they are also included in numerous reference guides to the classical piano literature of the twentieth century. However, there are no theses

[10] Jan Swafford, "On Daniel Asia's Symphonies," *The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 90.

[11] William Phemister, *The American Piano Concerto Compendium*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 13.

[12] William Phemister, "*Beyond Rhapsody in Blue: Other Great American Piano Concertos*," MTNA National Conference (Spokane, Washington, March 18, 2019), accessed February 12, 2020. https://www.mtna.org/MTNA/Engage/Conferences/Handouts/2019/Monday.aspx

or dissertations focused exclusively on his piano works to date. This document intends to serve as the initial step toward further scholarly efforts.

Methodology

To provide the context of Asia's piano works, a biographical sketch will be compiled. With the hope of understanding how his Judaism has been one of the influences on his musical choices, this biography will be based on information gathered in published materials, the composer's curriculum vitae on his official website, his own program notes, documented interviews, and my electronic correspondence with him.

Design of the Study

Chapter one presents an introduction to this study, including its need for, purpose, scope, methodology, and design of the study, as well as related literature. Chapter two provides biographical information that includes Asia's educational background and professional career. Chapter three discusses his artistic development through his piano compositions written in the Early (1970s), Exploratory (1980s), and American (1990s and beyond) periods. This is followed by further discussions on Musical Elements, the contemporary chamber music group Asia co-founded, and his relationship with Judaism. Chapter four focuses on an analysis of *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano. Chapter five concludes with a reflection section and a summary of the document with suggestions for further study.

Related Literature

Since Asia is a contemporary musical artist who has not received sufficient scholarly treatment, I discuss all relevant literature I have identified.

Reference Works

Biographical information on Asia and his works can be found on his official website[13] and in general music reference sources such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd ed.),[14] *Dictionary of American Classical Composers* (2nd ed.),[15] *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Classical Musicians* (8th ed.),[16] *The American Piano Concerto Compendium* (2nd ed.),[17] and the *Guide to the Pianist' Repertoire* (4th ed.).[18]

Books

The book *Jewish Experience in Classical Music*: *Shostakovich and Asia* discusses the incorporation of Jewish elements in both composers' music, their expressive languages, and their views on Judaism.[19] Dmitri Shostakovich's works, such as his Symphony No. 13 "Babi Yar," Piano Trio No. 2, String Quartet No. 2, and Violin Concerto No. 1, exemplify the composer's treatment of Jewish elements in his music; Asia's Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5 illustrate the roles of Jewish culture and philosophy in his works.

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[13] Daniel Asia, "Biography," *Daniel Asia*, 2016, accessed October 20, 2019, https://danielasia.net/biography-2/.

[14] Stanley Sadie, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 2001), 111.

[15] Neil Butterworth, *Dictionary of American Classical Composers*, 2nd ed. (NY: Routledge, 2005), 16–17.

[16] Nikolas Slonimsky, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of 20th Century Classical Musicians*, 8th ed. (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 47.

[17] William Phemister, *The American Piano Concerto Compendium*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 13.

[18] Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts, *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 37.

[19] Daniel Asia, Curtis and Margaret Smith, Alexander Tantser, Janet Sturman, Jan Swafford, Topher Booth, Aryeh Tepper, Alex Dunkel, *Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia*, ed. Alexander Tantser (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2014).

Dissertations

Five doctoral dissertations on Asia's works are identified. Doebler's "*An annotated catalogue of choral works commissioned by the Ithaca College Choral Series* (2014)"[20] sees Asia's rhythmic features and harmonic treatment as devices which serve the syllabic presentation and satirical style of verses by E. E. Cummings, via a particular example of Asia's choral work *Purer than Purest Pure*.

According to Snydacker's "*The New American Song: a catalogue of published songs by 25 American living composers* (2011),"[21] the characteristics in Asia's song repertoire often embrace the Hebrew language and qualities of impressionism, post-tonality, and minimalism.

Adams' "*Timbral diversity: An annotated bibliography of selected works for the tenor trombone containing extended technique* (2008)"[22] addresses atypical performance techniques employed in Asia's *Dream Sequence I* for solo trombone, which requires the performer to engage tapping, singing, stamping, and exhaling through the instrument while playing.

Asia's Piano Concerto, along with other piano concerti by Ravel and Bartók, inspired Martin's composition project entitled "*Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (2018)."[23]

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[20] Elizabeth A. Doebler, "An annotated catalogue of the commissioned works of the Ithaca College Choral Series published by Theodore Press Company" (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2014), accessed December 30, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/1652010885?pq-origsite=primo.

[21] Sarah Elizabeth Snydacker, "The New American Song: a catalogue of published songs by 25 American living composers" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2011), accessed October 19, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2649&context=etd.

[22] James Max Adams, "Timbral diversity: An annotated bibliography of selected works for the tenor trombone containing extended technique," (DMA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2008), accessed December 30, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304539573?pq-origsite=primo.

[23] Christian Martin, "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2018), accessed October 19, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/2051269920?accountid=12964.

Kantor's dissertation, "*A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia* (1997),"[24] is the first-ever study specifically on Asia's music. It offers a detailed stylistic survey of his five choral works: *Nineteen* (1973), *Why (?) Jacob* (1978), *She* (1981), *Celebration* (1988), and *Purer than Purest Pure* (1996). Asia's style has evolved from "free-wheeling" and avant-garde to quasi-tonal and melodic,[25] as illuminated by Kantor's juxtaposition of *Why (?) Jacob* (1983) and *Purer than Purest Pure* (1996). However, Asia's compositional language has not settled on any stylistic definitions previously given to his music. His musical idiom, particularly in the piano works, has continued exploring new territory, as stated in his own program notes for *Ragflections* and *No Time*: "…[rag time] is rather a natural addition to my piano works as my music of the last forty years or so is increasingly tonal and interested in raising sparks from an interaction with the world of pop music…"[26]

Journal Articles

Asia's Piano Trio, *Scherzo Sonata*, and Piano Concerto have been reviewed by Dankner in *Notes* (Vol. 61, no. 1) along with the Symphony No. 2 "*Celebration Symphony (Khagiga:In Memoriam Leonard Bernstein)*," *Breath in Ram's Horn "Songs for My Father"* (for Tenor or Soprano and Piano), *An E. E. Cummings Songbook* (for Tenor or Soprano and Piano), and *The Alex Set* (for Solo Oboe or

[24] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964.

[25] Ibid., 16.

[26] Daniel Asia, program notes for "Music + Festival 2018: Claude Debussy and Daniel Asia," accessed February 2, 2020, https://wpu.cfa.arizona.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/10/22231605/ProgramMusicPlusFestival2018-DebussyAsia.pdf, 13.

Saxophone). Dankner describes Asia's music as neo-romantic with an "American" sound, resulting from integrating multiple tonal languages and rhythmic diversity.[27]

Other articles and periodicals related to Asia, his music, and discographies, appear in numerous newspapers, scholarly journals, and classical-music magazines. They include "*Asia's American Sound*" (*Tribune Business News*),[28] "*One Concerto, Two Artists, 25 Opportunities*" (*New York Times*),[29] "*Visiting professor explores Jewish faith through music*" (*Elon News Network* of Elon University, North Carolina),[30] "*Breath in a Ram's Horn: Why Classical Music is like Jewish Prayer*" (*HuffPost*[31]),[32] "*Meet Daniel Asia and Get the Inside Story*" (*Seattle Times*),[33] "*Music Professor Tapped for National Council on the Arts*" (*UA News* of University of Arizona, Tucson),[34] *"To Open in Praise – Vocal Works by Daniel Asia"* (*New Music Connoisseur*),[35] "*New Music Review: Daniel*

[27] Stephen Dankner, "Various Works by Daniel Asia." *Notes* 61, no. 1 (2004): 237–40, accessed October 1, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/4487351.

[28] Cathalena E. Burch, "Asia's American Sound." *McClatchy - Tribune Business News,* December 14, 2007, accessed November 18, 2019. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/463423992?accountid=12964.

[29] Leslie Kandell, "One Concerto, Two Artists, 25 Opportunities." *New York Times*, February 18, 1996, accessed November 18, 2019. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/109608603?accountid=12964.

[30] Stephanie Lamm, "Visiting professor explores Jewish faith through music." *Elon News Network*, March 6, 2014, accessed November 15, 2019. https://www.elonnewsnetwork.com/article/2014/03/visiting-professor-explores-jewish-faith-music.

[31] Formerly *The Huffington Post*.

[32] Daniel Asia, "Breath in a Ram's Horn." *Huffpost*, last modified 2017, accessed December 21, 2019. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/breath-in-a-rams-horn_b_1864638.

[33] Melinda Bargreen, "Meet Daniel Asia and Get the Inside Story." *The Seattle Times*, February 15, 1990, accessed March 22, 2020. https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19900215&slug=1056159.

[34] Andy Ober, "Music Professor Tapped for National Council on the Arts." *UA News*, February 18, 2020, accessed March 25, 2020. https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/music-professor-tapped-national-council-arts.

[35] Ben Yarmolonsky, "To Open in Praise – Vocal Works by Daniel Asia." *New Music Connoisseur* 24, no. 1 (2018): 12, accessed September 26, 2019. https://www.newmusicconnoisseur.org/issues/Vol24-1.pdf.

Asia's Scherzo Sonata" (*Clavier*[36]),[37] "*Revisiting Composer Daniel Asia*" (*Fanfare*),[38] *American Record Guide*, and *Gramophone*.

[36] Currently known as *Piano Magazine*.

[37] Jane Magrath, "New Music Review: Daniel Asia's Scherzo Sonata for Piano." *Clavier* 35, no. 5 (1996): 36.

[38] James Reel, "Revisiting Composer Daniel Asia." *Fanfare* 28, no. 1 (2004): 38–41.

CHAPTER TWO

Biography

Daniel (Isaac) Asia was born on June 27, 1953 into a Reform Jewish family in Seattle, Washington. His father, a lawyer, was a fine pianist, who would have pursued a concert career except for the onslaught of depression and family matters.[39] Just like many other children in Jewish homes, Daniel was encouraged to study an instrument and classical music.[40] His introduction to classical music began with the trombone when he was in the third grade. He chose trombone over clarinet, the instrument he originally intended to learn, because of his protruding front teeth.[41]

Asia attended Lakeside School in Seattle, where his major musical influence was Peter Siebert, who provided him with theory guidance and later pointed him to Hampshire College in Amherst. Jerome Gray, with whom he studied jazz and learned how to create musical ideas,[42] was another influence in his mid teens. Gray was one of the greatest jazz musicians of his time in Seattle and was on the piano faculty at Cornish College of the Arts. He, together with his colleagues, formed the Cornish Quintet to take noncommercial jazz "beyond jamming and to appeal to more structured tastes."[43] Asia also studied guitar, trombone, and jazz and played in bands, orchestras, and jazz ensembles.

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[39] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 14, 2020.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Daniel Asia, *Song of America*, accessed March 14, 2020. https://songofamerica.net/composer/asia-daniel/.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Kurt E. Armbruster, *Before Seattle Rocked: A City and Its Music* (Washington: University of Washing Press, 2011), 263.

It was during his time at Hampshire College that Asia began playing the piano seriously. In this Five-College area,[44] he was able to study with teachers from both Hampshire College, his home campus, and Smith College. His contact with instructors at Hampshire College included Randall McClellan, who specialized in electronic music; Valerie Pilcher, the founder of Hampshire College chorus; and James McElwaine, a Yale graduate, who, together with Asia, later became the founding members of the contemporary chamber music group called Musical Elements. Asia's other teachers at Smith College included Stephen Albert, known for a lyrical quality in his music despite the complexity of the score;[45] Ronald Perera, best recognized for his text settings by Dickinson, Grass, Cummings, and Shakespeare;[46] and Iva Dee Hiatt, founder of Smith College Chamber Singers.[47]

After receiving a bachelor of arts degree in Music and European History from Hampshire College in 1975, Asia continued his education at the Yale School of Music, where he received a master of music degree in Composition and Conducting in 1977. He considered Jacob Druckman[48] his primary composition teacher at Yale. Druckman's studies with Aaron Copland have been seen as a significant influence on Asia's music.[49] Asia also studied composition with Bruce MacCombie[50] and

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[44] Incorporated in 1965, Five Colleges, Inc. is one of the oldest and most highly regarded consortiums in American higher education. It includes members of four private colleges (Hampshire, Amherst, Smith, and Mt. Holyoke) and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. https://www.smith.edu/academics/five-colleges, accessed May 14, 2020.

[45] Brad Hill, "Stephen Albert (1941-1992)" in *American Popular Music: Classical* (NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2006), 5.

[46] Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts, "Ronald Perera (1941-)" in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 754. http://www.ronaldperera.com/, accessed May 17, 2020.

[47] Iva Dee Hiatt (1919-1980): http://www.cantatasingers.org/iva-dee-hiatt/, accessed May 17, 2020.

[48] Jacob Druckman (1928-1996) in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed., 341.

[49] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964, 13.

[50] Bruce MacCombie (1942-2012) in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed., 646.

Alan Pollack[51] his first year. Other instructors included Robert Morris[52] in electronic music and Arthur Weisberg[53] in conducting. Weisberg's creation of his Contemporary Chamber Ensemble was viewed to have inspired Asia to start an ensemble of the similar kind.[54]

After graduating from Yale in 1978, Asia, along with Yale alumni, founded Musical Elements,[55] a New York City-based contemporary chamber music ensemble devoted to performing works by its members, promoting under-represented music, and commissioning new works.

Asia spent the summer of 1979 at Tanglewood, where he took composition lessons with Gunther Schuller.[56] The following year, Asia received a fellowship to study composition with Isang Yun[57] at the Universität der Künste Berlin (formerly Hochschule der Künste Berlin).

Although Kantor in his dissertation indicates that Asia's development as a composer was shaped particularly by Druckman, Weisberg, and Schuller through both their philosophies and their accomplishments,[58] Asia himself views his artistic growth as influenced by all of his teachers and also by the composers he profoundly admires: Stravinsky, Debussy, Beethoven, Copland, and Ives.[59]

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[51] Alan Pollack (1948-), *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_W._Pollack, last updated January 20, accessed May 17, 2020.

[52] Robert Morris (1943-) in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed., 694.

[53] Arthur Weisberg (1931-2009), *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Weisberg, last updated May 21, accessed May 24, 2020.

[54] Kantor, 13.

[55] Musical Elements Official Website: http://musicalelementsensemble.blogspot.com/, accessed May 5, 2020.

[56] Gunther Schuller (1925-2015) in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed., 882.

[57] Isang Yun (1917-1995) in *Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire*, 4th ed., 1036.

[58] Kantor, 13.

[59] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 14, 2020.

From 1981–1986, Asia was Assistant Professor of Contemporary Music and conductor of the wind ensemble at Oberlin Conservatory. In 1986, he was appointed Visiting Lecturer at City University, London, a position he held for two years. His stay was made possible through the support of a UK Fulbright Arts Award Fellowship and a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. By 1987, he was conducting performances with both the Endymion Ensemble in London and Musical Elements in New York.[60]

From 1991–1994, Asia served as Composer-in-Residence for the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra through the Orchestral Residencies Program of Meet the Composer. He joined the faculty at the University of Arizona, Tucson, in 1988, where he heads the composition program and directs the American Culture and Ideas Initiative. Recently nominated as a member of the National Council on the Arts,[61] he has been a frequent guest speaker at educational institutions and synagogues in the United States and Europe.

[60] Kantor, 13.

[61] Andy Ober, "Music Professor Tapped for National Council on the Arts" *UA News*, February 18, 2020, accessed May 15, 2020, https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/music-professor-tapped-national-council-arts.

CHAPTER THREE

Asia's Piano Works and His Artistic Development

Daniel Asia wrote eight piano works between 1975 and 2017. They encompass five solo works, one concerto, one for two pianos, and one for four-hand piano. Neil Butterworth[62] describes Asia's artistic evolution as leading from the early style that was "dense in texture with complex rhythms" to later works of "simpler texture, color, rhythmic materials in more developed and sophisticated formal designs."[63] Jan Swafford, composer and author of award-winning books on Ives, Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart, views Asia's stylistic trajectory as a microcosm of the unfolding of American contemporary classical music in the past four decades.

> There is a yearning for grander and more expressive canvases. There is a weaving-in of American jazz and popular elements, and at the same time a turning from the relentless redundancies of Minimalism toward richer content. There is above all a search for social and spiritual meaning in what we do.[64]

This development of musical taste in American contemporary classical music includes a rise in a sense of national identity and perhaps a growing moral urgency in the composer's role.

For the convenience of discussion, three stylistic periods of Asia's piano works are provided: Early, Exploratory, and American.[65] These delineations are generated specifically for this study with the purpose of referencing their stylistic elements and contexts.

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[62] Neil Butterworth (1934-): A music critic, composer, broadcaster for BBC Radio Scotland, author of books such as *Dictionary of American Classical Composers* (1984), *The American Symphony* (1998), *The Music of Aaron Copland* (1985), and *Haydn: His Life and Time* (1977). http://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n80-159125/, accessed May 13, 2020.

[63] Neil Butterworth, *Dictionary of American Classical Composers*, 2nd ed. (NY: Routledge, 2005), 17.

[64] Jan Swafford, "On Daniel Asia's Symphonies," *The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 92.

[65] Asia agreed with these stylistic periods, *Personal Correspondence*, April 3, 2020.

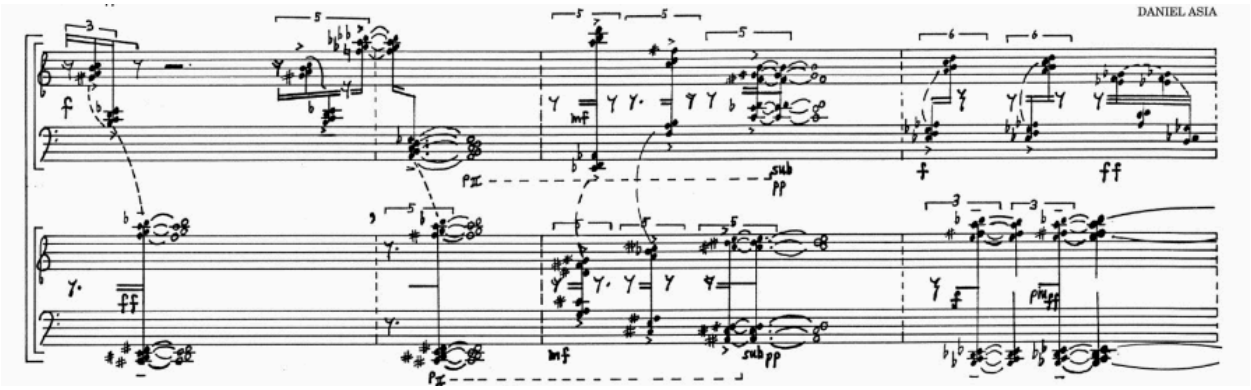
The Early Period (1970s)

Asia's piano works of this period are *Piano Set I* (1975) for solo piano and *Piano Set II* (1976) for two pianos. His early works seem to illustrate his immersion in the contemporary vernaculars, with their brisk changes of gestures and deviation from traditional tonal language. Critics describe his early style as incorporating "minimalism's rhythmic gestures"[66](Ex. 1) and the "Avant Garde in melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic elements"[67] (Ex. 2).

Example 1. *Piano Set I*, 4th movement, m. 1.



Example 2. *Piano Set II*, 1st movement, mm. 1-4.

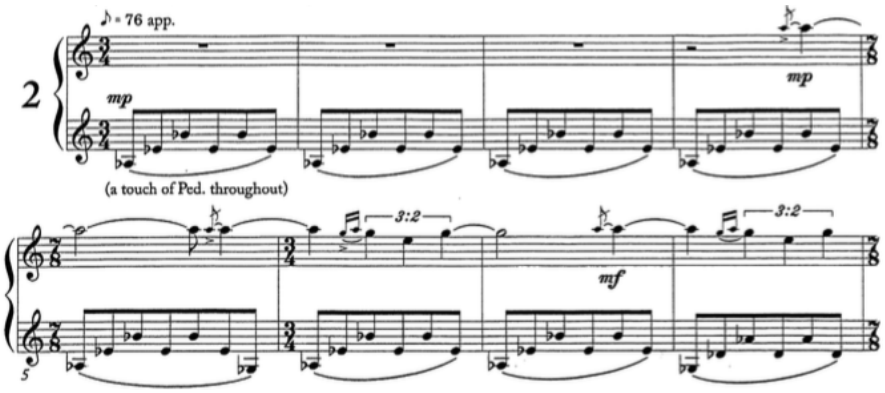


[66] Paul Cook, "Asia: Symphonies No. 2 & 3," *Classical Pulse* (August 1994).

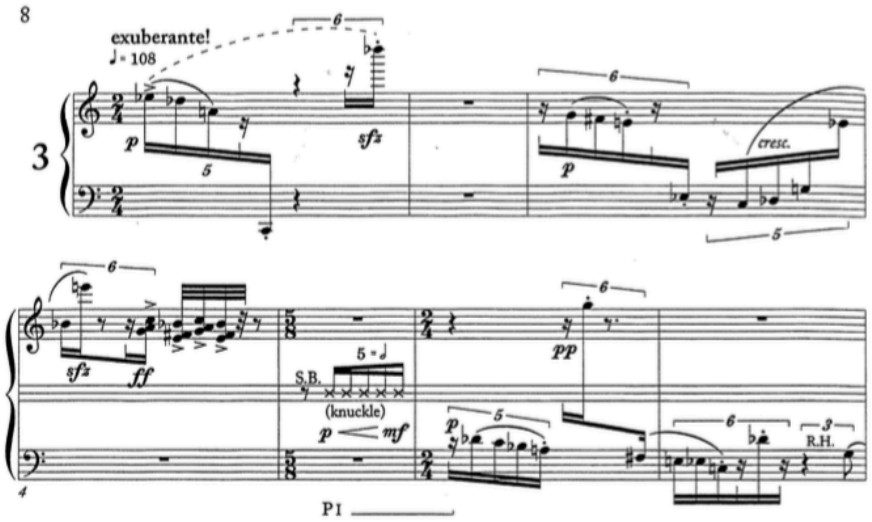
[67] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 16.

Both *Sets* consist of multiple movements of contrasting musical characters and gestures. Each of the five movements of the *Piano Set I* has a different musical feature, ranging from a melancholy atmosphere (Ex. 3) to a musical image reminiscent of a Jackson Pollack painting (Ex. 4).[68]

Example 3. *Piano Set I*, 2nd movement, mm. 1-8.



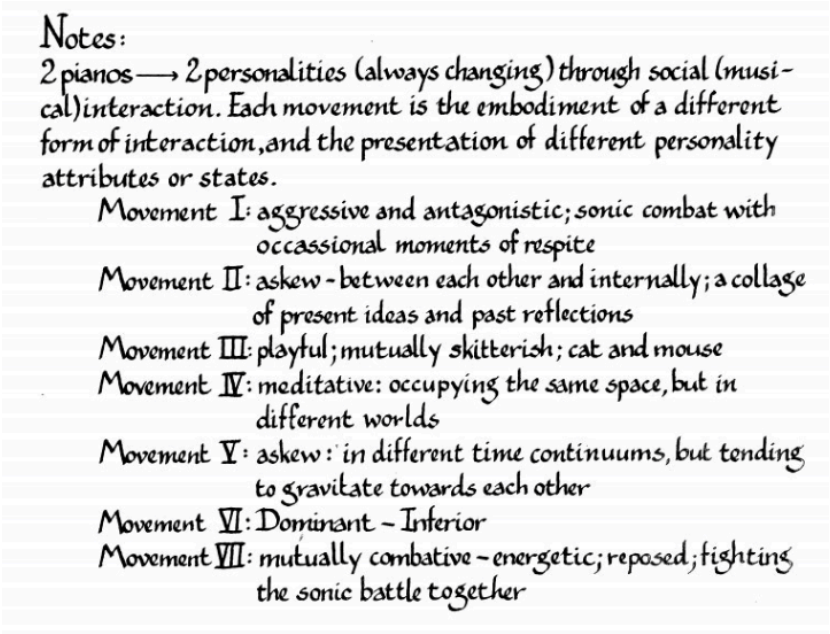
Example 4. *Piano Set I*, 3rd movement, mm. 1-7.



[68] Daniel Asia, program note for *Piano Set I*, Music + Festival 2018: Claude Debussy and Daniel Asia, accessed January 3, 2020, https://wpu.cfa.arizona.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/10/22231605/ProgramMusicPlusFestival2018-DebussyAsia.pdf, 13.

The contrasting musical characters in *Piano Set II* are marked by two personalities (two pianos) as they interact with each other through seven movements presenting seven personality attributes.

Performance Commentary of *Piano Set II*.


Notes:
2 pianos ⟶ 2 personalities (always changing) through social (musical) interaction. Each movement is the embodiment of a different form of interaction, and the presentation of different personality attributes or states.

Movement I: aggressive and antagonistic; sonic combat with occassional moments of respite

Movement II: askew - between each other and internally; a collage of present ideas and past reflections

Movement III: playful; mutually skitterish; cat and mouse

Movement IV: meditative: occupying the same space, but in different worlds

Movement V: askew: in different time continuums, but tending to gravitate towards each other

Movement VI: Dominant – Inferior

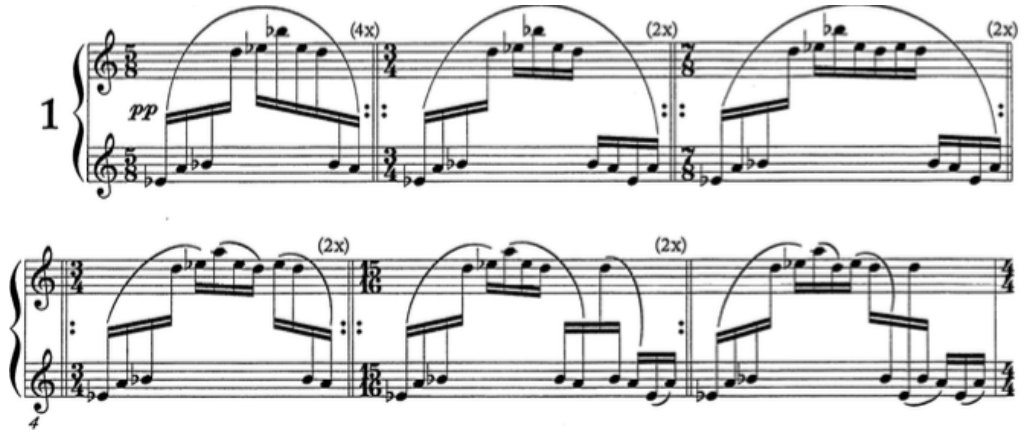
Movement VII: mutually combative – energetic; reposed; fighting the sonic battle together

To avoid verbatim reiteration in his music, Asia often uses slurs and accents for diversifying rhythms and developing limited pitch material, as in the first movement of the *Piano Set I* (second half of Ex. 5). This is probably why he calls this movement "proto-minimalist."[69] In the same musical example, one can see additional notes inserted every time the original idea repeates. This particular way of developing a melody is first discussed and termed "melodic acculumation" by Kantor in his dissertation (Ex. 5).[70]

[69] Ibid.

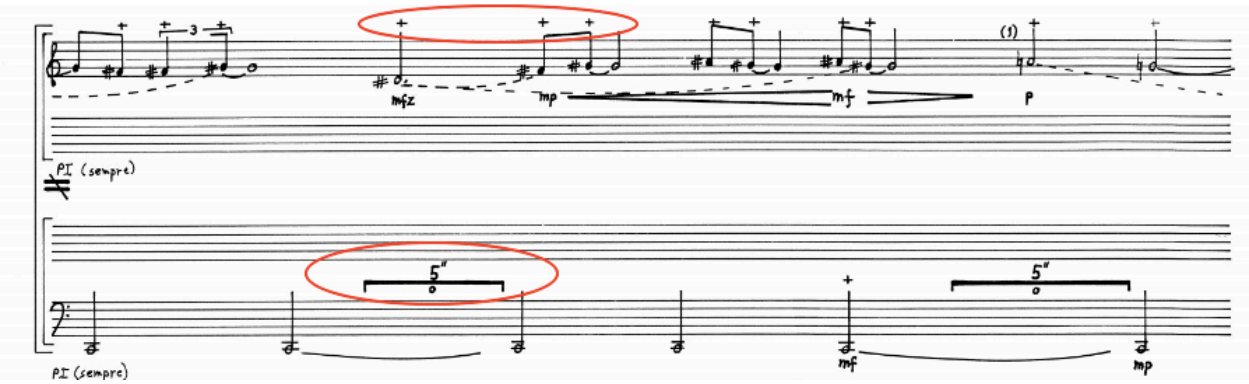
[70] Kantor, 9.

Example 5. *Piano Set I*, 1st movement, mm. 1-6.



In both *Sets*, Asia uses extended performance techniques, such as knocking on the piano soundboard and playing inside the piano on the strings (m.5 in Ex. 4). He suggests an experimental stage setting, "having two pianos placed as far apart as the space allows,"[71] in *Piano Set II*. He also incorporates notation symbols inspired by those in George Crumb's *Makrokosmos* in the same work,[72] such as + for muted tone (in upper staff of Piano I in Ex. 6) and extended fermatas indicating precise durations (in lower staff of Piano II in Ex. 6).

Example 6. Incorporation of Crumb's symbols. *Piano Set* II, 4th movement, p.18.



[71] Daniel Asia, performance commentary of *Piano Set II*, Merion Music, Inc.

[72] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, April 18, 2020.

During this period, the majority of works are electroacoustic music and compositions for solo instruments without piano, as well as the String Quartet No. 1 and several choral works.

The Exploratory Period (1980s)

The exploratory period contains two solo piano works, *Why (?) Jacob* (1983) and *Scherzo Sonata* (1987). The solo piano version of *Why* was adapted from the choral version (1978) written at the end of the early period. Kantor finds a sense of "free-wheeling in melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements" that permeates these works.[73] In spite of explicit markings of musical expressions and nontonal writing that still remain, Asia seems to display a sense of internal unification in these works. The exploratory period also sees the beginning of prolific symphonic works, with the *Scherzo Sonata* (1987) serving as the genesis of the Symphony No. 1 and the orchestral work *Black Light*.

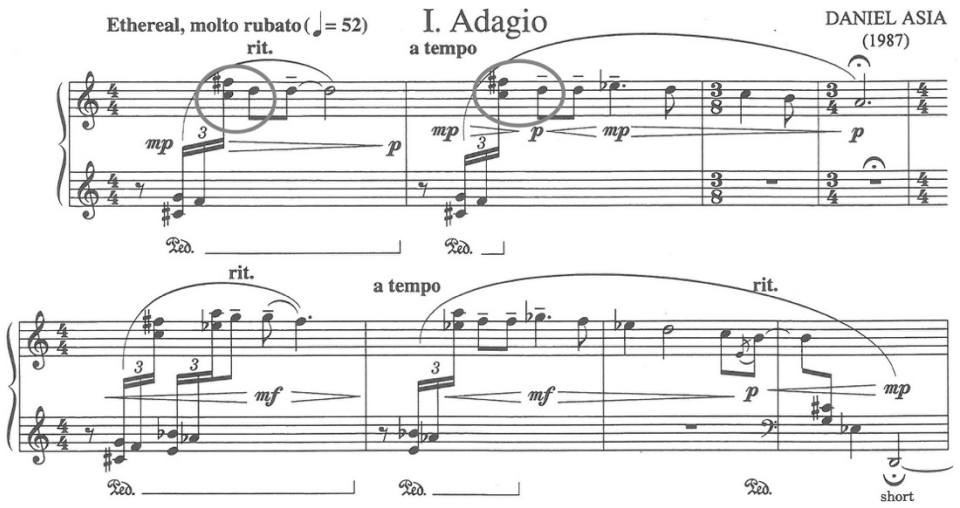
The solo piano version of *Why (?) Jacob*, a single-movement work, is unified by the reoccurrences of the tonal "chant" sections contrasting with the other sections of rhythmically and harmonically free-wheeling writing. A deeper analysis of *Why* is presented in Chapter four.

The *Scherzo Sonata* comprises three quicksilver scherzos in 6/16 meter interspersed between four relatively slow movements. The germ idea of a falling 3rd ($F^{\#}$–D, circled in Ex. 7, mm.1-2) in the first movement, mostly in apparent and sometimes in subtle manifestations, generates "a sense of unity due to the constant variation of material that returns in each of the scherzos."[74]

[73] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 16.

[74] Stephen Dankner, "Various Works by Daniel Asia." *Notes* 61, no. 1 (2004): 237–40, accessed October 1, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/4487351. 239.

Example 7. *Scherzo Sonata*, 1st movement, mm. 1-8.



The American Period (1990s-)

Today, Asia acknowledges that his musical language has become "less about quick changes of materials and more about continuity."[75] This is evident in the piano works of the American period: Piano Concerto (1994), Piano Variations (1998-99), *Two Rags* (2004) for solo piano, and *Iris* (2017) for four-hand piano. The American atmosphere in these works is evoked by an infusion of driving rhythms and jazz idioms woven into a more transparent texture with a more tonal language.

Phemister included Asia's Piano Concerto in the second edition of the *American Piano Concerto Compendium* (2018)[76] and presented the work as one of the great American concertos at the MTNA national conference in 2019.[77] Dankner describes the driving rhythms in the Piano Concerto as

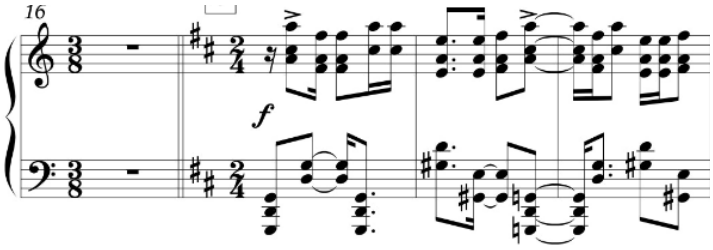
[75] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, April 3, 2020.

[76] William Phemister, *The American Piano Concerto Compendium*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 13.

[77] William Phemister, "*Beyond Rhapsody in Blue: Other Great American Piano Concertos*," MTNA National Conference (Spokane, Washington, March 18, 2019), accessed February 12, 2020. https://www.mtna.org/MTNA/Engage/Conferences/Handouts/2019/Monday.aspx

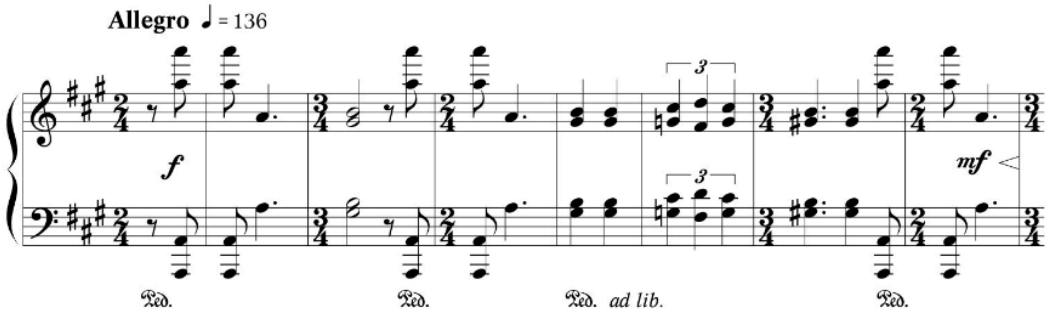
part of Asia's whimsical expression and as "certainly one of the characteristics that identify his music as American-composed"[78] (Ex. 8).

Example 8. Piano Concerto, 3rd movement, mm. 16-19.



Dankner also suggests that Asia's preference for bare octave texture attests to his American sound (Exs. 9 and 10).[79] This textural transparency or "plainness in texture" is one of the distinctive qualities often associated with the music of Aaron Copland.[80]

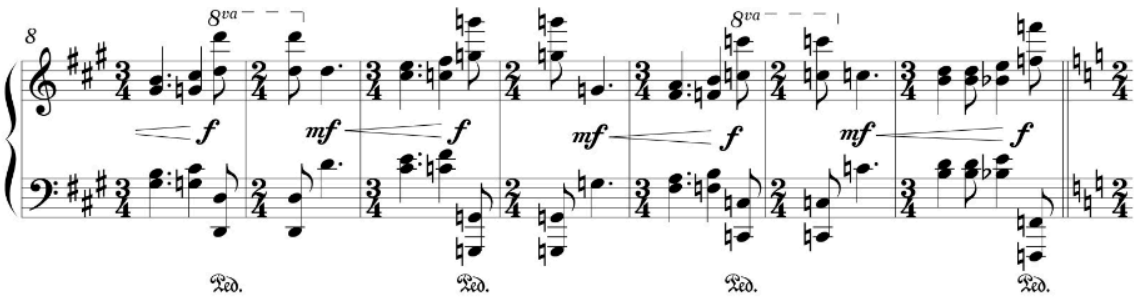
Example 9. Piano Concerto, 1st movement, mm. 1-14.



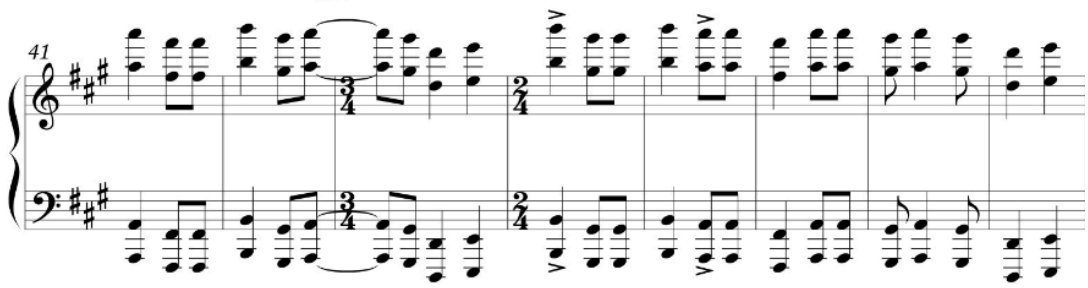
[78] Stephen Dankner, "Various Works by Daniel Asia." *Notes* 61, no. 1 (2004), accessed October 1, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/4487351. 238.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Rex Levang, "What makes Copland's music so American," *The Minnesota Monthly*, November 2000, accessed May 1, 2020, http://music.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/0011_copland/minnmo.shtml.



Example 10. Piano Concerto, 1st movement, mm. 41-48.



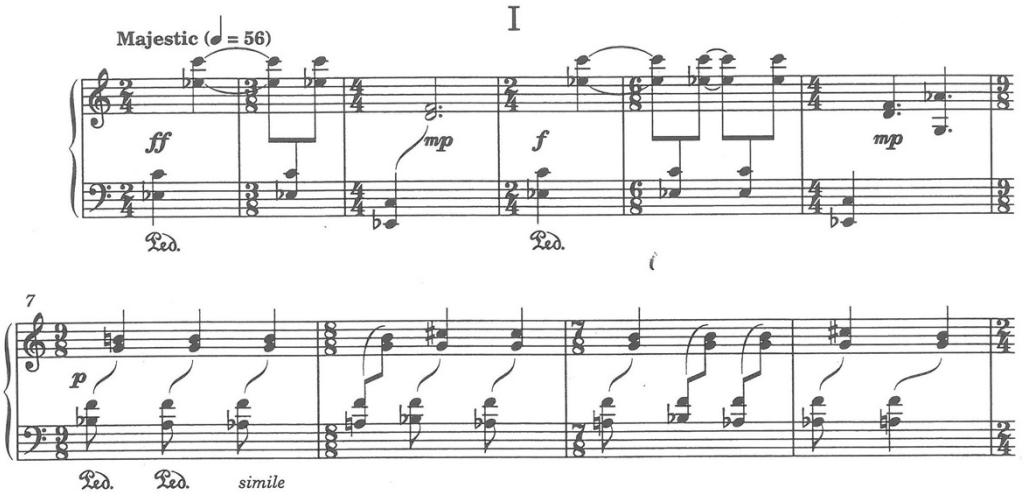
Jacob Druckman, Asia's primary teacher at Yale, had studied with Copland and recounted Copland's predilection for widely spaced sonorities, particularly empty octaves and fifths.[81]

One may also find similarities between Asia's Piano Variations (1998) and that of Copland, as Asia said "I love and enjoy teaching Copland's Piano Variations."[82] The Variations demonstrate Asia's pedagogical lineage and his respect for Copland's music. Not only do the changing meters here remind one of Copland's Variations, but the general tempo sequence (slow-fast-slow) also seems similar, as individual variations tend to become longer and deviate further from the original theme before the final returns (Ex. 11).

[81] Stanley V. Kleppinger, "Copland's Fifths and Their Structural Role in the Sonata for Violin and Piano," *The Society of Music Theory* 17, no. 2 (July 2011), accessed May 1, 2020. https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.2/mto.11.17.2.kleppinger.html.

[82] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 11, 2020.

Example 11. Piano Variations, 1st movement, mm. 1-6.



In addition to Copland, Asia also admires Bernstein's ability to "wed being Jewish in the twentieth century and being American in the twentieth century."[83] He considers Bernstein a great polymath, who wanted to compose, conduct, teach, better the world, be and act Jewish.[84] Additionally, Asia also views the music of Ives, Stravinsky, Debussy, and Beethoven as his inspirations.[85] These musical influences have been described by various scholars as expressions of "neo-romanticism,"[86] "neo-impressionism,"[87] and "a mix of Stravinsky and Bernstein" in the music of Asia.[88] One can hear vibrant rhythmic gestures and neo-romantic, perhaps neo-classic harmonic presentations here and there

[83] Leslie Kandell, "One Concerto, Two Artists, 25 Opportunities," *The New York Times*, February 18, 1996.

[84] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 14, 2020.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Mary Ellen Hutton, "Cello Master's Dvorak Casts a Symphony Spell," *The Cincinnati Post*, March 31, 1990.

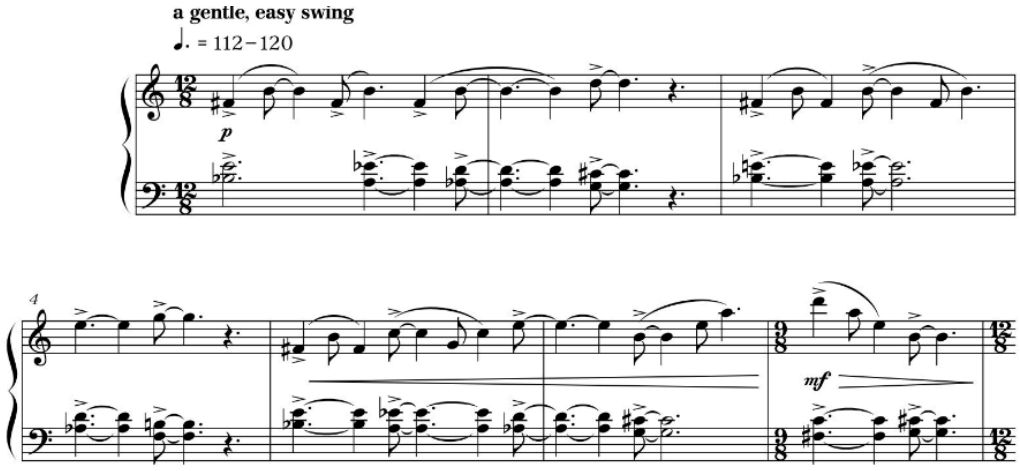
[87] Paul Snook, "Asia: Symphonies No.2; No.3," *Fanfare* 17, no. 5 (1994).

[88] Mary Ellen Hutton, "Fanfare Enlivens Predictable Show," *The Cincinnati Post*, October 8, 1994; footnotes 10, 11, and 12 are quoted in James Graham Kantor's "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 16.

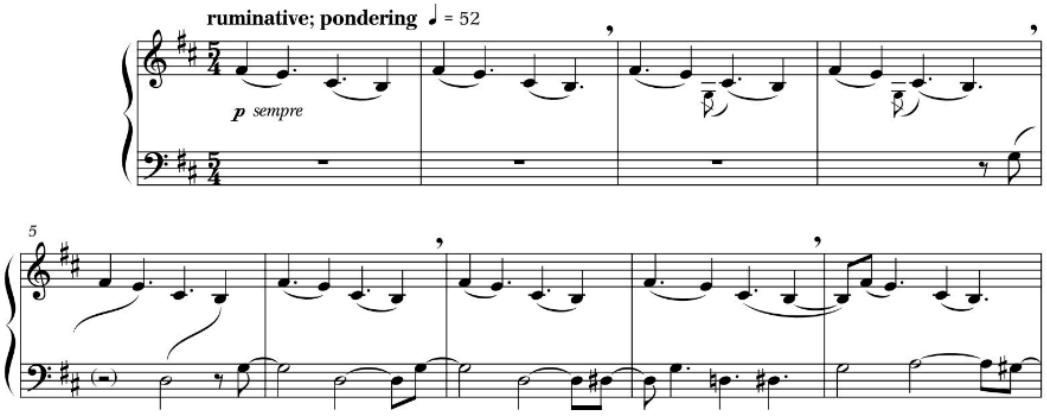
in these works. A sense of "freshness" in melodies and harmonies is strongly felt. Even nontonal clashes are made convincing by his gesture-driven and improvisatory writing.

Another of Asia's American features is the use of jazz elements, as shown overtly in *Ragflections* (Ex. 12) and *No Time* (Ex. 13) from *Two Rags* for solo piano written in 2017. They are the composer's "interaction with the world of popular music."[89]

Example 12. *Ragflections* from *Two Rags*, mm. 1-7.



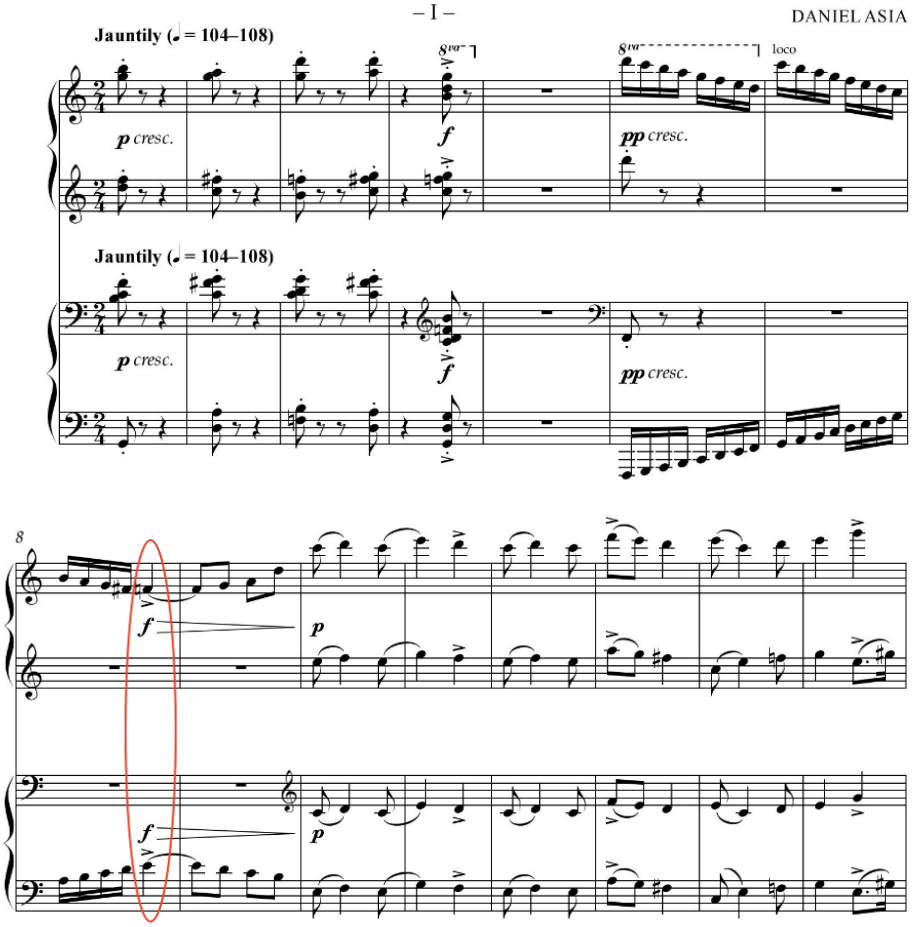
Example 13. *No Time* from *Two Rags*, mm. 1-9.



[89] Daniel Asia, program note for *Ragflections* and *No Time*, Music + Festival 2018: Claude Debussy and Daniel Asia, accessed February 2, 2020, https://wpu.cfa.arizona.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/10/22231605/ProgramMusicPlusFestival2018-DebussyAsia.pdf, 13.

Continuity in rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic elements is certainly more obvious in Asia's American period. The abandonment of quick changes of materials also yields a decline in meticulous markings in the later works. This is exemplified clearly when one compares one of Asia's early works to his most recent one, *Iris*, which shows a light-hearted melody after a humorous introduction of off-balance punctuated chords followed by a semitone clash (Ex. 14).

Example 14. *Iris* for four-hand piano, 1st movement, mm. 1-15.



The evolution of Asia's compositional language, from more complex rhythms, harmonies, and melodies in the early period to more melody-oriented, harmonically accessible, and rhythmically less complex in the American period, can be heard clearly through studying his piano works. Part of this

stylistic development seems to be a result of Asia's deepening involvement with both the contemporary repertoire and his religious faith. Asia himself says:

> ME [Musical Elements] showed me that the best music needn't always be complex, that you can allow the players more latitude if it is not complex. Jewish prayer music affected my sensibility greatly, in that I realized that tunes and melodies are not a bad thing.[90]

Asia also seems to be handing the baton over to the interpretation of the free musical minds of the performs as his musical ideas have moved from quick changes of materials to more continuity in gestures in later periods. This shift is reflected in the reduced occurrences of explicit markings when he realized that "he could rely on the intuitions of wonderful performers."[91]

Musical Elements (1978-1990)

Founded in 1978 by Asia, Clinton Everett (trombonist), and James McElwaine (clarinetist), Musical Elements was a contemporary chamber music ensemble active in New York City until 1990. In addition to performing works by its members, it also commissioned new music and promoted works that were little known. Robert Beaser, also a pupil of Druckman, joined Musical Elements as co-director in 1979. There were 16 more members, most of whom were young and all of whom were excellent musicians.[92]

After arriving on the Upper West Side of New York City, Asia realized the musical scene there was rather "parochial" through his numerous concert-going experiences.[93] The most prevailing musical

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[90] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 14, 2020.

[91] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, April 2, 2020.

[92] John Rockwell, "New Sound of Britain," *The New York Times*, n.d. http://musicalelementsensemble.blogspot.com/2014/01/new-music-from-england.html, accessed May 15, 2020.

[93] Jan Swafford, "Ear to Ear: A Conversation with Composer Daniel Asia," *The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 98.

stream was the so-called "uptown music," often associated with music that was "rationalized," "angular," and "devoid of emotion."[94] Musical Elements was hence born as a response to the uptight performances of uptown music in the late 1970s.

Cesarz's thesis provides an in-depth study of the musical landscape of New York City in the 1970s and how Musical Elements established and represented itself as part of the midtown culture between the division of uptown music and downtown music.[95] Generally speaking, uptown music focused on tonal complexity and adherence to serialism embedded in the tradition of Western classical music (such as the works of uptown composers Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, and Roger Sessions), while downtown music focused more on minimalist composers (such as La Monte Young, Philipp Glass, and Steven Reich), free improvisation, post-minimalism, and totalism,[96] which were outside the Eurocentric traditions. While these two schools of thought respectively held their own cultural, musical, and aesthetic beliefs, a third voice, midtown environment, arose and seemed to link the gap.

Musical Elements, "among the first ensemble groups to self-identify as a midtown ensemble, aimed to advance midtown cultural values by extending into the domain of concert programming."[97] Asia had a strong desire to make performances of Musical Elements appeal to a wider public and become more populist. One of its members, flutist Keith Underwood, said that the group was interested in playing various types of music.[98] Cesarz suggests that Musical Elements was promoting the Western

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Blake Edward Cesarz, "Musical Elements: Shinning a Light on Midtown" (master's thesis, University of Arizona, 2016), accessed March 22, 2020. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/1865308257/9B9F9A28E5714547PQ/6?accountid=12964.

[96] Kyle Gann, "Breaking the Chain Letter: An Essay on Downtown Music," last updated March 21, 2012, accessed May 4, 2020, https://www.kylegann.com/downtown.html.

[97] Cesarz, 25.

[98] Ibid, 36.

art music tradition like uptown while at the same time drawing on the appeal and accessibility of downtown.[99]

Through Musical Elements, works of the young and aspiring composers were premiered and lesser-known works of the famous were introduced to a broader community. As Asia recalled:

> We did premiers of Berio and Ligeti that we were astonished had not been done in New York. A lot of the stuff we did was first performances.[100]

Musical Elements' concert repertoire and performing venues were extensive. Works from different continents were heard. Its first concert series featured new music from England, Eastern Europe, Israel, Italy, and Japan, as well as the Northeast and West Coast of the United States.[101] The group's presence spanned from the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, # 1 Sheridan Square, Cooper Union, Carnegie Hall, Symphony Space, to the 92nd Street Y,[102] where they were the ensemble-in-residence from 1986 to 1989.

Asia sees Musical Elements as a great education, through which he was able to perform, collaborate with exceptional musicians, and explore music from all over the world.[103]

Asia's Jewish Connection and Manifestations in His Music

"*As a practicing Jew, I look at the world through a Jewish lens as well as musical*" – Daniel Asia.

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[99] Ibid, 38.

[100] Swafford, 98.

[101] Musical Elements Official Website: http://musicalelementsensemble.blogspot.com/, last updated October 22, 2018.

[102] The 92nd Street Y stands for The 92nd Street for Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association.

[103] Swafford, 98.

Asia's relationship with Judaism is both spiritual and musical: Jewishness is part of who he is, what he writes, and how he interacts with the universe.

In a documented interview with Swafford, Asia expressed that his later compositional style, a style that is more melodic and traditional, developed as a result of his deepening involvement with Judaism. Understanding the core value of Judaism helped him realize the creative direction he had been pursuing. Being willing to view himself in a historical context also helped him return to tradition, musically.

Born into a Reform Jewish family, Asia was very involved in the Jewish community and synagogue. Among Jewish denominations, Reform Judaism enables Jewish people to introduce innovation, allowing personal choices in matters of ritual observance, while preserving tradition.[104] During his student years, Asia was an active participant in Jewish religious and political groups at both Hampshire College and Yale. Upon arrival in New York City, on the Upper West Side, he was immersed quickly into its vibrant Conservative community, particularly Minyan Ma'at,[105] of which he was a founding member. Asia recounted his study of the Holocaust in addition to Music and History during his time at Hampshire College:

> Studying the Holocaust has shaped and affected my general and Jewish thinking, as about a third of my output is on Jewish themes or texts.[106]

Seth Rogovoy, music critic and author of *The Essential Klezmer*, suggests that though not all of Asia's music utilizes recognizable Jewish elements, an inherent quality of Jewishness permeates his music. His Symphonies No. 2 "*Celebration*" and No. 5 "*Of Songs and Psalms*" are often regarded as

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[104] My Jewish Learning, "The Jewish Denomination" https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-jewish-denominations/, accessed May 29, 2020.

[105] Minyan Ma'at means "a small group of ten Jews," *Personal Correspondence* with Asia, May 14, 2020.

[106] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, May 14, 2020.

mostly Jewish in theme. Symphony No. 2 uses the Jewish prayer service for the names of the movements; and Symphony No. 5, in the form of a song cycle, incorporates liturgical choral pieces interspersed with poems by Jewish poets Paul Pines and Yehuda Amichai. Swafford even notes that all of Asia's symphonies (the latest Symphony No. 6 was released after Swafford's statement) are "in some degree fundamentally Jewish."[107] In Kantor's study on Asia's choral composition "*Celebration*," from which the Symphony of the same name is derived, the work's melodic presentation is described as "stemming from the composer's ability to sing Jewish chants."[108]

Asia's two representative song cycles, *Breath in a Ram's Horn* and *Pines Songs*, feature ten poems written by Paul Pines, who was also the librettist of Asia's opera *The Tin Angel*. Other examples of Jewish references can also be found in *Sacred and Profane*, an electroacoustic composition including the sayings of Hasidic masters, and *Your Cry Will be a Whisper*, a solo guitar work based on the sayings of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav.

Pianist Jonathan Shames, who also comes from a Jewish family and is a close friend of Asia's, premiered and recorded Asia's *Scherzo Sonata* for solo piano and several other works. He describes Asia as "very good at singing nigguns (niggunim)" and notes that the majority of his works seem to have a distinctive quality of niggunim.[109] A niggun (or nigun; pl. niggunim) could be understood as Jewish wordless recitative that uses a series of repeated syllables, such as dah-dah-dah, la-la-la, or tah-tah-tah. These wordless syllables, considered as a spiritual expression that transcends the limitations of

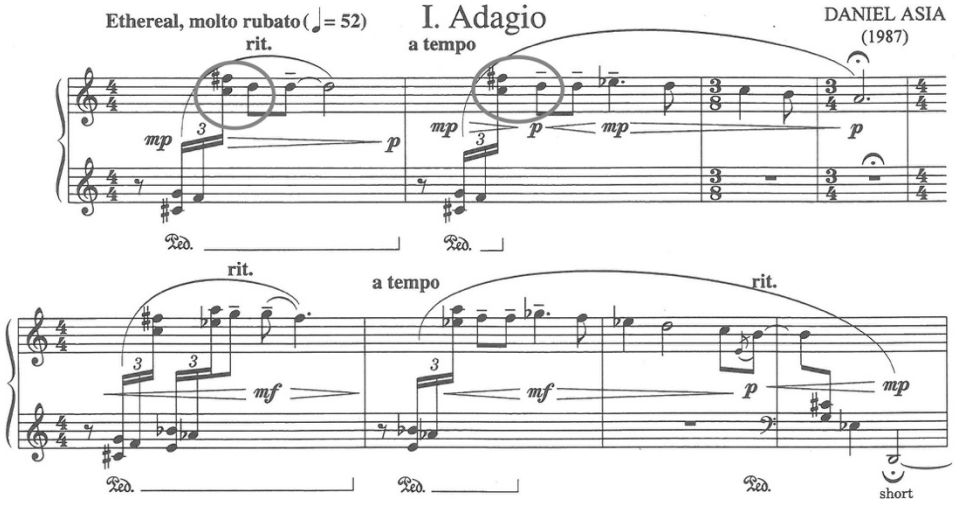
[107] Jan Swafford, "On Daniel Asia's Symphonies" *The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia*, ed. Alexander Tantser (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 89.

[108] James Graham Kantor, "A Conductor's Study on the Choral Works of Daniel Asia" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 22.

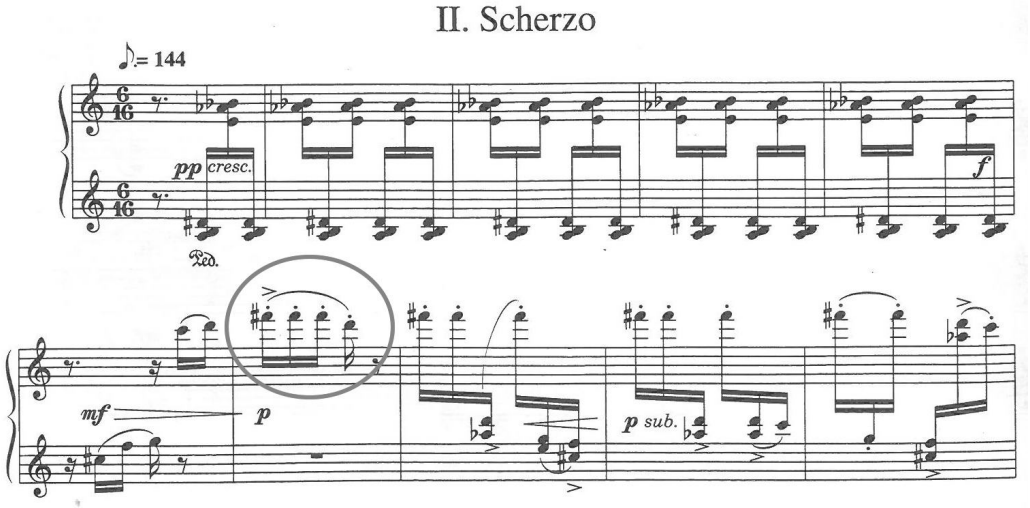
[109] Jonathan Shames, pianist, Director of Orchestra and Opera at the University of Oklahoma, *Personal Correspondence*, June 2021.

language itself, constitute a special means of communication with the Holy One in Jewish culture. The germ idea of the *Scherzo* (Exs. 15 & 16) may be seen as niggun-inspired and reminiscent of a religious recitative, especially in its slow movements.

Example 15. *Scherzo Sonata*, movement I, mm.1-8 – Adagio

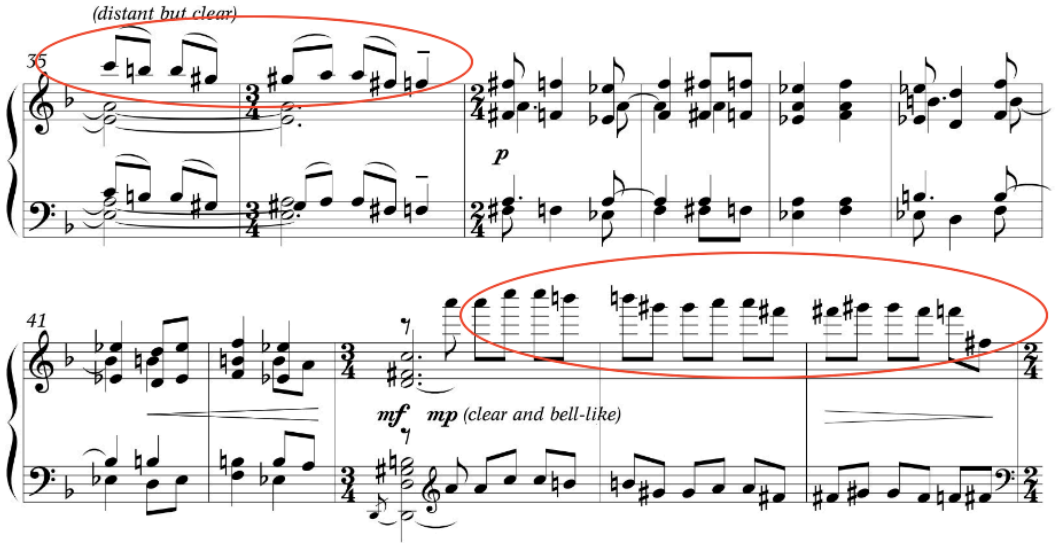


Example 16. *Scherzo Sonata*, movement II, mm.1-10 – Scherzo



Pianist Schub, for whom Asia's piano concerto was commissioned, depicts the second movement of the concerto as particularly Jewish for its cantorial quality and "curling Mitteleuropean appearance with tears in the voice"[110] that reminded him of his cantor uncle (Ex. 17).

Ex. 17. Piano Concerto, 2nd movement, mm. 35-45.



The reoccurrence of the nostalgic chant in *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano also exemplifies the cantorial quality of Jewish prayer music. The next chapter will provide musical excerpts of the work.

To Asia, classical music and Jewish prayer music are two different approaches to the same end: to experience a sense of sacred moments. In his essay "*Breath in a Ram's Horn: Judaism and Classical Music*," he discusses what he believes classical music and Judaism have in common. Music has the capability of transporting the common soul to a different space; Jewish prayers, similarly, lead people to encounter a transcendental experience. When a musician is "in the zone" artistically, he or

[110] Leslie Kandell, "One Concerto, Two Artists, 25 Opportunities." *New York Times*, February 18, 1996, accessed November 18, 2019. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/109608603?accountid=12964.

she experiences the same sense of "radical amazement," from a religious view. Jewish rituals provide sacred moments in the profane world, just as the existence of music allows people to experience holy moments in a musical work. Through listening to music, listeners get to experience a deeper understanding of themselves and of the world. A musical score, like a Jewish sacred text, serves as the most fundamental and intimate method to communicate with the great composer – or the Holy One. Through repetitive and reflective studying of a score, a musician relives and interprets the music according to his or her personal experience, as a religious devotee does with the biblical texts.

As Asia puts it, "each performance is a commentary on a divinely inspired text."[111] Performers' interpretations vary according to every individual's lived experience, and thus, the beauty of diversity. With an open mind, heart, and imagination, a listener may be exposed to an experience that is spiritual and sacred.

Understanding how Asia views the relationship between Judaism and classical music can help us understand his music more and deepen our experience of all classical music.

[111] Daniel Asia, "Breath in a Ram's Horn: Judaism and Classical Music" *Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia*, ed. Alexander Tantser (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2014), 80.

CHAPTER FOUR

Why (?) Jacob for Solo Piano (1983)

In 2015, I had the opportunity to premier Asia's *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano and to work briefly with the composer. The performance was held on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga as part of Asia's concert series "*Breath in a Ram's Horn: The Jewish Spirit in Classical Music*," featuring him as the composer-in-residence. What impressed me were the composer's radiant personality and his contagious energy when he talked about music. I performed this work in *The Third Person Singular*, a dance production by Scarecrow Contemporary Dance Company, in my hometown Tainan, Taiwan to celebrate the Tainan Arts Festival in 2021.[112]

The present solo piano version of *Why (?) Jacob* (1983) was adapted from the original version written for chorus and piano (1978). The original version was first commissioned by the Lakeside School in Seattle, Asia's high school alma mater, to celebrate the then newly built St. Nicholas Hall and to memorialize his childhood friend, Jacob Rayman, an American-Israeli medic who passed away in the Yom Kippur War (1973).[113] In 2006, the work was further orchestrated by the composer.

Asia's deliberate placement of the question mark within the parentheses between the words *Why* and *Jacob* shows influences of both modern literature and Judaism. He acknowledges the inspiration from the poet E. E. Cummings' radical experiments with spelling and peculiar treatment of the relationship between words and punctuation marks, such as the lower case "i" and uncommon positioning of brackets as in "i do(n't) know." He also shared his conception of the title:

> "*Why*" followed by the question mark makes the question universal before then limiting it to Jacob (Rayman). The three fathers of Judaism are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Already,

[112] "News," Scarecrow Contemporary Dance Company, September 14, 2021, https://www.scdc-dance.com/news.php?cid=2.

[113] Rayman's story, along with other Israeli soldiers in the war, is documented by Hallie Lerman in her photography book entitled *Crying for Imma* ("Imma" means mother in Hebrew).

his name leads from the personal to the Jewish, to the universal.[114]

This statement indicates that the title contains extra-musical meaning depicting both individual and all-inclusive inquiry. The spiritual references appear frequently in the original choral text, such as "Yaacov" (Jacob in Hebrew) and "Yaweh" (God in Hebrew). It further evokes the question whether "*Why*" in the title might refer to the letters extracted from "YaWeH."

The solo piano version differs slightly from the original choral version, with the choral part removed and a few measures at transition and conclusion added, leaving its performance duration approximately eight minutes long. The work can be best described as a mix of two opposing elements, in terms of tonal language, textures, meters, and rhythm. Noted by Dankner as "one of Asia's most characteristic traits,"[115] the work's structure can be divided into six sections alternating between the nontonal improvisatory writing and tonal statements of a folk-like tune, here referred to as the G-minor chant. G-minor is the center tonality in the tonal sections while the rest of the work is dissonant and chromatic. The homophonic texture in the G-minor chant sections contrast with the linear nontonal melodies. The meter remains 3/4 throughout the tonal sections while in the other sections it changes frequently and asymmetrically (5/4, 15/8, $6^{1/2}/4$). The G-minor chant sections are rhythmically straightforward while the other sections are rhythmically freer with generous nonmetrical markings.

Structural Overview of *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano.[116]

[Introduction]	[Exposition]	[Transition]	[Development]	[Varied Introduction]	[Return]
Nontonal	G-minor Chant	Nontonal	G-minor Chant	Nontonal	G-minor Chant
mm.1-15	mm.16-36, Ⓑ	mm.37-46, Ⓓ	mm.47-104, Ⓔ	mm.107-120, Ⓘ	mm.121-end, Ⓚ

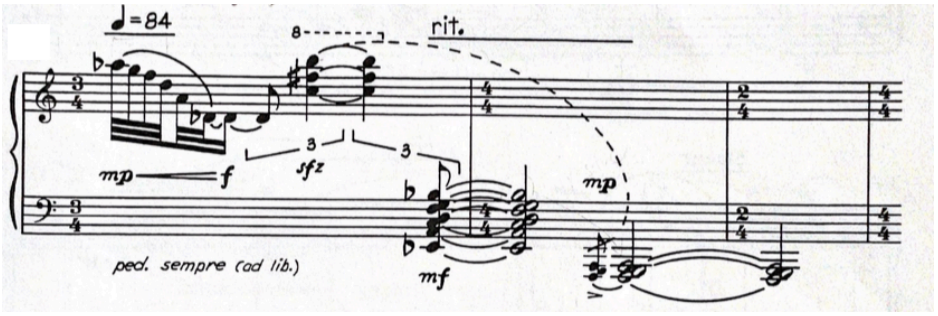
[114] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, April 4, 2020.

[115] Stephen Dankner, "Various Works by Daniel Asia." *Notes* 61, no. 1 (2004): 238, accessed October 1, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/4487351. "One of Asia's most characteristic traits is the alternation of very modal and tonal sections with (by comparison) quite dissonant passages."

[116] Circled letters, rehearsal letters, are included for examples because they are used in the solo piano score rather than measure numbers. Each locates just the first measure of an example.

Improvisatory and nontonal writing abound in all the introduction and transition sections. Widely spaced registers are used as the work opens with a descending nontonal gesture followed by chords spanning more than four octaves (Ex. 18).

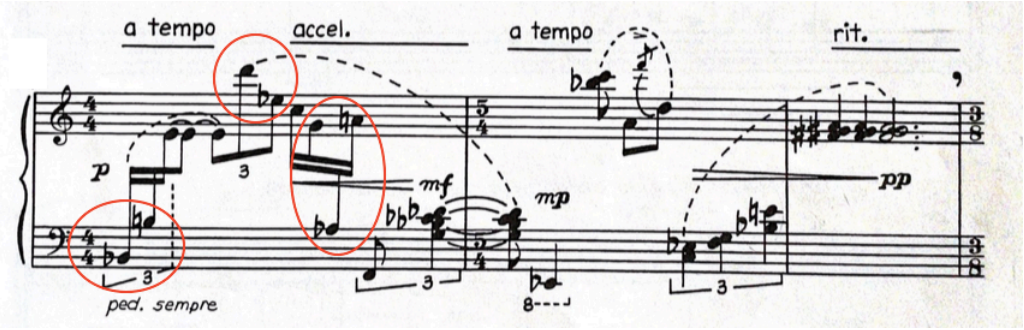
Example 18. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 1-3, Ⓐ-6



The introductory gesture descends from A^{b}–D, and the interval of a fourth is both the foundation of the subsequent chords in measure one (C–$F^{\#}$–B and E^{b}–A, A–D, C–F, D–G, F–B^{b}) and many other chords throughout the work. The second chord in measure one may be viewed as a pandiatonic chord formed of G-minor's diatonic scale pitches. Pandiatonicism is a neo-classicist trait of Stravinsky and Copland, who would freely generate chords from the diatonic scale without resolving them in a traditional way. Example 18 also shows meticulous interpretive markings, a hallmark of Asia's early piano works.

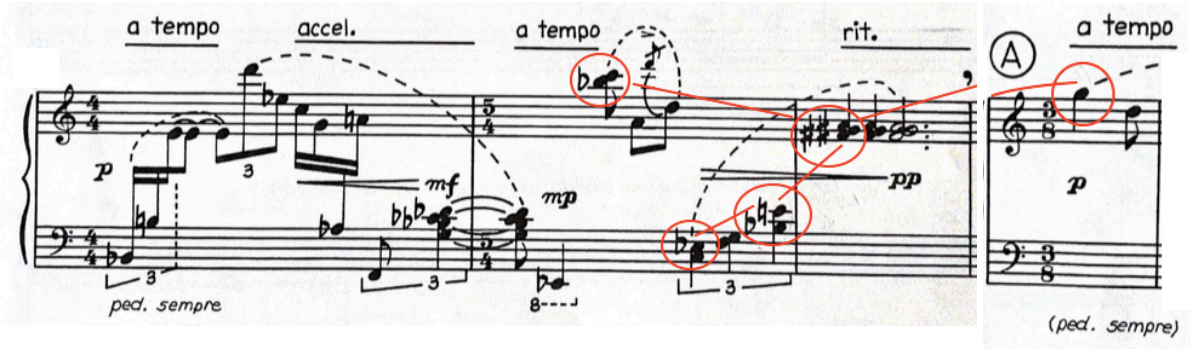
Some figurations in the introduction section already show chromatic motion hidden by octave displacement of neighboring notes in different registers (circled in Ex. 19). This can give the impression of different timbres following one another as the textural density and dynamics shift.

Example 19. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 4-6, Ⓐ-3



Some of the hidden chromatic motions point towards the upcoming key of G-minor. The C/Bb to A in the highest notes lead down to G and the Eb-E♮-F# in the bottom of the texture also lead up to G (Ex. 20).

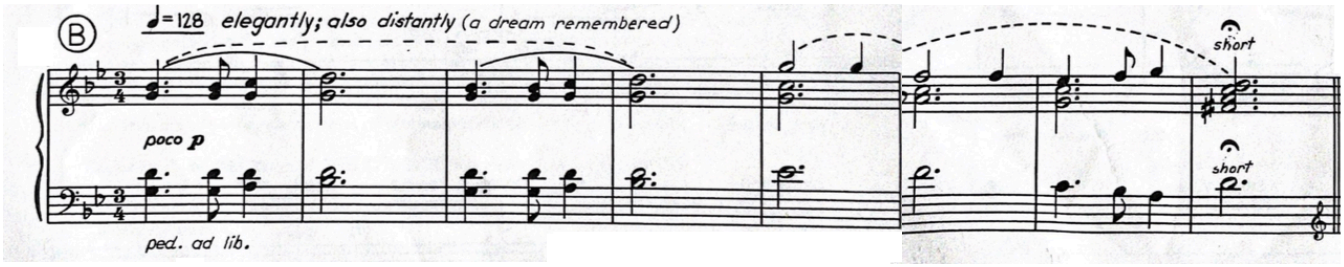
Example 20. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 5-7, Ⓐ-2



The G-minor chant, first appearing as "a dream remembered," has notable characteristics of niggunim, where wordless syllables could be effortlessly added to the melody for one to sing along (Ex. 21). However, no specific Jewish melodies are used here.[117] Asia's Jewishness in his musical voice can be as subtle, intrinsic, yet straightforward as the melodic presentation is in this work.

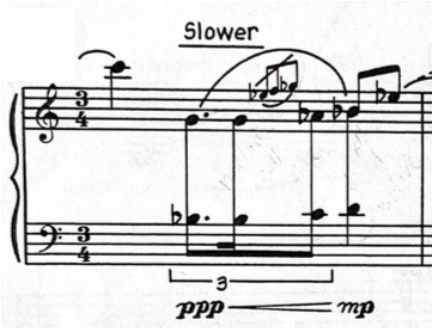
[117] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, January 15, 2020.

Example 21. First statement of G-minor chant.[118] *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm.16-23, Ⓑ



The rhythmic-melodic motive of the chant is already embedded in an inversion as a progression of parallel sixths three measures before its first statement (Ex. 22).

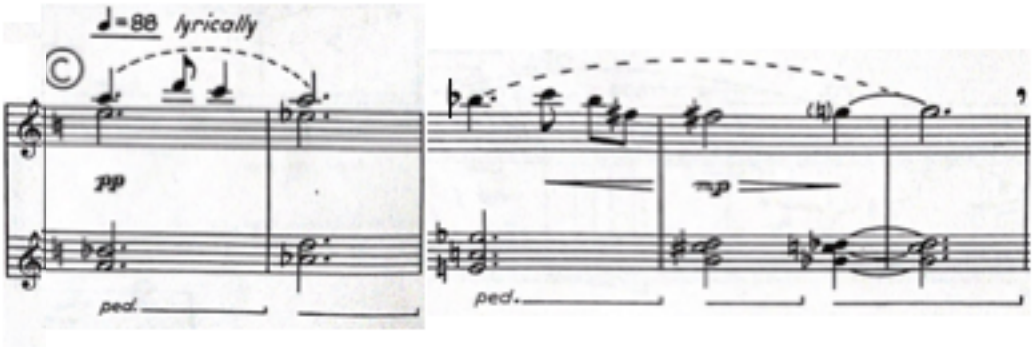
Example 22. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 12, Ⓐ+8



Rhythmic fragments of the chant continue with tritones dominating. While the leading tone of G-minor to tonic in the soprano line continues the sense of G-minor, this extension of the chant is soon interrupted by a sweeping nontonal gesture (last measure of Ex. 23), a harbinger of the coming transition section.

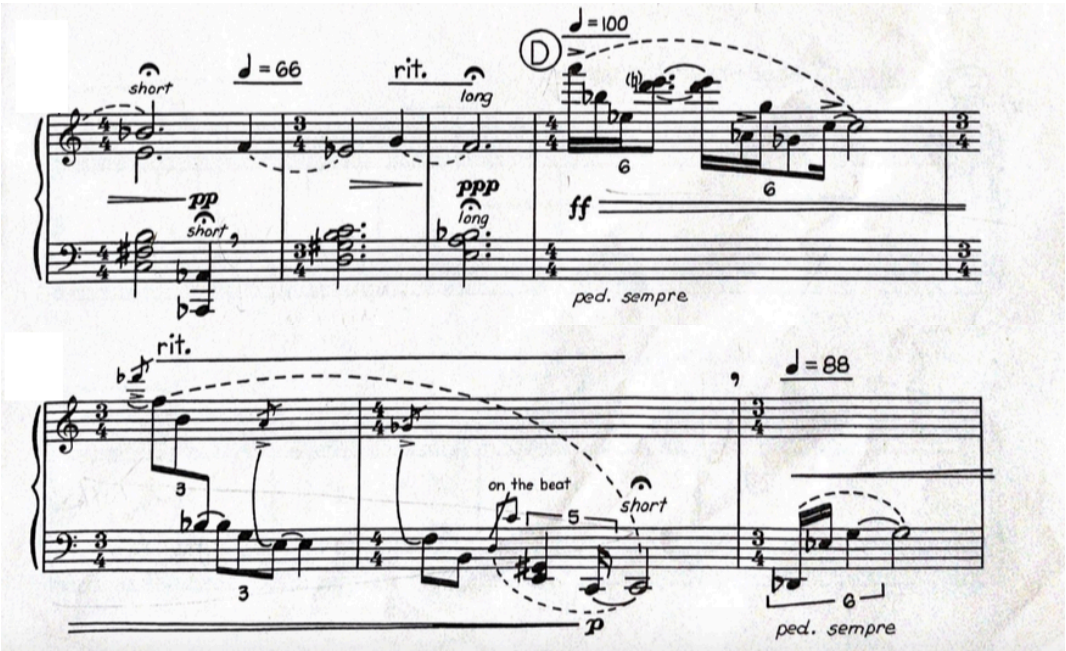
[118] Dashed legato lines show musical and phrasal directions as the solid legato lines do. *Personal Correspondence* with Daniel Asia, April 18, 2020.

Example 23. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 26-31, Ⓒ



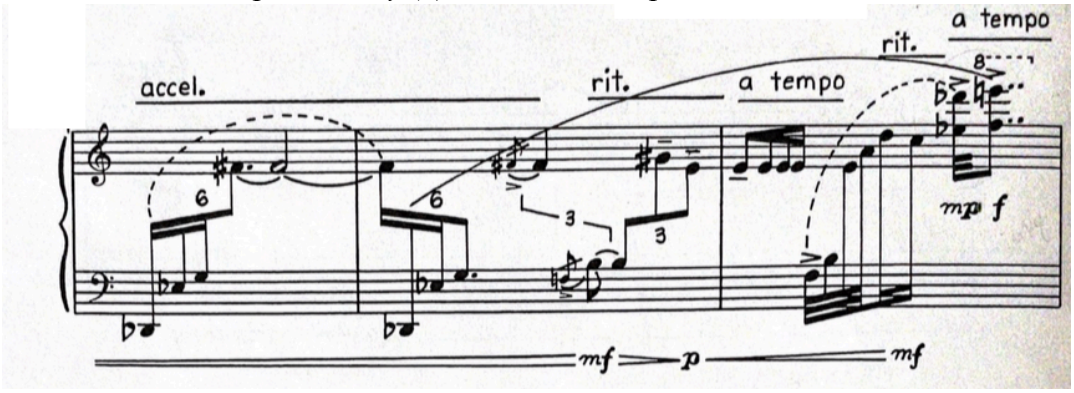
Like the introduction section, the short transition section is also nontonal and improvisatory. It begins explosively with a four octave drop from a high A (marked *ff*) to a low C (marked *p*) and ends with repeated B^b that prepares the second statement of the G-minor chant. Asia's multiple *ritardandos*, accented grace notes, on-the-beat ornaments, and gradually relaxed rhythmic figures here suggest rhythmic elasticity (Ex. 24).

Example 24. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano. mm.37-40, Ⓓ



The transition also contains a good example of a series of motivic sequences, referred to as "motivic development of cells" by Dankner.[119] Kantor also describes Asia's practice of developing small motives with the term "melodic accumulation," indicating gradually adding new musical idea to the established material as a restatement starts over each time (starting from last measure of Ex. 24 until Ex. 25).[120]

Example 25. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 40-43, Ⓓ+4

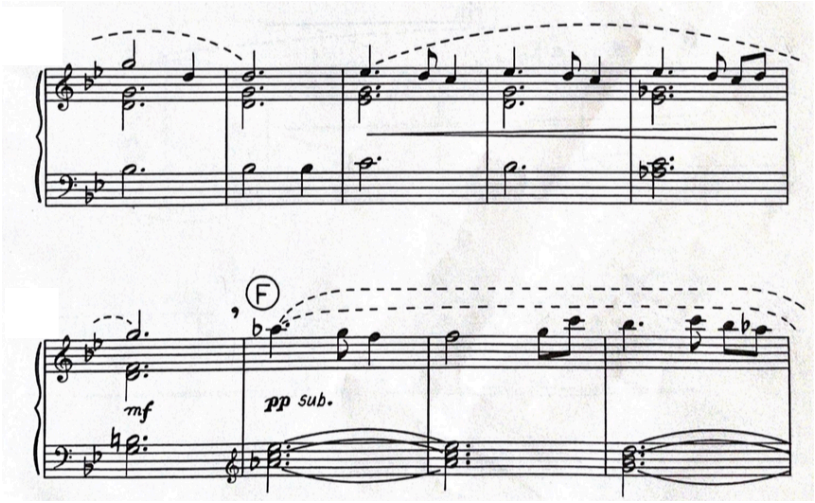


The original eight-measure G-minor chant is highly extended in the development section, with its nearly doubled length as well as ascending tessitura followed by an interpolated cadenza. The descending C–B^{b}–A^{b}–G in the bottom of the texture hint at the upcoming repetitions of A^{b}–G triads in the left hand (Ex. 26) that eventually fall to a dominant-seventh chord in G-minor and a short cadenza.

[119] Stephen Dankner, "Various Works by Daniel Asia." *Notes* 61, no. 1 (2004): 238, accessed October 1, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/4487351.

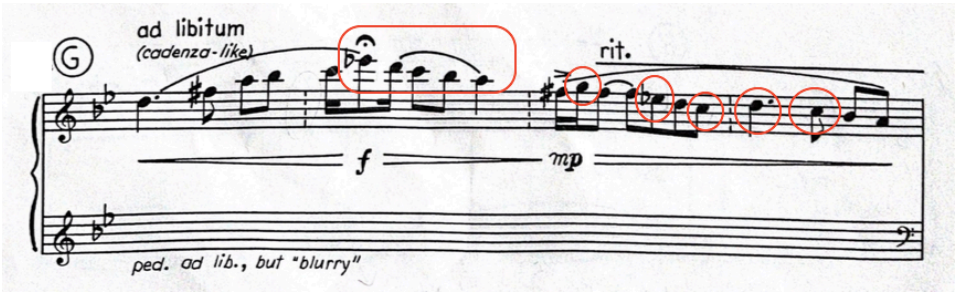
[120] James Kantor, "A Conductor's Study of the Choral Works of Daniel Asia." (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1997), accessed October 16, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/304331554?accountid=12964. 9.

Example 26. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 65-73, Ⓕ-4



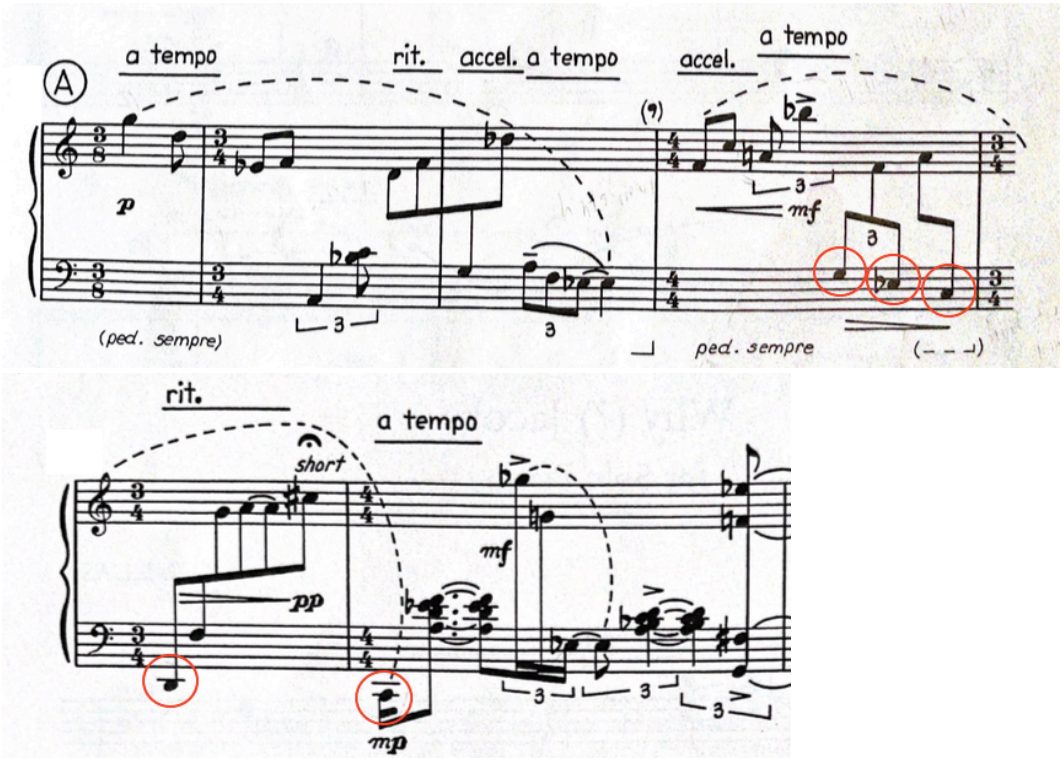
The cadenza lingers on a high E^b (the ninth of the previous dominant chord), followed by a falling scalar line. Emotions are intensified by the rising and falling and also freed by the dotted bar lines (Ex. 27), which may allow more rhythmic elasticity than the solid bar lines would have.

Example 27. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 88, Ⓖ



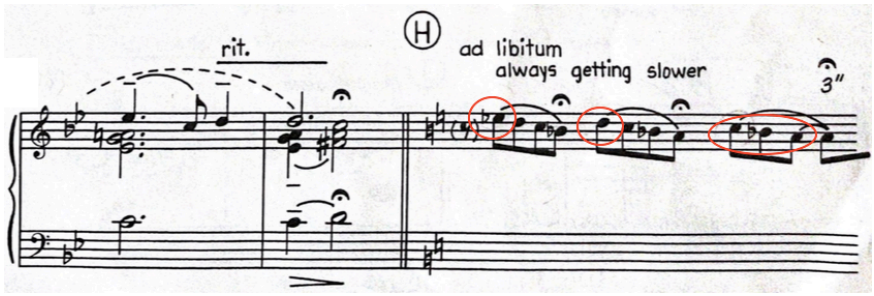
The falling line illustrates Asia's use of distant motivic relationships in this work, both melodically and intervallically. The G–E^b–C–D–C figuration in the cadenza (circled in Ex. 27) are already foreshadowed by the bass melody in the introduction section (circled in Ex. 28).

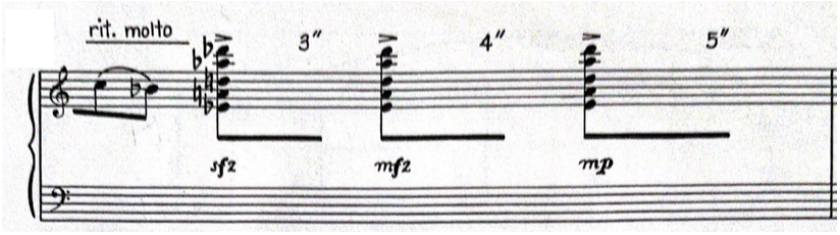
Example 28. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 10-12, Ⓐ+4



After further development of the G-minor chant, the descending scalar motion E^{b}–D–C–B^{b}–A (Ex. 29) returns in the downward figures leading to a sudden outbreak of sonority. The accented chords also remind us of the abundant fourths used throughout the work (second half of Ex. 29).

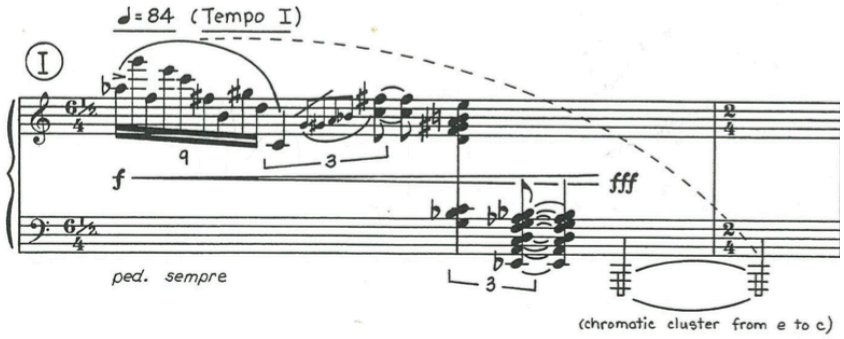
Example 29. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 105, Ⓗ





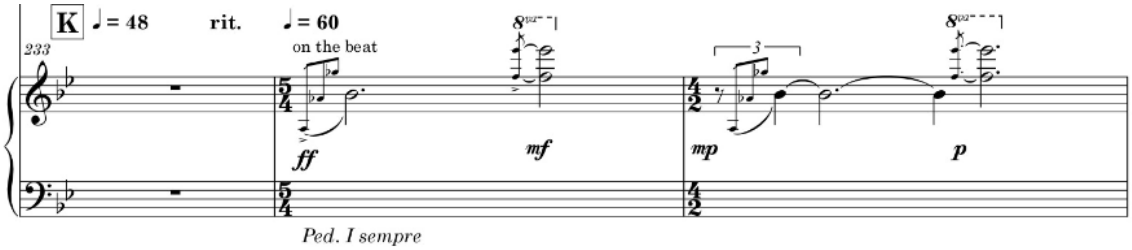
In the varied introduction section, the initial figuration of the work (Ex. 18) returns in a more agitated and dissonant form (Ex. 30). Instead of dropping down to a *mp* as in the opening, the music reaches the dynamic peak of the whole work with a chromatic tone cluster marked *fff* (Ex. 30).

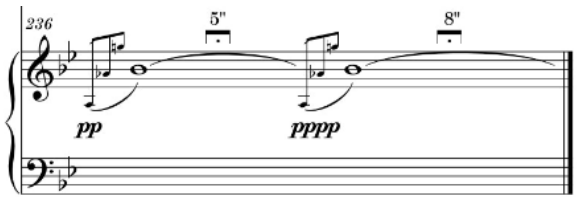
Example 30. *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 110, Ⓘ



The solo piano version ends differently than the piano part of the original choral version, which concludes with the faltering momentum of grace notes (Ex. 31).

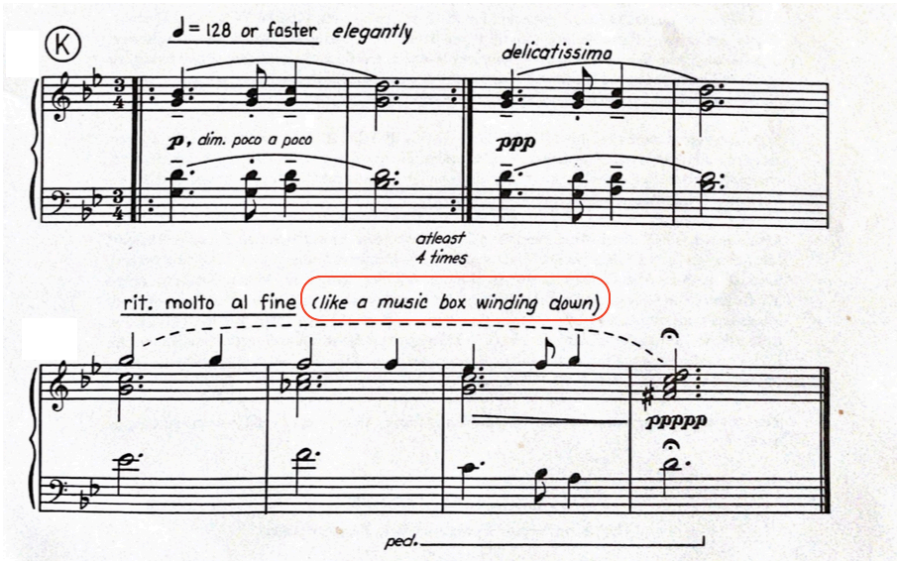
Example 31. Ending of *Why (?) Jacob* for chorus and piano, mm. 233-236.





The solo piano version finishes with the reoccurrence of the first phrase of the chant repeated "at least four times" softening down to *ppp*. It finally continues to its next phrase disappearing on an unresolved dominant seventh chord, like a music box winding down (Ex. 32).

Example 32. Ending of *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano, mm. 124-end, Ⓚ



CHAPTER FIVE

Reflections

Asia's piano works by themselves reveal a gigantic trajectory of styles and expressions. Swafford views Asia's stylistic evolution as a microcosm of the unfolding of American contemporary classical music in the past four decades. Three delineations of stylistic periods, Early (1970s), Exploratory (1980s), and American (1990s-), have been generated only for this study to refer to the compositional characteristics and contexts of Asia's piano works.[121]

In Asia's early period, *Piano Sets I & II* incorporate contemporary musical vernaculars such as minimalistic, Avant-Garde, and experimental qualities. Some notational markings inspired by Crumb are used in the *Piano Set II*. Asia's several electroacoustic and chamber works are written during this time.

The exploratory period begins to see more of Asia's symphonic works. The solo piano version of *Why (?) Jacob* and Scherzo Sonata, serving as the foundation of his Symphony No. 1 and later *Black Light*, both belong to this second compositional stage. Although *Why (?) Jacob* was adapted for solo piano during this period, its original version was written for chorus and piano in the early period already. *Why (?) Jacob* inherits the free-wheeling and improvisatory characters of Asia's earlier style and shows nontonal and tonal writing alternating between multiple structural sections. His soulful and cantorial writing of melody is his Jewish representation in music. Though explicit musical markings have been reduced significantly in his later works, what has remained unchanged is the audacity in his timbral palette.

In the American period, his Piano Concerto, Piano Variations, *Ragflections*, and *Iris* display more tonal, jazzy, and neo-romantic qualities. They demonstrate what he calls "more continuity in

[121] Asia agreed with these stylistic periods, *Personal Correspondence*, April 3, 2020.

harmony, rhythm, and melody" and an "interaction with the world of pop music." He also notes that "my gestural language became less flamboyant, so everything the listener heard was clearer."[122] This self-deconstruction seems to involve inspirations from Asia's own Jewish faith and experiences with his New York-based contemporary chamber music ensemble Musical Elements, which made him realize that the best music does not always have to be complex, and even simpler melodies could be appealing. To me, he is more of an interpreter of Jewish tradition rather than a composer of Jewish music. He seeks what classical music and Jewish prayer music have in common: a pathway to experiencing sacred moments.

Since *Why (?) Jacob* is mostly gesture-driven in all the nontonal sections, performers should feel free to divide complicated gestural phrases between two hands, as long as phrase directions are maintained. Phrases are often long and go beyond the bar lines. Dotted bar lines found in Asia's earlier works imply that "meter has no suggestion of the usual weightedness of beat structure, although they should have been engraved as regular bar lines."[123] Different melodic lines of the G-minor chant in the development and return sections could be brought out for a "distant" effect as noted in the score. Especially when the chant is repeated at least four times in the return section, one may consider creating an effect of echoing between the bass line and the soprano line. Although the rhythmic figures of the chant may seem much slower than those of the nontonal sections, Asia's meticulous four-bar-long dotted legato lines remind the performer to keep the chant flowable and singable. Metronomic markings would provide a better idea of the composer's ideal musical pace at first, yet when one has familiarized him/herself with the work, the interpretation could be freer. Hand gesture also matters in

[122] Jan Swafford, "Ear to Ear: A Conversation with Composer Daniel Asia," *The Jewish Experience in Classical Music: Shostakovich and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 101.

[123] Daniel Asia, *Personal Correspondence*, April 18, 2020.

the continuation of atmosphere after the final measure (marked *ppppp*). One should still listen to the music even if sound is no longer heard.

Performing the work with the Scarecrow Contemporary Dance Company, I firsthand witnessed the accessibility of the chant and nontonal gestures. Even non-musicians and crew members with no musical background were able to hum the chant and some scalar fragments effortlessly. Asia may have synthesized compositional languages from his pedagogical lineage in earlier trainings, but beyond that, he is able to have an immediate impact on those who have heard the work only a couple of times. I believe his voice makes an unmistakable statement. I further realized the importance of breathing within music after having worked with dancers on this work, as breathing could be a realization of time and space to dancers. When a sense of breathing is felt in music, dancer's movements become freer, then so do the emotions.

This paper studies Asia's piano works, particularly *Why (?) Jacob*, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to truly "realize" a composer and his works. To analyze is one story, to realize is another. When I first performed this work, I had to imagine the stories behind this elegy, the connections between the composer and his childhood friend, Jacob. When a frightening car accident occurred to me right before performing the work, I told this unforgettable personal story through Asia's music during the concert. When I brought this work to the Scarecrow dance project, dancers relived the work and more stories were shared with a wider community. That was when I felt the connection between myself, the composer, and the work was realized.

Serving as the initial step toward further scholarly efforts, the sincere hope for this study is to generate not only more interest in Asia's works but also to invite more possibilities to "realize" any work that moves.

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APPENDIX A: Complete Listing of Compositions by Daniel Asia by Category (as of 2020)

Piano

Solo Piano:
Piano Set I – 1976

Why (?) Jacob – 1983

Scherzo Sonata – 1987

Piano Variations – 1998-99

Ragflections – 2004

No Time – 2004

Two Pianos:
Piano Set II – 1977

Piano Concerto:
Piano Concerto – 1994

Four-Hand Piano:
Iris – 2017

Chamber Music

With Piano:
Piano Quartet – 1989

Piano Trio – 1996

Sonata for Violin and Piano – 2001

A Lament for Cello and Piano – 2001

Without Piano:
On The Surface (for Soprano and Chamber Ensemble) – 1975

Sand I (for Flute, Horn, Bass) – 1977

Plum-D II (for Flute and Pre-recorded Flutes) – 1977

Sand II (for Mezzo Soprano and Chamber Ensemble) – 1978

Line Images (for Double Reed Ensemble) – 1978

Music for Trumpet and Organ – 1983

B for J (for Flute, Bass Clarinet, Trombone, Vibraphone, Electric Organ, Violin, Viola, Cello) – 1988

Five Images (for Flute and Bassoon) – 1994

Embers (Duo for Flute and Guitar) – 1995

Momentary Lapses (for Violin and Guitar) – 2000

New Set (for Guitar and Violin) – 2004

Concerti

Piano Concerto – 1994

Cello Concerto – 1997

String Ensemble

String Quartet No. 1 – 1975

String Quartet No. 2 – 1985

String Quartet No. 3 "The Seer" – 2006

Brass Ensemble

Brass Quintet – 2001

Woodwind Ensemble

Woodwind Quintet – 1998

Voice

Pines Songs (for Soprano, Woodwind Quintet, Piano) – 1983

Psalm 30 (for Baritone or Cantor, Violin, Piano) – 1986

Two Sacred Songs (for Guitar, Soprano, Flute, Cello) – 1989

Breath in Ram's Horn "Songs for My Father" (for High Voice and Piano) – 1996

An E. E. Cummings Songbook (for High Voice and Piano) – 1998

Sacred Songs (for Flute, Cello, Piano, Soprano) – 2003

Songs from "Adrift a Blinding Lights" (for Tenor and Piano) – 2004

Amichai Songs (for Baritone, Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Violoncello, Piano) – 2015

V'Shamru (for Baritone or Cantor and Chamber Orchestra) – 2015

Solo Instrument

Dream Sequence I for Solo Trombone (solo trombone) – 1975

Orange for Solo Viola (solo viola) – 1979

Marimba Music for Solo Marimba (solo marimba) – 1983

Three Movements for Trumpet and Orchestra – 1984

Your Cry Will Be a Whisper for Solo Guitar (solo guitar) – 1994

The Alex Set for Solo Oboe (solo oboe) – 1995

Guitar Set I for Solo Guitar (solo guitar) – 1998

Songs of Transcendence: Three Songs for Guitar (solo guitar) – 1999

Cello Suite for Cello (solo cello) – 2002

Unicorns Are Fireproof for Solo Flute (solo flute) – 2003

Ragflections for Piano or Organ (solo piano/solo organ) – 2004

Orchestral

Rivalries – 1981

Ossabaw Island Dream for Orchestra – 1982

Ossabaw Island Dream for Large Orchestra – 1986

Songs from the Page of Swords – 1986

Symphony No. 1 – 1987

Symphony No. 2 "Celebration Symphony" (Khagiga: In Memoriam Leonard Bernstein) – 1990

Black Light – 1990

At the Far Edge – 1991

Symphony No. 3 – 1992

Symphony No. 4 – 1993

Then Something Happened for Large Orchestra – 1999

Once Again – 1999

Bear Down Arizona – 2002

What About It – 2003

Why (?) Jacob – 2006

Gateways – 2007

Symphony No. 5 (*In Honor of Israel's 60th Birthday*) – 2008

Nonet – 2010

Symphony No. 6 "Iris" – 2017-18

Choral

Nineteen – 1973

Sound Shapes (for Chorus and Pitchpipes) – 1973

Why (?) Jacob (for Chorus and Piano or Organ) – 1978

The She Set (for S.A.T.B Chorus) – 1982

Celebration – 1988

Purer than Purest Pure (for S.A.T.B Chorus) – 1996

Out for More (for S.A.T.B Chorus) –1996

Electro-acoustic Music

Shtay (electronic tape) – 1975

Miles Mix (electronic tape) – 1976

As Above (an Electronic Tape for Film) – 1977

Sacred and Profane (electro-acoustic/computer works by Asia/Haaheim) – 2009

New Music

Shuffle and Blue: A New Music Concert with A Twist (or A Slide) – 2009

Opera

The Tin Angel – 2011

Oratorio

Divine Madness – 2016

APPENDIX B: Complete Discography of Works Analyzed

Published

Title	Details	Label/Year	Artists
Ivory	*Scherzo Sonata* *Piano Quartet* *Why (?) Jacob*	Koch Internat-ional Classics/ 1995	Jonathan Shames (Piano) The Bridge Ensemble

Title	Details	Label/Year	Artists
Gateways	*Gateways* *Piano Concerto* *Black Light*	Summit/2001	André-Michel Schub (Piano) New Zealand Symphony Orchestra James Sedares (Conductor)

Title	Details	Label/Year	**Artists*** (Piano)
Ivory II	*Piano Sets I & II* *Piano Variations* *No Time* *Ragflections* *Iris*	Summit/2021	Daniel Linder Fanya Lin Dane Muller Gary Steigerwalt

*Daniel Linder: *Piano Set I*, Piano Variations, *No Time*, and *Ragflections*
Daniel Linder & Fanya Lin: *Piano Set II*
Dane Muller & Gary Steigerwalt: *Iris*

Unpublished

***Why (?) Jacob* for Solo Piano:**

Elena Abend (Piano)/September 2012
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP4ucS5uVrU

Carolyn Enger (Piano)//January 2018
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ys9JitBrG8

Hsin-I Guo (Piano)/November 2021
https://drive.google.com/file/d/148Qa5iUxkcX4pFwBAb4lnU80mr9w9GZE/view?usp=sharing;

APPENDIX C: Electronic Correspondence with Daniel Asia

Questions for Daniel Asia are listed chronologically and in bold with his responses in italics

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April 2, 2020:

Does *Why (?) Jacob* have an orchestra version?
Yes.

***Why* was written shortly after Yale when you're already starting Musical Elements?**
Yes.

Did you adapt *Why* for piano for any specific occasion or reason besides the nature of the original version?
There was a request from a colleague to produce a short work as part of a concert of such pieces.

***Why* is a commissioned work to celebrate your high school's then newly-built hall, did Jacob also attend your high school before returning to Israel?**
I decided to write a piece for those who could not attend due to death. Jacob did not attend Lakeside.

Was it intentional to place the question mark between *Why* and *Jacob* and within a bracket?
Yes.

There's a decline in your use of expression markings after *Scherzo Sonata*, why is it?
My music became less about quick changes of materials and more about continuity. I also realized I could rely on the intuition of wonderful performers.

Is *Piano Set II* a dedication to Mrs. Asia?
Yes.

How did you come up with the title *Piano Set II (or Popsicle Upside Down on the Pavement)?*
It came shortly after Piano Set I. I decided I also wanted a more whimsical subtitle. The piece was written during a very hot summer in Cambridge MA. That subtitle seemed to portray that quality.

How to damp near the pin in your *Piano Set II*? I tried damping the strings near the pin with my finger but it didn't create a different effect.
Try about an inch or so from the pin to produce a warm hollow sound.
There's a similar motivic cell (tritone, triplet) in the openings of *Why*, *Scherzo*

***Sonata*, *Piano Quartet*, and *String Quartet No. 2*, did they take the idea from any particular material or source?**
No.

Were the two piano sets written during your time at Yale?
Yes.

What do you say about chronicling your stylistic development through three periods: Student, Exploratory, and American?
Sure, but maybe instead of Student call them early works.

What do you think about the idea of *Daniel Asia's piano works: A composer's view on his own works* as the title of my study?
Sure.

How did your experiences with Musical Element influence your keyboard writing or your musical thoughts afterwards?
Not too much, but I was working with superlative pianists all along the way.

Is *Iris* also your Symphony No. 6? If so, when was it composed?

I first composed Iris for piano four hands. Then latter thought it would work really nicely as a symphony. Iris 4 hands was composed in 2017. Iris Symphony in 2017-18.

Is *She* the same as *The She Set*? Please correct me if my wording for the titles is not right.
She was written in 1981. I added to this to make the She Set in 2008.

April 7, 2020:

When was the symphony version of *Why (?) Jacob* composed?
2006.

***"I decided to write a piece for those who could not attend due to death. Jacob did not attend Lakeside."* Are you referring to those who lost their lives in the Yom Kippur War here?**
Yes, that and then something universal as well. Perhaps our response to knowing that life is short and terminal. That we are here for a short time.

Would you mind elaborating a little more on your arrangement of the title *Why (?) Jacob*, is there any musical or extra musical message that you want to convey to the performer? Or would you rather leave it to our imagination and interpretation? The "i do(n't) know" reminds me of E.E. Cummings' style.

Yes, the influence of EE Cummings certainly. "Why" followed by the question mark makes the question universal before then limiting it to Jacob (Rayman). The three fathers of Judaism are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Already, his name leads from the personal to the Jewish, to the universal.

April 14, 2020:

In *Why*'s solo piano version, there are dotted barlines in the cadenza-like passage (p. 6), do they share the same idea as that of *Piano Set II,* suggesting an absence of metrical significance?
I would think so.

It seems to me that there still is a metrical importance because of the downbeats, but it does give a sense of rhythmic stretch/elasticity and sound unmetered.
Correct.

In *Why*, both dotted and solid legato lines are used, and they seem to indicate not only the articulation but also the musical/phrase direction. Is there a particular effect or image that you're trying to say beyond these markings?
No, you have it correct.

The underlined ritardando, dotted barlines, and dotted legatos are found mostly in the *Piano Set II* and *Why*, do these expressive markings represent your earlier or any special musical thinking?
Yes. I think I was stupidly trying to suggest that meter has no suggestion of the usual weightedness of beat structure. If I were to have the score reengraved I would make all measures regular measures with bar lines.

I was wondering if I may get a digital copy of *Why (?) Jacob* for solo piano. Since my musical examples are scanned, and the difference of color that scanning picks up is not very pleasant to look at.
You may ask my publisher Dan Coleman at Modern Works Music Publishing if he can provide this for you. I include him on the email above.

Is there a recording of *Piano Set II* available? It would be of great help for me to have an aural overview of this work.
This was supposed to be recorded in march but had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. I hope to record it in the Fall. In the meantime there is a very old recording that I will forward to you.

In *Piano Set II* (starting from p. 3), those long lines attached to the right of the unstemmed notes over *ped.* I, what kind of effect should be conveyed besides the effect given by the pedaling instruction? Maybe the performer's body gesture (e.g. arms following through as the sound decays)?

I should have made these solid lines. They are just to show that the pedal is kept down.

In *Piano Set II*, for the half notes with hollow circle over diamond shaped notes (p. 22, secondo piano), do the hollow circles mean *with no niente*? The instruction says "depressing silently" for the diamond shaped notes, same as in the opening of mvt. V of *Piano Set I*, does the performer press the keys also silently or press normally first and release silently?
No, it doesn't say press silently. The plus sign + means to damp at the pin.

In *Piano Set II*, what does the hollow circle with a right slash mean (p. 22, L.H. of secondo)?
The **o** *above the two notes means to damp on the C string such that the upper note is sounded as a harmonic.*

Again in *Piano Set II*, what does the face down half bracket with 5" above and a circle underneath mean? 5"= 5 seconds?
Yes, 5 seconds. This notation is borrowed from George Crumb (see Makrokosmos).

Do accented grace notes have a special effect or function that you would like to convey to us?
No, but I suspect they are always before the beat.

There are words "echoi" in *Piano Set II* (P. 30) and "ecoi" in *Scherzo Sonata* (p. 5), are they the same thing? Their context seems to be different from each other: the "echoi" in *Piano Set II* gives an echoey impression while "ecoi" in Scherzo Sonata does not seem to evoke the same image due to the accelerando and the accent. What are they referred to?
I think they are both wrong. I probably should have just said "echo"

May 2, 2020:

***Ragflections* and *No Time* were published under the title of *Two Rags*, are they meant to be performed together or they can be played individually?**
It matters not, as I can't remember and have no strong opinions on the matter.
sorry, I just can't be more specific.

May 14, 2020:

When did your formal musical training begin?
When I began playing the trombone in 3rd grade I believe.

Is trombone your primary instrument? Did you also study guitar, jazz, and piano (in college?)? Do you play other instruments?
It was my primary instrument. I started guitar in high school, and jazz in high school as well. I began playing piano seriously in college. I learned the recorder family in high school.

Were your parents musical? What was your introduction to classical music?
My father was a very fine pianist, who might have pursued a concert career, except for the onslaught of the depression and family matters. The trombone began my formal introduction to classical music.

Did you ask your parents for music lessons? Was it customary for children in most Jewish families to receive music lessons? Is classical music education (or high culture education) an important part of Jewish culture?
Yes, I wanted to progress in my playing of the trombone and that demanded private lessons. It wasn't uncommon for children in Jewish homes to be encouraged to study an instrument and classical music. For example, one of my youthful buddies was Stephen Ansell. He became the violist in the Muir Quartet and is currently principal in the Boston SO.

I read that you were playing in orchestras, jazz ensembles, and bands, were these experiences in your early teens?
Yes.

Your major influences at Lakeside School were Siebert and Grey, anything else you'd like to add besides Siebert's theory guidance and Grey's jazz lessons and his help with creating musical ideas?
Grey was at The Cornish School of Cage/Cunningham fame.

You also studied the Holocaust in addition to Music and European History at Hampshire College. Would you say studying the Holocaust has influenced your creative language? How does it interact with your music?
It certainly has effected my general and Jewish thinking. It therefore has had the effect on the fact that about 1/3 of my output is on Jewish themes or texts.

During your college years, you studied with Stephen Albert, Ron Perera, Randall McClellan, Iva Dee Hiatt, Valerie Pilcher, and Jim McElwaine. It seems like they taught at different places, so what prompted you to study with them? Would you elaborate on how they (or some of them) inspired you?
Hampshire College is part of the Five-College area. It includes among others Smith and Amherst. Albert, Perera, and Hiatt taught at Smith, the others at Hampshire.

Was Robert Morris part of the influences of your electronic music?
A small part.

How would you describe Gunther Schuller's influences on your music?
Very little.

How would you describe Isang Yun's influences on your music?
Very little.

I also read that you had conducted Endymion Ensemble in London while you were a visiting lecturer at the City University. Did your experiences with Endymion give you any particular thoughts or different aspects for Musical Elements?
No.

Are you currently serving as a member of the National Council on the Arts?
Not yet.

How do you see a statement regarding your style evolving from more "hard-edged dissonant language to a more lyrical style" as a reflection of your deepening involvement with the Musical Elements and Judaism?
ME showed me that the best music needn't always be complex, that you can allow the players more latitude if it is not complex. Jewish prayer music effected my sensibility greatly, in that I realized that tunes and melodies are not a bad thing.

Could you also elaborate more on your involvement with Judaism, such as your family's traditions, your times at Hampshire College and Yale, and after you went to New York? You were a founding member of the Minyan Ma'at in New York City? Does Minyan refer to a Jewish congregation (of more than 10 men)? What does Ma'at mean?
I was raised as a Reform Jew. At Hampshire and Yale I participated in Jewishly religious and political groups. When I arrived in New York on the Upper West Side, I was immersed quickly into its vibrant Conservative community, particularly Minyan Ma'at. Yes, minyan means a group of ten Jews. Ma'at means small.

Do you have musical mentor(s)? Are there any composers that you particularly admire?
All of my teachers. Stravinsky, Debussy, Beethoven, Copland, Ives.

In an interview, you expressed your appreciation for Bernstein's ability to "wed being Jewish and being American in the 20th century." What does that mean?
Bernstein was one of the great polymaths, meaning he wanted to do it all: compose, conduct, teach, better the world, be and act Jewish, etc.

Your Piano Variations reminds me a bit of Copland's Piano Variations, in terms of its general tempo sequence and that the individual variations tend to become longer until the main theme finally returns. In your Piano Variations, you use movements instead of variations. Did you have specific thinking on it?
No, but I love, and teach Copland's PVs. So I am not surprised you find similarities.