

An Early String Quartet Movement by Paul Ben-Haim*

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Abstract: Paul Ben-Haim's contribution to the rise of an Israeli idiom in classical music is well-known and broadly documented. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted both by scholars and by performing musicians to works he composed as Paul Frankenburger, before his arrival in the land of Israel. This article reaches deep into Ben-Haim's past, reporting the discovery of an early movement for string quartet, composed by Frankenburger when he was only seventeen. The article situates the discovery of the quartet within the recent resurgence of interest in the composer's early works, as well as presenting a brief analysis of the work and a report of its recent publication by the Israel Music Institute and its first performance by the Carmel Quartet.

Keywords: Ben-Haim, Frankenburger, chamber music, Israeli music, string quartet, Carmel Quartet.

The discovery of a previously unknown work by a celebrated composer is always an exciting event. All the more so when the composer holds a central position within the musical history of a particular time or place. Paul Ben-Haim's life and works have been thoroughly researched over the past decades, and Jehoash Hirshberg's seminal monograph on the composer has been supplemented by numerous in-depth studies of the composer's works and their place in the emergence of a distinctly Israeli classical music tradition.¹

Following Ben-Haim's immigration to mandate Palestine in the 1930s, he changed his name from the German Frankenburger to the Hebrew Ben-Haim, positioning himself at the center of a group of composers intent on forging a new musical dialect that would marry their European training as classical musicians with the soundscape of their new home.² In his will, dictated in 1956, he expressed an explicit desire to suppress a large number of the earlier works composed during his German period.³ Perhaps for this reason, works from this period were relatively neglected in both research and performance for

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¹ Jehoash Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim, his Life and Works*, 2nd edition, revised and updated (Tel Aviv: IMI, 2010); Liran Gurkiewicz, *Paul Ben Haim: Stylistical Devices and Jewish identities in his Orchestral works*, Ph. D. Thesis, Bar Ilan University, 2016. [heb]; Haddasah Guttman, *The Music of Paul Ben-Haim: A Performance Guide* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Ronit Seter, "Israelism: Nationalism, Orientalism, and the Israeli Five," *The Musical quarterly*, 2014-07-01, Vol.97 (2), p.238-308; Assaf Shelleg, *Jewish Contiguities and the Soundtrack of Jewish History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² As argued by Liran Gurkiewicz, Ben-Haim's shift in style was more gradual and not as radical as was once believed. See Gurkiewicz, "Paul Ben-Haim: The Oratorio Joram and the Jewish Identity of a Composer," *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, Vol. 11, 2013/II, pp. 106 – 129

³ Ben Haim's last will in testament is in The National library of Israel: "Archive of Paul Ben – Haim", Mus 55, Series E: Documents, item no 014. I thank Liran Gurkiewicz for bringing this document to my attention.

many years. Yet the last decade and a half have seen much activity designed to rectify this state of affairs.⁴ In 2008 Hirshberg initiated and supervised a revival of the oratorio *Joram* (1931-33), by the Münchner MotettenChor und Symphoniker under Hayko Siemens.⁵ It was subsequently recorded by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under the same conductor in 2012.⁶ 2013 saw the ARC ensemble's excellent recording of a Piano Quartet Op. 4 composed in 1921, when the composer was twenty four. This was the first time the piece had been played since a live broadcast in 1932.⁷ In 2010, with the cooperation of the Israeli Music Institute, I brought upon a revival of Ben-Haim's earliest large scale work, the String Quintet of 1919, a fine, ambitious work, which I performed and recorded with the Carmel Quartet for the first time since its last documented performance in 1931.⁸ In 2016, as part of the Israeli music festival, Frankenburger's impressive String Trio (1927) was performed by Roi Shiloah, Yoram Youngerman and Ariel Tushinsky, for the first time since 1977. The following year, the *Concerto Grosso* of 1931, which had been performed in Germany and Russia in 1931, as Frankenburger was in transit to mandate Palestine, was recorded by Israel Yinon and the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover.⁹

With the exception of the Piano Quartet, all the aforementioned works were part of the few mentioned in Ben-Haim's will as meriting performance after his death. Not so with the piece with which I am concerned in this article, the *Langsamer Satz* for string quartet of 1914, an intense study in chromaticism, laid out in ABA form. Not much is known of this early work, composed when Frankenburger was a student in the *Wilhelm-Gymnasium* in Munich.

⁴ Yoel Greenberg, "Drawn Up out of a Mute Wellspring: The Revival of Paul Ben-Haim's Early String Quintet (1919)," in *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, Vol. 9 – 2011, pp 25 – 42; Gurkiewicz, "Ben Haim and Jewish identity", *Min-Ad*, 2013; Malcolm Miller, "Letters from the Front: Paul Frankenburger (Ben-Haim's) early unpublished correspondence with Otto Crusius (1857-1918)", Proceedings of an Academic Conference - presented at the 16th World Congress of Jewish Studies, in *The Jewish Music Research Center*, [<https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/>]

⁵ The work had previously been performed only once, in 1979, and that in an incomplete version. The first authentic performance of the piece, took place on November 8, 2008, in a concert marking 70 years to *Kristallnacht*. In relation to the different performances of *Joram* and Jehoash Hirshberg's initiative to bring this challenging piece to stage see the last updated edition: Jehoash Hirshberg, *Paul Ben – Haim, His Life and Works*, 3rd edition, revised and updated (IMI and Carmel Publications, 2019), pp 95 – 96. Regarding the reception of the work see: Malcolm Miller, "First Performances – Ben Haim's *Joram*", in *Tempo* 63 (249), Cambridge University Press, 2009; pp. 52– 53.

⁶ Paul Ben-Haim, *Joram Oratorio*, The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Hayko Siemens – Conductor, Helicon Classics, 2012.

⁷ *Music in Exile: Chamber works by Paul Ben Haim*, performed by the ARC Ensemble, (Chandos Digital - Chan 10769, 2014).

⁸ For a broader discussion of the 1919 Quintet, as well as a musical analysis of it see by this author: Greenberg, "The Revival of Ben Haim's String Quintet (1919)," *Min-Ad*, 2011. *Paul Ben-Haim Chamber Music for Strings*, performed by the Carmel Quartet (Toccata Classics, TOCC 0214, 2014).

⁹ *Paul Ben Haim, Symphony no. 2 and Concerto Grosso*, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hanover, Israel Yinon, (cpo 777 677 – 2, 2011).

Until recently, the work had not been mentioned in the catalogue of works at the end of Hirshberg's monograph on the composer, although Hirshberg has since included it in the 2019 edition of the book.¹⁰ Hence, in 2011, while perusing the Ben-Haim archive, I was surprised to find a manuscript written on two pages of closed score, on which the only indication of the intended scoring being the title: *Langsamer Satz für Quartett*. The notation on two staves only, as well as the date of composition, ostensibly indicate that this work was perhaps little more than an exercise in four-part writing. Yet the meticulously copied dynamics, expressive markings and articulation suggest that the young composer may well have hoped to have had it performed. At the end of the score, Frankenburger stated the date of completion, a habit he would maintain throughout his career: September 3rd 1914. By that time, all the major European forces had entered World War I, and only a few days remained until the German army was confronted by British and French forces in the First Battle of the Marne (September 6-9, 1914). Yet the war did not immediately interrupt Frankenburger's studies, and the reason this manuscript was never brought to performance must remain a matter of speculation.

This is not to say that the composer entirely forgot the work. Five years later, with the young Frankenburger back from the front after the war, its opening, *Tristanesque* measures, were to reappear, heavily modified, transposed to f minor, yet nonetheless clearly recognizable, as the opening theme of the second movement of the ambitious String Quintet of 1919 (See Examples 1 and 2). The theme itself is tonally unstable, beginning on a *Tristan* chord in the original pitch-class, but notated as an appoggiatura on the dominant of E flat minor, with the E flat in the first violin and the C flat in the viola resolving in the second half of the measure to D and B flat, respectively. By this time, however, the cello's F has shifted upwards to an F sharp, and the dominant of E flat remains unattained. Instead, the bass descends chromatically, and reaches the dominant of E major in measure 7. This, too, remains unresolved, and Frankenburger returns in measure 8 to a variant of the opening theme and harmony. This time, the chord's enharmonic spelling is identical to the *Tristan* chord, but the B appears in the bass. The D# in the second violin resolves downwards, yet again, the dominant of E-flat remains an unrealized promise, as the bass shifts down from B flat to A. The opening measures return, an octave higher, in measures 27-34, this time *forte*, again culminating on the dominant of E major, which is sustained for four measures (36-40). Yet this dominant is also not resolved, and is instead deflected to G major, the key of the lush middle section.

¹⁰ Hirshberg, *Ben-Haim*, 3rd edition, 2019: p. 363. [heb]. Hirshberg also includes a short discussion on my discovery of the work and its subsequent performance with the Carmel Quartet. *Ibid*, 16

Sehr langsam und ausdrucksvoll

Example 1: Paul Frankenburger (Ben Haim), Langsamer Satz mm. 1-5

molto espress.

Example 2: Paul Frankenburger (Ben-Haim), String Quintet mm 14-21

If the theme of the first section was dense and chromatic, that of the second section – presented by the viola solo, and taken up by each of the instruments in turn, is generously lyrical, featuring large expressive leaps and spanning a broad range of nearly two octaves within only four measures (Example 3).

Allmählich bewegter

Example 3: Paul Frankenburger (Ben-Haim), Langsamer Satz, theme of middle section, mm. 43-46

Although the tonality of this section is clearer than that in the first, it remains unstable throughout. By and large, the middle section consists of three rotations of increasing intensity, each of which begins with a clear presentation of the theme and ends with a climactic build up. The first rotation (mm. 43-62) begins with the theme in G major; the second (mm. 63-70) with the theme in F major; and the third (mm. 71-80) again in G. The climactic build at the end of the third rotation also serves as the retransition into the much intensified, yet foreshortened, reappearance of A. Once again, the theme is presented twice, the second time an octave higher, yet this time the dynamics are reversed: the first appearance of the theme is at a dynamic of *fortississimo* (*fff*), whereas the second is *pianissimo ma molto espressivo*. A brief reminiscence of the middle section in E flat brings the movement to a close, stable at last on E flat major, but with sigh motifs of C flat – B flat on the cello reminding us of the appoggiaturas of the opening theme.

It is unlikely that Frankenburger was familiar with another E-flat *Langsamer Satz* for string quartet, composed a decade earlier by the young Anton Webern, then also in his formative years. Nevertheless, the oft-cited description of Webern's movement as "*Tristan und Isolde* compressed into a few minutes" is just as apt in the case of Frankenburger's work, if not even more so. The sense of an aching yearning established at the very beginning is sustained throughout the movement with remarkable skill for a seventeen-year-old student, providing yet another reminder of Frankenburger's schooling within late German romanticism, and the considerable transformation his style underwent over the years. Even if chamber music did not form the lion's share of his oeuvre, Frankenburger was to continue composing chamber music at each and every stage of his career. As such, the *Langsamer Satz* of 1914 provides us with an important glimpse of his first attempts in the genre, as well as enriching our repertoire with a fine concert piece in its own right.

In 2017, following my own initiative, the Israel Music Institute published performance parts for the *Langsamer Satz*, and in that same year, the Carmel Quartet gave it its world premiere, more than a century after its composition. This performance can be heard at the following link: <https://youtu.be/qc66ONRaVSY>. The two pages of the manuscript are reproduced in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1: Paul Frankenburger, Facsimile of manuscript of the *Langsamer Satz* for String Quartet (1914). Reproduced by the permission of the National Library of Israel, Music Department, Paul Ben-Haim Collection.

Langsamer Satz für Quartett

Sehr langsam und ausdrucksvoll.

P. Frankenburger.

immer besser

Bezeugen

Nachdenken

Sanftfließen

molto esp.

Allmählich bewahren

molto esp.

exp.

31247

mus 55 440

5. 13.

mf *cres.* *All*
molto ritardando
sempre *sehr ausdrucksvoll.*
appassionato *sehr leidenschaftlich.*
sehr langsam.
sempre
dolce *pp* *fine*

Komp. am 2. u. 3. September 1914.

