

AMOS ELKANA

WHY DO YOU SLEEP

For chamber ensemble

Op. 60

SCORE



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AMOS ELKANA

WHY DO YOU SLEEP

Instrumentation

4 voices (or 1 voice with playback)
3 recorders (soprano, tenor and bass - or 1 recorder with playback)
guitar
cello
contrabass
djembe

Duration

~7'00"

Performance notes

Ma Lecha Nirdam? (What Makes You Sleep?) sets five lines from the piyyut "Ben Adam Ma Lecha Nirdam" by Yehuda Ibn Balaam (Seville, 11th century). Drawn from the Book of Jonah's account of a sailor sleeping through a storm, the text asks why one remains passive in the face of danger—a question that resonates today, from environmental crisis to civic responsibility.

The work opens in a hushed instrumental space: bass recorder, muted strings, and gentle percussion create a cool, restrained soundworld, coloured by non-vibrato and soft articulations. When the voice enters, it is multiplied into several overlapping lines—each recorded by Etty Ben-Zaken—so that a single timbre becomes an intimate choir. This layered voice alternates between urgency and quiet reflection, shaping the piyyut's questions into waves of sound.

The instruments respond and comment: the recorder's tone sometimes shadows the melody and sometimes weaves a counter-line; the guitar moves between harmonics, plucked notes, and soft strumming; cello and bass provide a resonant foundation; percussion appears sparingly as punctuation rather than pulse. Later, a small recorder ensemble joins, adding a bright, breathy colour before the music retreats into stillness.

The result is a compact, seven-minute work that draws its power from restraint, clarity, and the interplay between a solo voice—at once singular and multiplied—and finely balanced instrumental textures.

Text of the piyyut:

בן אדם מה לך נרדם
שפך שיחה דרש סליחה
ומהרה רץ לעזרה
ומפגע וגם רשע
ברח ופחד מאסונים

Man, what makes you sleep?
Pour out your prayer, seek forgiveness;
And swiftly run to seek help;
From transgression—and from evil—
Flee, and fear disaster.



to Etty BenZaken and Eitan Steinberg

מה לך נרדם? Why do you sleep?

Amos Elkana

$\text{♩} = 60$

4/4

A1

Bass Recorder

Violoncello

Contrabass

con sord.
non vib.

ppp

sul pont.

pp

non vib.

9

A3

B. Rec.

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

p

16

A4

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

p

21

(B1) non vib.

non vib.

p ben ma nir

p a le

p non vib.

p dam cha

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

nat.

non vib.

p

Cb.

p

Djembe



26

(B2)

a le dam dam cha ben

dam dam cha ben ma nir

ben ma nir a le dam

non vib.

p

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

31

Voice
 T. Rec.
 Vc.
 Cb.
 Djembe

=

36
 Voice
 T. Rec.
 Gtr.
 Vc.
 Cb.
 Djembe

B3
 B4

sul tasto
 l.v.
 o o o o
 mp
 sim.
 pizz.
 mp
 pizz.
 mp

41

Voice

le dam dam cha

cha ben ma nir

T. Rec.

nir a le dam

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

45

Voice

ben a - dam ma le - cha nir - dam

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

(B5)

49

Voice

shfoch si - cha drosh sli - cha um - he - ra rutz le -

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

(B6)

53

Voice

ez - ra u - mi - pe - sha ve - gam re - sha brach u-

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

57

Voice

fchad me - a - so - nim

B. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

(C1)

61

Gtr.

Djembe

(C2)

64

Voice

u fchad me

u fchad me

u fchad me

u fchad me

Gtr.

Djembe

74 (D1)

Voice

nim

nim

nim

nim

Sop. Rec.

non vib.

p

S. Rec.

non vib.

p

T. Rec.

non vib.

p

Gtr.

8

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

79 (D2)

Sop. Rec.

pp

S. Rec.

pp

T. Rec.

pp

Gtr.

8

Vc.

Cb.

Djembe

D3

84

Sop. Rec.

S. Rec.

T. Rec.

Gtr.

D4

88

Sop. Rec.

S. Rec.

T. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

l.v.

non vib.

ppp

non vib.

ppp

D5

93

Sop. Rec.

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.

ppp

p

99

Gtr.

Vc.

Cb.