

Archives have a Life of their Own— New Discoveries in Ben-Haim's Legacy

JEHOASH HIRSHBERG

While working on my monograph, *Ben-Haim, Hayav Vitzirato* (“Ben-Haim—His Life and Work” [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1983]), I conducted several sessions with Paul Ben-Haim (1897-1984). At that time, Ben-Haim was ailing and confined to a wheelchair. He had been hit by a car and seriously injured in 1972, when he visited Munich to receive an honorary diploma from the Mayor of the city. One of my main concerns was to discover the works written in Germany, when he was still known as Paul Frankenburger, before his immigration to Palestine in 1933. Only a handful of these works were known and described by his friend, the publisher Peter E. Gradenwitz, in his popular concert guide, *The World of Symphony*. The *Concerto Grosso* and *Pan* for soprano and orchestra were the only compositions of the German period performed in the *Yishuv*, but never after the establishment of the State of Israel. Ben-Haim told me that, following his forced emigration from Germany, he decided to open a new chapter in his life, and thus abandoned his earlier compositions.

Following my request to see them, however, he instructed his wife to show me a chest of drawers where they were kept. I was amazed to realize their sheer number and diversity, nearly all in manuscript form, as well as a few published pieces, such as his *Hofmannsthal Lieder* of 1916. Alongside the music manuscripts, I also discovered a treasure trove of folders, containing newspaper reviews of his performances as *Kapellmeister* and as a composer, all methodically collected and pasted in by his elderly father. I explained to the Ben-Haims the tremendous significance of this forgotten material, and they immediately consented to my proposal for it to be transferred to The Jewish National & University Library (JNUL) in Jerusalem, and create there a Ben-Haim Archive. Mrs Ben-Haim put it clearly: “You can see his condition. I am also old and unwell. When we are no longer around, they will take over the apartment and throw it all into the trash can.”

I wasted not a single moment, and immediately called Professor Israel Adler, then Head of the Music Department at the JNUL on my return to Jerusalem, and notified him of the breaking news. As always with him, he moved extremely quickly. He paid a visit to Ben-Haim the following day, together with the Library's legal consultant. Ben-Haim was happy to sign the agreement transferring all rights to his material to the JNUL. The next day, I loaded the entire collection into my car, and carefully removed it all to Jerusalem. The discovery of this new material changed my plans for the book, and greatly expanded the discussion of Ben-Haim's German period.

But I still felt restless. Was there anything else? Mrs Ben-Haim was doubtful, but showed me a large metal trunk that had been left for decades to rust on their balcony. Whereas the drawers had been well organized, here there was total chaos. Additional manuscripts of his early music were mixed together with precious letters from Stokowsky and Menuhin, together with taxi and laundry receipts, *et alia*. I carefully classified everything that had been in the trunk, and added the relevant material to the growing archive. As a token of admiration to the great man, I asked the excellent singer Cila Grossmeier to prepare four of his *Hofmansthaal* and *Nietzsche*

Lieder for a private concert at Ben-Haim's home. She later recorded them for the radio, and performed them on many occasions. At that time, I also performed his *String Trio* of 1927 with the late violinist Dvora Grossmann and cellist Emil Adar at a conference of the Israeli Musicological Society.

In view of Ben-Haim's deteriorating health, I worked at a maddening pace and exerted much pressure on the lethargic Am Oved publishing house. I managed to get the book out, and hand it to Ben-Haim in person. His dwindling eyesight did not permit him to read the book, and his wife could read no Hebrew, but he was excited to the verge of tears just holding the book. Ben-Haim passed away a few months later.

At that point, the history of the Ben-Haim Archive moved on a stage. I began work on the English version of the book with Israeli Music Publications, which then held the rights to Ben-Haim's work. The administrator, Stanley Simmonds, allowed me to expand the book beyond the strict limitations that Am Oved had imposed on me. At the same time, Mrs Ben-Haim started to put the apartment in order—and kept calling me about new items she discovered, among them a treasure trove of 360 or so letters that her late husband had written to her from Palestine while awaited a visa to enter Palestine. He had commanded her to burn them, but she had concealed them, and then forgotten all about them. The Archive was enriched, therefore, with several hitherto unknown small compositions, numerous letters and documents—as was the lengthy Appendix of the English version of the book.

The expanded English version of the book came out in 1990. Mrs Ben-Haim was finally able to read the book—with much emotional excitement. She died a few months later. I considered the work on the book final and the Archive complete. How mistaken I was!

I was happy that the book aroused interest in Ben-Haim's hitherto unperformed compositions. Yet, a few years after publication, the English version suffered a setback when Mr Simmonds suddenly abandoned IMP, and the many remaining copies of the book were left in a locked and untended basement, slowly disintegrating in the heat and humidity. Having despaired of ever recovering them, I approached Mr Paul Landau, head of the Israeli Music Institute. He had acquired the rights to Ben-Haim following a tangled legal maneuvering, and he immediately consented to publish a new, updated edition of the book—which is currently in print—on behalf of The Book Committee of the Arts Council. The accomplished pianist, Gila Goldstein, put out two CDs of Ben-Haim's entire volume of work for the piano. Shortly afterwards, soprano Varda Kotler issued a delightful CD of Ben Haim's Hebrew and German songs. The launch of the recording took place at a recital at the Einav Center in Tel Aviv, where I briefly introduced the music. The concert was followed by a reception, where a young woman approached me and introduced herself as Tamar Ben Avraham, Ben-Haim's granddaughter. She told me that the concert and my introduction had reminded her of a locked metal cabinet that had been placed in her home after Ben-Haim's death. It hadn't been touched for some twenty years. She knew there were manuscripts inside, but hadn't felt able to disturb this sacred memory of her grandfather. During the concert, however, she had made up her mind to break into the cabinet—and she soon transferred to me five heavy folders of manuscripts.

This revelation caught me at a very busy period, and I felt I should defer work on this precious material until I could find the peace and quiet needed for it. I then carefully went through the folders, which held extremely interesting early versions and sketches of his early music. But I was especially excited with the discovery of six

as yet unknown early compositions, which have now found their way into the Archive and the Appendix of the forthcoming edition.

The following hitherto unknown compositions were found in the collection:

1. A short piece for violin solo (or the violin part for a piano composition that has not been found). It carries no date and looks like a very early piece, since Ben-Haim studied the violin before turning to the piano.

2. A Heine cycle of three *Lieder* from *Ritter Olaf*: “*Keck und heiter schaut Herr Olaf*,” “*Herr Olaf sitzt bei Hochzeitschmaus*,” “*Herr Olaf, es ist Mitternacht*.”

3. Heine, *Abenddämmerung*.

The *Lieder* were composed in 1913-14, when the composer was sixteen years old. They add to the many *Lieder* already in the Archive, reflecting Ben-Haim’s deep interest in and knowledge of classical German poetry.

4. *Libera me*, a short composition for a four-part chorus, composed in 1920.