

# Moses PERGAMENT

## VOLUME ONE: A MUSICAL MISCELLANY

FANTASIA DIFFERENTE FOR CELLO AND STRING NONET

MUSIC FOR STAGE AND SCREEN

PIANO CONCERTO

CHAMBER MUSIC

PIANO WORKS

Martin Malmgren, piano  
Tomas Nuñez, cello  
Agora Music Collective  
Helsinki Metropolitan Orchestra  
Sasha Mäkilä  
Helsinki Chamber Orchestra  
Aku Sorensen

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## MOSES PERGAMENT Volume One: A Musical Miscellany

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<b>Piano Concerto (1951–52)</b>	<b>27:52</b>
❶ I <i>Maestoso</i>	10:04
❷ II <i>Molto adagio</i>	9:42
❸ III <i>Allegretto grazioso</i>	7:48
❹ <b>Sorrow, Op. 5, for piano (1908–9)</b>	<b>2:00</b>
<b>Lyrical Dances for piano</b>	<b>4:18</b>
❺ Elf Dance I (1914)	0:58
❻ Elf Dance II (1915)	1:36
❼ Mazurka (1912)	1:44
❽ <b>Incidental Music for <i>Kung Salomo</i> ('King Solomon'): 'Sulamith's Dance' for piano (1915)</b>	<b>1:36</b>
❾ <b><i>Chanson triste</i>, version for violin, <i>violino obbligato</i>, cello and piano (1915)</b>	<b>3:32</b>
<b>Incidental Music for <i>Esthers gästabad</i> ('The Feast of Esther') (1936)</b>	
❿ I Dance	1:58
⓫ II <i>Adagio</i>	2:57
<b><i>Med livet som insats</i> ('They Staked their Lives'): Film Score (1939)</b>	
⓬ Act I: The Mill (1939), transcr. Malmgren	1:51
⓭ Act II: Minuet (1916), transcr. Malmgren	3:16
⓮ Act III: <i>Valse lente</i> (1939)	3:21

15	<b><i>Festive Fanfare</i></b> transcr. composer (1961)	2:05
16	<b><i>For Nicole</i></b> for piano (1974)	1:23
17	<b><i>Meditation</i></b> for cello (1974)	3:17
18	<b><i>Meditation</i></b> for cello and piano (1969)	4:12
19	<b><i>Melodia romantica</i></b> for cello and piano (1970)	3:16
20	<b><i>Fantasia diferente – 'Ciélo e térra'</i></b> for cello and string nonet (1969)	9:50
		TT 76:28

**Martin Malmgren, piano** 11–16 18 19  
**Musicians from the Agora Music Collective**  
 Sebastian Silén, violin 9  
 Lea Tuuri, *violino obbligato* 9  
 Mathias Hortling, cello 9  
**Tomas Nuñez, cello** 17–20  
**Helsinki Metropolitan Orchestra** 11–13  
**Sasha Mäkilä, conductor** 11–13  
**Helsinki Chamber Orchestra** 20  
**Aku Sorensen, conductor** 20

FIRST RECORDINGS

# MOSES PERGAMENT – A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

by Martin Malmgren

Moses Pergament was born in Helsinki on 21 September 1893, into a Jewish family originating from the Lithuanian village of Ukmergė, north-west of the capital, Vilnius. There was no lack of musicians in the family: his younger brother, Simon Parmet, studied conducting and eventually became conductor of the Finnish Radio Orchestra in 1948–53; his future step-brother, Matti Rubinstein, also became a conductor; and his niece, the pianist-composer Erna Tauro (*née* Pergament), became active in the world of music-theatre, and is remembered in particular for her songs based on Tove Jansson's 'Moomin' books. Pergament himself originally aimed at a career as a violin virtuoso, and after studies with Victor Nováček – the Czech violinist who premiered the first version of the Sibelius Violin Concerto – he entered the St Petersburg Conservatoire with hopes of joining the class of the legendary violinist Leopold Auer. As Pergament's biographer Carl-Gunnar Åhlén notes,<sup>1</sup> it appears that Moses initially was offered a place in the class of Ionnes Nalbandian, Auer's Armenian assistant.<sup>2</sup> It is highly likely that Pergament was in Nalbandian's class at the same time as a very young Jascha Heifetz, likewise of Lithuanian origin, who, unlike Pergament, would soon move on to Auer's class.<sup>3</sup>

In the unpublished memoirs that Pergament wrote towards the end of his life, of which Carl-Gunnar Åhlén cites fragments in his biography, the composer offers this explanation of his unusual family name:

<sup>1</sup> Carl-Gunnar Åhlén, *Moses Pergament*, Gidlunds Förlag, Möklinta, 2016, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The preparatory course was given by 'a certain [Leonid] Kogan', according to Pergament (*ibid.*, p. 29).

<sup>3</sup> Heifetz entered Nalbandian's class in 1910, at the age of nine. In a review in *Svenska Dagbladet* on 4 April 1934, after a Heifetz performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto in Stockholm, Pergament notes that Heifetz was 'a mature artist already at the age of 10, a medium for higher inspirations'.

My grandfather was drafted into the Russian military at the age of nine, as the Russians did with all the Jewish boys in the Russian and Polish Jewish villages. Conscription in Russia at that time lasted 25 (!) years. My little grandfather was asked at enrolment what his name was. Mosche Parmet, he answered truthfully. Parmet – what is that? the Russians wondered. It's what you write the handwritten Torah scrolls on (the Bible text). Ah, Pergament it is!<sup>4</sup> Then you can be called Pergament too. That's how we and many others got their surnames. The Russians thought it was simple and painless.<sup>5</sup>

In the same memoirs, Pergament explains how his practising experiments during this time led to the development of lymph nodes on his left hand, which he claims put an end to further violin studies.<sup>6</sup> What was meant to be four years of studies became three, and Pergament returned to Helsinki, where he entered the Helsinki Music Institute (later the Sibelius Academy) in September 1911 and received lessons from Erkki Melartin in music theory.<sup>7</sup> For a brief period, he also studied at the Helsinki University. In spite of his hand injury, his violin studies were continued – now with Leo Funtek, who had succeeded Nováček. Nor did the injury prevent him from playing in the Helsinki Philharmonic Society, nowadays the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. One could therefore assume that Pergament remained a capable violinist but that he no longer envisaged a virtuoso career for himself.

He was also part of a circle of composition students of Ilmari Krohn, which included Yrjö Kilpinen, Väinö Raitio and Matti Rubinstein. The group was eventually disbanded

<sup>4</sup> The Russian пергамент is 'parchment' in English.

<sup>5</sup> Ählén, *op. cit.*, p. 19. This passage also explains why Simon Parmet, né Pergament, called himself Pergament-Parmet for a while, before eventually adapting the simpler surname of Parmet. The change is said to have taken place in the 1920s on the advice of a German conductor while Parmet was studying in Germany; it is believed that the change of surname was intended, at least in part, to distinguish himself from Moses.

<sup>6</sup> Ählén, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>7</sup> According to Ählén, Pergament had lessons with Melartin in both music theory and composition, but the newspaper articles from Pergament's debut concert in 1914 present him as a self-taught composer. Writing under the pseudonym BIS, Karl Fredrik Wasenius (a great-grandfather of Robert von Bahr, who named his renowned record label in memory of his ancestor, and whose very first recordings were of music by Moses Pergament) referred to Pergament in a review as 'a pupil of Melartin in regards to earlier theoretical studies, in composition his own teacher' (Ählén, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 and 37).

because of Krohn's demand for absolute fidelity from his students,<sup>8</sup> but Pergament would remain friends with Yrjö Kilpinen over the next decades, describing him as 'Finland's Hugo Wolf' in his later position as music critic.<sup>9</sup> Pergament liked to refer to himself as an autodidact, and so one can assume that these early composition lessons had a limited impact on his development.

In the days preceding Pergament's debut concert as a composer, held in the Great Hall of the Helsinki University in December 1914, a well-known figure in Finnish music life writes in his diary: 'Another new composer, in addition to that a Jew, Moses Pergament. *Hufvudstadsbladet* – the Jewish paper by preference – puffs. After the highly successful debut, which was sold out to the last seat and where many works on the programme had to be encored immediately, another entry in the same diary mentions Arthur Frenckell, the editor-in-chief of *Hufvudstadsbladet* who happened to be Jewish: 'Our Swedish press cheers for Moses Pergament. Frenckel [*sic*] directs and patronises his tribe; in fact the most powerful on earth. The Finnish press dares to tell the truth, but will probably have to eat it up'. The author of these diary entries was none other than Jean Sibelius.<sup>10</sup> His words serve as an example of the anti-Semitism Pergament had to face throughout his life, either directly or in a less overt manner.<sup>11</sup> In spite of all of its apparent qualities, his music remains scarcely known to the general public even today, and the extent to which prejudice and outright discrimination played a part in his marginalisation can hardly be overestimated. Pergament would become widely appreciated for his insightful writings on music in his 'day job' as a music critic and contributed enormously to

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> 'Yrjö Kilpinen – Finland's Hugo Wolf', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 September 1926.

<sup>10</sup> Diary entries on 19 November and 3 December 1914, *Jean Sibelius: Dagbok 1909–1944*, ed. Fabian Dahlström, Atlantis/Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Porvoo, 2005, pp. 204 and 206.

<sup>11</sup> It should be pointed out that Pergament came in contact with Sibelius in many ways, both directly and indirectly, throughout his life, and beyond these diary entries there is no evidence of a demeaning attitude from Sibelius towards Pergament – on the contrary. For his part, Pergament adored Sibelius' music and interviewed him in his later job as music critic, and *Sibelius symfonier: en studie i musikförståelse* (Söderström, Helsinki, 1955; an English translation appeared as *The Symphonies of Sibelius – A Study in Musical Appreciation*, published by Cassell, London, in 1959), perhaps the most influential book on the interpretation of Sibelius' symphonies, was written by Pergament's brother, Simon Parmet, as a result of his many visits to the composer in his home in Järvenpää, where he sought advice on the music. In a later diary entry Sibelius was complimentary about Pergament's talents.

Swedish musical life in this role, but as a composer he was hardly given a warm embrace by the domestic musical establishment after making Sweden his home in 1915. Because of his place of birth, some were unwilling to consider him a Swedish composer, although Swedish was his mother tongue and he had been granted Swedish citizenship in 1919.<sup>12</sup> His friends Hilding Rosenberg and Gösta Nystroem brought up his name before the Society of Swedish Composers numerous times, but it took no less than three decades for Pergament to become accepted as a member, in May 1945 – its first Jewish member, in fact. Doors that had previously been closed to him now started to open, and the composer, already more than 50 years old, began to receive commissions more frequently.

Pergament's move to Sweden in 1915 was in part an effort to avoid being conscripted into the Russian army when the First World War was unfolding, as his grandfather had been.<sup>13</sup> Pergament managed to get a suspension by bribing a military doctor, a purchase that included a false passport.<sup>14</sup> In the autumn of 1915, he travelled through Torneå-Haparanda in the north and arrived safely in Stockholm. Here he would soon be taken under the wing of the Finnish composer-conductor Armas Järnefelt (Sibelius' brother-in-law, as it happens), whose letter of recommendation probably played an important role in Pergament's successful application for Swedish citizenship. With paternal care, Järnefelt helped Pergament to find his place in this new environment, allowing him to sit in at the Royal Opera in Stockholm to follow Järnefelt's rehearsals with the orchestra. As Åhlén notes in his biography,

To the left side of the conductor [Järnefelt] sat Moses' violin teacher Leo Funtek as alternating first concert-master. He had been forced to emigrate to Sweden after Austria's declaration of war on 6 August 1914 since he was born in the Austrian-Hungarian Ljubljana/Laibach and therefore belonged to the enemies of the Grand Duchy of Finland.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Jews were not able to become citizens in Finland until 1918. By then, Pergament had already applied for citizenship in Sweden.

<sup>13</sup> Finland was a 'Grand Duchy' of Russia for over a century, until 1917, when it won its independence.

<sup>14</sup> Åhlén, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Approximately thirteen years after Pergament's move to Stockholm, his 1921 ballet *Krelantems och Eldeling*<sup>16</sup> for large orchestra would receive its belated premiere on that very stage of the Royal Opera, with decoration and costumes by Gösta Adrian-Nilsson.

After relocating to Stockholm, though, the young cosmopolitan composer was far from ready to settle down: he would soon spend time in the lively cultural milieu of Paris, attending the 1920 production of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* at the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées with Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. As Pergament recalled the event in his later years, the violent reaction of the audience appeared to be of the same variety as the brawls that had accompanied the 1913 premiere of the work in the same venue:

they were fighting on the parquet [...] with their fists, so there was a battle all over the auditorium. [...] We sat at the top, it was one of those little ox-eye windows up in the gallery, and we howled with all our strength in enthusiasm, complete dissolution. We thought it was so fantastic. Now it wasn't just the concert version, it was the Russian Ballet that danced the work, and it was probably very much the enormous intensity of the dance that made us so moved.<sup>17</sup>

Not long thereafter, Pergament appears to have made contact with Diaghilev himself, and to have interested him in collaborating on a ballet, making Pergament the only Finnish-born composer to have received a commission from Ballets Russes. It was around this time that he wrote not only *Krelantems och Eldeling* but also started sketching a second ballet, *Revolution*. It is unclear how events unfolded, but the Ballets Russes underwent

<sup>16</sup> Åhlén describes the ballet as a classical triangle drama:

The young, adored folk hero Krelantems [...] loves the dancer Eldeling [...] and has his feelings reciprocated. His rival is the brutal and tyrannical King [...] who uses her to chase away his gloom. Neither grand feasts with dances, jesters' parades, fighting games or masked games amuse him for long; his only wish is that Eldeling dance for him. Krelantems rushes towards the King with his sword but is overpowered by the guard. Eldeling is left alone with the King who becomes increasingly violent. In a vision she sees Krelantems taken away and finds new strength, but when the King realises that he cannot subdue her, he orders Krelantems to be killed and the body to be carried into the palace. Eldeling collapses when she sees the corpse with Krelantems's helmet. The King realises that it is now his turn to use her. But a signal sounds, it grows dark, and Krelantems's followers enter the palace and kill the King. The corpse on the stretcher was the Fool [...] who played dead and who now dances a dance of joy.

*Ibid.*, p. 88

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Anders Edling, *Franskt i svensk musik 1880–1920*, Almqvist and Wiksell, Uppsala, 1982, pp. 313–14.

a split and never programmed *Krelantems och Eldeling* before its dissolution in 1929. Pergament must already have lost all hope with the Ballets Russes, since he had started looking for alternative venues for a production years before the company was disbanded, and thus the work was eventually premiered in 1928 in Stockholm. The ballet master at the Royal Opera at the time was the Polish-born dancer, choreographer and author Jan Ciepliński, who had been dancing for the Ballets Russes in 1925–27. In spite of the difficulties of dancing in Gösta Adrian-Nilsson's costumes, *Krelantems och Eldeling* was a resounding success with the audience, with no fewer than thirteen curtain calls.<sup>18</sup> Although a 24-minute ballet suite version was later recorded, it seems that the full ballet has not been performed since that belated premiere.

Pergament also spent some years studying conducting in Berlin, where he met his future wife, Ilse Kutzleb. They married in 1923 and had three children; she died in 1960. It could be argued that Pergament was more strongly influenced by German culture than by French, as exemplified by his long list of songs to German poetry, compared with only one song in French. After the Second World War, however, he did not set a single song in German. When composing a song to text by Otto Julius Bierbaum in 1973, whose poetry Pergament had set to music many times in the first decades of the twentieth century, he made his own translation of the text into Swedish. His *L'infidèle*, to a text by Maeterlinck, is from 1951, a set of *Four Chinese Songs* date from 1946, and in his final decade he became preoccupied with writing songs in Italian – a shift of focus strongly suggesting that the traumatic experiences of the 1930 and '40s led Pergament to search for inspiration elsewhere. There is a telling letter from him to Konrad Latte, a German-born musician who was among the few Jews in Berlin to survive the war, thanks to a network of people who helped him hide.<sup>19</sup> Latte remained in Germany after the war and considered performing Pergament's *magnum opus*, the thirteen-movement choral

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Pergament to Gösta Adrian-Nilsson on 21 March 1928. Adrian-Nilsson was ill at the time of the premiere and could not attend.

<sup>19</sup> It is believed that approximately 2,000 Jews lived through the war in Berlin – Konrad Latte was one of them, but Pergament would have been unaware of his fate at the time of their exchange of letters. Latte's remarkable life-story can be read at 'Saving Konrad Latte', *The New York Times* (nytimes.com).

symphony *Den judiska sången* ('The Jewish Song'; 1943–45), for soprano, tenor, chorus and orchestra, which was written at the height of the Second World War. Pergament responded that it was a highly demanding work for large forces, and instead referred to some of his smaller compositions on Jewish subjects. He then added a bitter remark: 'When it comes to presenting my music to Jews in Germany, I'm happy and grateful. But I have no interest in German audiences.'<sup>20</sup>

Upon his return to Sweden in the early 1920s, Pergament took up a position as music critic for the Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet*. Although he never felt at home in this role, his poetic and informative writings were of considerable cultural-historical importance, since they opened the ears of Swedish listeners to the sounds of contemporary music from the continent. Pergament has frequently been praised for his factual and impartial manner of writing – he appears to have had little difficulty in giving critical reviews of personal acquaintances nor positive reviews of people whom he found antipathetic.<sup>21</sup>

It is as a writer that Pergament the Renaissance Man becomes most apparent. When offering in-depth analysis of a singer's vocal technique, his own experiences included having followed the costly lessons of his first fiancée, the mezzo-soprano Esther Bramson, with such luminaries as Jean de Reszke and Madame Charles Cahier; when reviewing violinists, he could compare them with the standard of his personal friends in Leopold Auer's class; and when reviewing new music, he was clearly capable of giving a qualified opinion on form and orchestration after years of study, as well as experience as both orchestral musician and conductor. But beyond the purely musical, his reviews would often become multi-layered in their references to literature, poetry, philosophy, film, history and so forth.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Moses Pergament to Konrad Latte, 23 July 1951; accessible at <https://www.taminoautographs.com/products/pergament-moses-typed-letter-signed-1951/>.

<sup>21</sup> Countless examples of appreciation for Pergament's honest way of writing can be found among letters from readers, colleagues and others in the Moses Pergament archives of the Music and Theatre Library of Sweden, located in Stockholm. Many of the letters quoted here can be found in these archives. Recalling his first years as a critic, Pergament wrote: 'During a voluntary but nevertheless fanatical tactic of isolation from all publicly performing musicians, I had managed in a few years to gain a reputation as an absolutely impartial and unbiased reviewer' (*Otto Järte sjuttio år: från vänner den 10 oktober 1951*, Svenska Dagbladet, Stockholm, 1951, p. 61).

It is difficult to ascertain what were the primary and what the secondary motivations for Pergament's marginal place in Swedish musical culture. As a Jew, he had to live with anti-Semitic attacks most of his life; as a foreigner, it took him a long time after moving to Sweden until he became fully accepted as a Swede. It comes as little surprise that a particular kind of humanism and inclusive attitude is evident in his writings, as illustrated by a 1947 review of a concert by the African-American singer Todd Duncan: 'In art, the colour of one's skin is not decisive. Thank God. For those with soul, talent and technical skill, the field is open. Any man and any state that seeks to delimit the domain of art with barbed wire should, in the name of true humanity, be branded a criminal.'<sup>22</sup> At the same time, one wonders if it merely a coincidence that Pergament began identifying with Swedish culture in his musical works from the late 1920s for over a decade onwards<sup>23</sup> – a period during which Pergament's own Swedishness was repeatedly questioned.<sup>24</sup>

It could also be said that Pergament's sincerity and fearless attitude earned him both friends and enemies. In 1929, having been called a 'foreign parasite' in a review by the composer-critic Wilhelm Peterson-Berger, Pergament went to Peterson-Berger's home and, on the spur of the moment, slapped his face – an event that made him famous overnight and led to caricatures and articles in the press. Letters of support came to both Pergament and his counterpart. His razor-sharp reviews and opinion pieces sometimes had far-reaching effects: a highly critical review of a performance by the violinist Henri Marteau in 1930 resulted in Marteau's cancelling the remainder of his tour in Sweden.

<sup>22</sup> From a review by Pergament of a Lied recital by Todd Duncan in Stockholm on 27 September 1947. The Kentucky-born Duncan (1903–98) created the role of Porgy in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in 1935 (having been chosen by Gershwin himself) and sang the role more than 1,800 times.

<sup>23</sup> Works from this period include a *Swedish Rhapsody* for orchestra based on folk-tunes from the region of Dalarna, arrangements of Swedish folksongs and arrangements for chamber orchestra of the Swedish author and amateur musician Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's piano works.

<sup>24</sup> In a letter of 11 March 1926 to Pergament, the Swedish composer Kurt Atterberg writes: 'I could not have dreamed that you would launch yourself as a Swedish composer [...]. So far, you are a purely Jewish composer for the sake of principle – why not in name as well?' Having Swedish citizenship and having works published under the heading 'Swedish compositions' was not enough for Atterberg, arguing that for Pergament to become a true 'representative of our music, you should also show your affinity and appreciation for our music and preferably also do something positive for it'. The two men would later be reconciled, and Pergament remained on good terms with Atterberg for the rest of his life, not least at the time when Atterberg fell from grace in parts of the Swedish musical life after the Second World War because of his contacts with composers and music organisations in Nazi Germany.

When Wilhelm Furtwängler was invited to conduct Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the Stockholm Concert Hall in December 1943 and there were calls to boycott a concert conducted by a German musician reputedly close to the Nazi authorities, Pergament was one of the few who came to his defence:

Rarely has the gap between dream and reality, between poem and life, widened so violently as it has here. It is certainly not with the 'wing of joy' that fate is wafting over the troubled human race. What Schiller and Beethoven dreamed of was perhaps a utopia, doomed to remain so forever. But it was nevertheless the creed of the humane German spirit, a glittering flow from the source of the deepest wisdom and the noblest emotion – goodness. The goodness that connected minds, hearts and hands across the social and national barriers of understanding, sympathy and higher fellowship.

The man who tore up the title page of the *Eroica* on the grounds that an autocrat who allows himself to be ruled by his egotism can only be an oppressor and is therefore not worthy of the dedication, that man would never have wanted to serve as a cultural messenger for a regime whose theories of struggle are based on terror and spiritual obfuscation. 'Nicht diese Töne!' he would have shouted at them. And if it had been in his power to defy them, he would have climbed the imperishable German platform walled by Lessing, Schiller and Goethe, and from there sung out to the world that 'Alle Menschen werden Brüder' and 'Seid umschlungen, Millionen!'

When Furtwängler comes to us in this dark hour with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – the cosmopolitan confession of the German tongue, which spreads a little light and warmth in our souls and gives crutches to our mutilated faith in a universal will to good – I cannot free myself from a thought that plays in my mind: the man is consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally doing the bidding of Beethoven and Schiller! A call for a boycott against him was almost published in the newspapers. What stupidity! Now I realise that his performance of the 'Ninth' could not have come at a better time. After all, it is the most powerful protest against violence and misrule, hatred and inhumanity to man, ever uttered in the common language of thought and feeling.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 'Nicht diese Töne!', *Aftontidningen*, 6 December 1943. Pergament would be heavily criticised for his stance, also after the war, and was even construed as a Nazi accomplice by the writer Moa Martinsson. A more in-depth discussion can be found in Henrik

Another reason for Pergament's marginal position in Swedish musical life could be more difficult to prove: professional jealousy. When he was hired as music critic for *Svenska Dagbladet*, no fewer than five members of the Society of Swedish Composers – Kurt Atterberg, Natanael Berg, Oskar Lindberg, Ture Rangström and Patrik Vretblad – went to the editor-in-chief to complain that the paper had hired someone completely unknown, who additionally wasn't Swedish-born. In true altruistic fashion, the mighty five suggested that one of them – Ture Rangström – should instead get the job.<sup>26</sup> By Swedish standards, Pergament was an impressively cultivated, knowledgeable person who before his thirties had seen more of the world than many elderly local composers had seen in their lifetime. It is perhaps of little surprise that this highly successful 'foreign parasite' was not greeted with open arms by everyone in the Swedish music establishment.

Pergament's institutional acceptance through his membership of the Swedish Society of Composers in 1945 came soon after he had completed *Den judiska sången*. During the war, he also formed a Jewish orchestra and choir from refugees from the Third Reich, which he led together with his singer and cantor friend Leo Rosenblüth, who was himself a composer.<sup>27</sup> At this time, he also befriended the writer Nelly Sachs, who had been able to flee Nazi Germany at the last minute, thanks to the intervention of the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf and others. This friendship resulted in two operas written to librettos by Sachs: *Eli* and *Abram's Erwachen oder Sehnsucht aus Durst* ('Abraham's Awakening or Longing through Thirst') – the latter still awaits a performance.

Other works of note from his later years include a cello concerto (1955) written for the renowned Catalan cellist Gaspar Cassadó, the oratorio *De sju dödssynderna* ('The

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Rosengren, *Judarnas Wagner: Moses Pergament och den kulturella identifikationens dilemma omkring 1920–1950*, Sekel Bokförlag, Lund, 2007, pp. 319–27.

<sup>26</sup> Åhlén, *op. cit.*, p. 72. It is also worth noting that the board of *Svenska Dagbladet* devoted time in no fewer than seven meetings to discuss whether or not it would be appropriate to hire a person whose name might sound like a pseudonym to many readers.

<sup>27</sup> In 1973 an LP of *Jewish Liturgical Music* by Rosenblüth (1904–2000) became the first-ever release of the Swedish record label BIS. His compositions include a folk opera, *Sulamith* (1931), and choral music (much of it liturgical) as well as incidental music for radio and the theatre.

Seven Deadly Sins'; 1963), based on poetry by Karin Boye,<sup>28</sup> a piano concerto (1952),<sup>29</sup> a concerto for two violins and chamber orchestra (1954), three of his four string quartets (1952, 1956/1967 and 1975), choral music, songs and much else.

Pergament also published four books on music during his lifetime: *Svenska tonsättare* ('Swedish Composers'), *På vandring med Fru Musica* ('On a Walk with Mrs Musica'), *Ny vandring med Fru Musica* ('New Walk with Mrs Musica'), and a Jenny Lind biography.<sup>30</sup> In his late years he also intended to publish a book entitled *Quo vadis, Musica?*, which among other things was meant to include a lecture about Nelly Sachs and a series of composer portraits, but no publishers appear to have shown interest. Outside Sweden, Pergament the writer is perhaps as obscure as Pergament the composer.

Although Pergament's music did begin to be performed more often later in his life, it fell back into neglect after his death, on 5 March 1977. His life-story is filled with examples of intolerance and discrimination, and one wonders to what extent his career would have turned out differently without such prejudice. This series of recordings will, we hope, help atone for past wrongs by making it possible to re-evaluate the life and music of Moses Pergament.

<sup>28</sup> Born in Gothenburg in 1900, Boye moved to Stockholm as a child. An antifascist already as a student, on a visit to Germany she was inspired by the growing Nazi movement to write the novel *Kallocaïn* (1940), which predates Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* in its portrayal of a totalitarian society. *De sju dödsynderna* was the fifth and final anthology of Boye's poems, left unfinished at the time of her suicide in 1941. Karin Boye became a link between Pergament and Nelly Sachs, who would later be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature: Sachs contacted Pergament after having read his critical review of a German translation of Karin Boye's poetry.

<sup>29</sup> Ideas for a second piano concerto, in 1975, occupy only a few pages of music. Pergament notes in his diaries that it was 'commissioned' by the Polish pianist Bella Horn, at the time engaged to the Spanish pianist José Ribera. He was among the few who performed Pergament's first and only completed piano concerto during Pergament's lifetime. Upon my inquiry, Horn expressed surprise to hear that Pergament had begun writing a piano concerto for her. In a phone call I made to José Ribera on 21 November 2022, he explained how the young couple would sometimes spend evenings together with both Pergament and the Austrian-born composer Hans Holewa, whose music the pianists also performed and premiered. One could perhaps imagine that an idea for a commission came about during one of these gatherings, but never developed beyond the sketches and was abandoned by the aging composer.

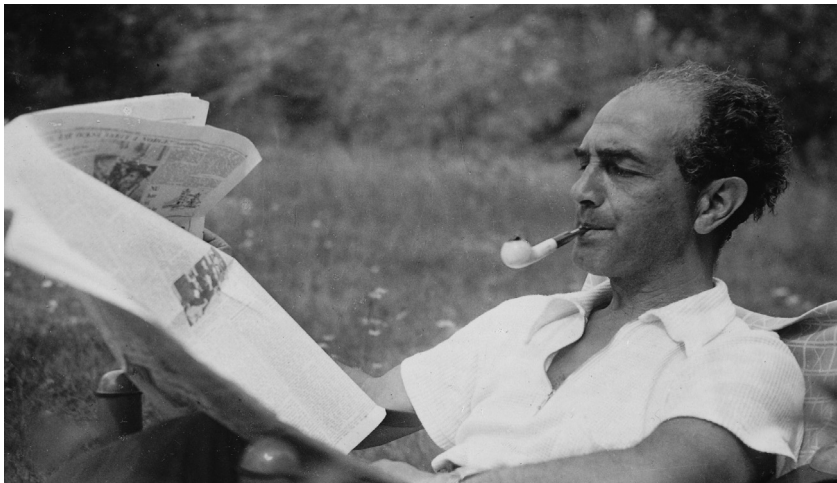
<sup>30</sup> *Svenska Tonsättare*, Hugo Gebers Förlag, Stockholm, 1943; *Vandring med Fru Musica*, P. A. Norstedt & Söner, Stockholm, 1943; *Ny vandring med Fru Musica*, Norstedt, 1944; *Jenny Lind*, Norstedt, 1945.

# MOSES PERGAMENT ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES

by Henrik Rosengren

Moses Pergament's Swedish career as a composer, writer on music and cultural critic began in a time of political and aesthetic frictions, which had their roots in the modernisation of European society in the course of the nineteenth century. During the process of Jewish emancipation, the position of the Jews in western society changed. Social participation became more readily accessible to Jews, who had been isolated for centuries, and were thus able to become a central force in the process of modernisation. Emancipation, however, created an anti-Semitic backlash in the form of political agitation, violence and persecution. Along with that backlash, racial biology emerged in nationalist intellectual circles to provide an irreversible categorisation of people (basically, Jews and others whose origins were not 'white' European), where miscegenation was considered to undermine human development. This growth of a narrowly defined nationalism in turns stimulated the Jewish response to the anti-Semitic attacks: Zionism, with its goal of a Jewish national home.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the idea of national identities was placed on a pedestal where they were understood as strictly delimited categories. In Europe the ability, as a composer and cultural practitioner, to express the soul of one's own country in art was a cherished ideal, alongside which lay the perceptions of Richard Wagner and others that Jews lacked the ability to express the artistic soul of the majority culture. It was in this prejudicial landscape that Moses Pergament asserted his intention of expressing both Jewishness and Swedishness in his music. Accordingly, the endeavour received sharp opposition from leading Swedish musicians, among them the composer Kurt Atterberg, the chairman of the Association of Swedish Composers, who, in an exchange of letters with Pergament, refuted the idea that Jewish artists could express something other than a Jewish national identity. The



*Pergament in his prime, with one of his beloved pipes*

same line of thought was held by another composer, Wilhelm Peterson-Berger, who was also a critic (under the signature 'P.B.')

for the largest Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* and who during the 1920s continuously hurled anti-Semitic invective against musicians with a Jewish background.

In a sketch for a film-script from the 1920s, Pergament illustrated the identity-crisis that the developments of the nineteenth century meant for the Jews: should they try to assimilate into emerging modern society, or should the old Jewish traditions and world views be protected at any cost; or was Gentile resistance so strong that the only solution was the creation of a Jewish nation? In Pergament's script, these conflicts facing a Jewish identity are depicted in the form of three different characters representing three distinct

strategies: assimilation, orthodoxy and Zionism. Pergament himself sought a middle way. In his work as a composer, he was able to derive inspiration from Jewish history and traditional Jewish music, which reminded him of his upbringing and its stories and traditions, while at the same time he strove to be accepted as both a Swede and a Jew in the Swedish cultural life of the interwar period. His marriage in 1923 to the German-born, non-Jewish Ilse Kutzleb could have been an expression of assimilation but instead created tension in the traditionally rooted parts of his family. Pergament never became a convinced Zionist.

The question of identity and artistic practice was constantly relevant for Pergament, both as a composer and a music critic. As the music in this album illustrates, he aimed at integrating influences from various musical traditions perceived as national. As the Nazi threat grew in Germany, his desire to anchor his composition in a Swedish musical tradition also seems to have become stronger – as is illustrated, for example, in the *Swedish Rhapsody* from 1941 with motifs from Swedish folk-music. But in several musical works he also gave voice to the Jewish people as a direct result of Nazi German anti-Semitism, including a *Rapsodia ebraica* (first performed in 1938) and *The Jewish Song* (1943–45), which had its origins in Pergament's own mental coming-to-terms with what today is known as the Holocaust – as it unfolded, even though general public awareness of the scale of Nazi atrocities did not emerge until after hostilities had ceased.

After the end of the war in 1945, Pergament became increasingly accepted as a composer and music critic on his own premises. It happened at the same time as national ideals took on a less polarised appearance in Swedish cultural debate. Today Pergament is perceived primarily as a representative of an early Swedish musical modernism and as the foremost Swedish interpreter of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. For a generation that read his music criticism from the 1920s to the 1960s, his articles were a window onto a continental tradition of *Bildung* that is seen only fragmentarily in cultural debate today.

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# MOSES PERGAMENT: TOWARDS A REDISCOVERY

by Martin Malmgren

There is a rather unseemly tendency in Swedish musical life today to speak warmly of Moses Pergament as one of the pioneers of Swedish modernism in the 20th century, but to ignore the music with which he performed his pioneering work.<sup>1</sup>

This series of recordings aims to provide an opportunity to rediscover the music of Moses Pergament, most of which remains entirely unrecorded and unknown. Pergament was a modest man who expressed little interest in elbowing his way forward, and the value of his music should perhaps best be assessed by outsiders. In view of the current lack of recordings, these albums will at last provide an opportunity to do so: the series is so far planned to include vocal music, the complete works for violin and piano and the smorgasbord found on this first volume. More recordings are already being planned.

This album aspires to give a kaleidoscopic view of Pergament's entire creative life. It contains his earliest surviving piano composition, miscellaneous other piano works and transcriptions, film and theatre music, chamber works and two works for larger forces: the Piano Concerto and the *Fantasia differente* for cello and string nonet. Although a few of these works have been recorded for radio broadcast, to the best of my knowledge none of the works presented here has previously been released.

## **Piano Concerto (1951–52)**

The origins of Pergament's Piano Concerto are connected to the concerto he had written for his own instrument, the violin, in 1948. The Hungarian pianist and former Bartók student Andor Földes (1913–92) heard this concerto in a performance by his compatriot, the violinist-conductor Carl von Garaguly (1900–84), and approached

<sup>1</sup> Per-Anders Hellqvist, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 19 December 1963.

Pergament with a request to write a piano concerto in the same style. This proposal was initially turned down: Pergament was not a performing pianist and felt unsure if he would be up to the challenge. But two years later on a late summer night during a visit to his country residence, where he liked to retreat from the buzz of the city, a striking theme appeared in his head. It was the theme that opens the concerto, and as he was unable to get it out of his head, he instead began composing. The work was premiered in Gothenburg Concert Hall on 20 November 1952, with the Estonian-Swedish pianist Kābi Laretei (1922–2014) as soloist and Dean Dixon conducting.<sup>2</sup> Other pianists performing it include the Greek pianist Vasso Devetzi and Spanish José Ribera, and among its conductors are numbered Göran Alféus, Herbert Blomstedt, Erik Cronvall, Sixten Eckerberg, Gunnar Staern and Živojin Zdravković. The Polish-born pianist Felicja Blumental also expressed interest in both performing and recording the work, but was unable to interest any orchestras in the prospect.<sup>3</sup>

What may appear as a rhapsodic work on first hearing is in fact a carefully constructed concerto using classical means: the first movement is in sonata form, the second is a slow movement that develops over a bass ostinato, and the finale is in rondo form. The concerto opens [1] with a declamatory theme. In the apt words of a reviewer of the premiere, its characteristic interval instantly takes the listener ‘back a few thousand years to the Eastern origins of Western music.’<sup>4</sup> The theme is heard constantly throughout the movement, and is contrasted only for brief moments with a lyrical second subject. The second movement [2] is based on an ostinato figure in <sup>5</sup><sub>4</sub>, incidentally using almost the same notes as the DSCH motif. The lamenting melody that is heard in the piano entrance is later repeated by the first horn and most of the wind section, building up to an emotional climax. As another reviewer put it: ‘In the slow middle movement of the piano concerto, whose obstinate bass

<sup>2</sup> Földes never performed the work – perhaps he forgot about the matter after Pergament had turned down his proposal. Moreover, Pergament’s reviews of Földes’ playing were mixed, and so he may have doubted that Földes would be a suitable interpreter of the work. There is no preserved correspondence between the two.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Pergament from Markus Mizne, Felicja Blumental’s husband, on 21 March 1976.

<sup>4</sup> ‘T. Ag’, *Aftonposten*, 21 November 1952, clipping in the Pergament Archives in the Musik- och Teaterbiblioteket in Stockholm.

melody creates an unusual clarity and unity, Pergament's melodic vein appears in a particularly beautiful light. This movement is one of the most beautiful in his output.<sup>5</sup> The music gradually dies out, as quietly as it once began. The sombre mood is turned on its head in the finale [3], now in rondo form. Whereas all other material in the concerto is by Pergament, the rondo theme is based on a Jewish song which is sung and danced during Simchat Torah celebrations.<sup>6</sup> As if wanting to show that this dance is one of equals, the movement is constructed as a *concerto grosso*, with the piano soloist sometimes doubling the orchestral parts or providing energy to the rest of the ensemble with its insistent semiquavers, reminiscent of the rondo finale of Brahms' First Piano Concerto. The secondary theme, introduced in the piano, is characteristic of Pergament and contains motivic elements that can be found in many other works of his. The Concerto concludes by combining the rondo and the secondary theme.

But is it really a piano concerto? Is it rather a concerto for orchestra with a prominent piano part, or a *sinfonia concertante*? Perhaps the answer is that it is all of the above. It undoubtedly starts as a piano concerto, with a clearly soloistic part that at times struggles against the collective forces of the orchestra. The slow movement also contains many passages of soloistic writing. But in the third movement, the orchestra and the soloist are in full harmony, working towards the same goal and without any sense of conflict. The struggle between the individual and the collective is over, and the party may begin.

Although Pergament claimed to have written pure, non-descriptive music, more than one reviewer made connections to recent events, which seems particularly relevant for the *tour-de-force* first movement:

The composer's tonal language is not easily accessible, although Pergament stays within the framework of tonality, but if it is interpreted as it was yesterday, one soon realises

<sup>5</sup> Per-Anders Hellqvist, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 19 December 1963.

<sup>6</sup> Simchat Torah is the Jewish holiday which marks, and celebrates, the annual cycle of public Torah readings and is in many Jewish congregations the occasion for joyous singing and dancing.

the dark content, the nightmare of our time, which is expressed in spiritual, steel-tensed cantilenas and iron-hard rhythms.<sup>7</sup>

It takes more than one listening to fully absorb this music and empathise with its mood. This piano concerto is, however, a powerful work, and one that grips and captivates in a special way. [...] The overall impression is of a serious proclamation, and it is natural to place it in the context of the shocking events the world witnessed under Hitler's regime, which must never be forgotten.<sup>8</sup>

A clearer understanding of Pergament's aesthetic ideas and compositional choices can perhaps be found in his own review of another Swedish mid-century piano concerto, one performed almost as rarely as Pergament's: Hilding Rosenberg's Second Piano Concerto, written a year before. It gives an insight into Pergament's own artistic sensibilities:

Like so many of his other works, the Piano Concerto has a richly flowering exoticism, not limited to a single species but rather saturated with various elements of colour, form and style. It is easy to describe this as a lack of artistic unity, but if one realises that it is precisely the conscious attempts to weld together different species and styles into organic artistic units that have characterised Rosenberg's development over the last two decades, then one also realises that the strength of this constantly renewing master lies precisely in his rare ability to make like and unlike thrive together and subtly complement each other.

The new work stands alongside and partly intertwined with refined impressionist soundscapes, harsh so-called modern objectivity, i.e., Baroque constructivism and almost Viennese-classical, melody-saturated playing with lines. And if anyone asks what is new in it all, the answer is: pro primo the palpable impulses from Bartók, especially in the first movement but also in the Hungarian-sounding theme of the second movement, pro secundo the whole wealth of finely chiselled motifs, which with admirable instrumental and formal imagination have been incorporated into the symphonic structure.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 'R.P. Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning, undated clipping in the Pergament archive, 1952.

<sup>8</sup> 'A.T.', 'Ny tid', undated and unsourced clipping in Pergament's archive, 1952.

<sup>9</sup> *Aftontidningen*, 8 March 1951.

What about the question of references to recent events that were brought up in some reviews of Pergament's concerto? Although Pergament himself stated that he had written pure music, without any programme in mind, one can nonetheless assume that the composer of *The Jewish Song*, whose compositions throughout his life refer to Jewish culture and music, wrote this concerto with a particular mindset. The first movement seems to involve a protagonist finding himself in a 'more complicated and predominantly bizarre view of life and the world', to use Pergament's own expression in a review of Rachmaninov's Fourth Piano Concerto.<sup>10</sup> The second movement, eerily beautiful but deeply dolorous, as if an irreversible catastrophe has just happened, makes one wonder whether it is an elegy for the countless Jewish lives cut short in the Holocaust. And the finale is living proof that even the most extreme measures cannot entirely erase a culture, nor all of its representatives.

A few more words should be said about Moses Pergament's relationship with prominent performers of his music. One of his important champions was conductor Gunnar Staern, whose wife, Käbi Laretei, premiered Pergament's concerto.<sup>11</sup> Pergament acknowledged Staern's valuable feedback on the concerto in his diary, and after the premiere, Staern conducted the work with Laretei as soloist. Staern was no less opinionated when preparing to conduct Pergament's Cello Concerto. In a particularly illuminating letter to Pergament from 21 March 1956, Staern wholeheartedly thanks Pergament for his confidence in him and his willingness to let Staern experiment with tempo and other matters. Staern points out that tempo experimentation is necessary when working on 'the old masters', and laments that many young performers forget about this issue once the subject is new music. He refers to strict, contemporaneous performances of Stravinsky's music, and points out that Pergament's music is as sensitive as Mahler's, and that it requires breathing and 'vorwärts-gehen' – an impulse forwards. Although demanding in nature, Pergament was evidently willing to give performers

<sup>10</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 January 1937.

<sup>11</sup> The marriage between Staern and Laretei came to an end after Laretei met the film-director Ingemar Bergman, to whom she was married from 1959 to 1969, although they had separated three years earlier.



Photograph: Anna Rivkin/Moderna Museet

*Gunnar Staern and Moses Pergament in discussion, possibly during the recording sessions for the music for Alf Sjöberg's film Barabbas, released in 1953*

freedom and flexibility with performing his works – an impression confirmed by the few recordings where Pergament conducts his music himself.

The remainder of this album takes the listener on a relatively chronological journey through Pergament's creative life, beginning with a souvenir from St Petersburg. To enter the mindset of the fifteen-year-old boy behind the piece *Suru* ('Sorrow'), Op. 5 [4], some instructive reading can be found in his memoirs:

Even today, after more than fifteen eventful years, I can still see them clearly in my mind's eye, the two adolescent boys with the romantic capes and the big black slouch hats, with the world-weariness of puberty in their eyes and often with the defiantly proud posture of misunderstood geniuses. One of them – thin and tall, the other only thin. Day after day, walking side by side, inseparable, in the streets of the Finnish capital or in the larger parks, they were as different from the rest of the young people as they themselves sought to be. Even in concert halls, their heads, with the long hair of geniuses, were constantly seen pushing their way through the audience, as if clamouring for the attention they felt they deserved. How little they really deserved it is evident from the fact that neither of them had yet been able to show any overwhelming evidence of talent or give any hope of future prospects. The tall one was a mediocre pianist, and his friend dreamed in vain of becoming a great violinist.<sup>12</sup>

Thus begins a Pergament article from 1926 about his childhood friend Yrjö Kilpinen. Nowhere in the text does Pergament disclose what observant readers would already have guessed – that the other of the two boys is Pergament himself. As a testament to their childhood friendship, several of Pergament's earliest attempts at composition are found in the Yrjö Kilpinen archives of The National Archives of Finland. *Suru* appears to form the central 'movement' of a triptych, where Kilpinen wrote the outer movements. It exists in two versions, which have been combined in this recording. Kilpinen dedicated the opening nocturne to Pergament, who felt the need to respond in kind with a small character piece, which he wrote in St Petersburg. Writing music

<sup>12</sup> 'Yrjö Kilpinen – Finlands Hugo Wolf', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 September 1926.

was apparently not enough – the first two pieces of the set came with poems written by the young Pergament attached. For all of its simplicity, one can hear that someone with much to express stands behind the music. The listener can perhaps get a sense of what is described later in the Kilpinen tribute: ‘Sibelius’ artistic world citizenship was a shining example and the awareness of being in almost immediate proximity to the great master spurred on struggle and action’.

A comparison of this early work with Pergament’s three *Lyrical Dances*, written only a few years later, is informative. By then, he had returned to Finland and must have encountered more modern music. These works remain structurally uncomplicated, but they feature far more complex harmonies and a more marked attention to detail. The first ‘Elf Dance’ [5] is in ternary form, where the modal writing of the outer sections is contrasted with a more chromatic middle part in a faster tempo. The second [6] contains music that Pergament would later recycle in his ballet *Krelantems och Eldeling*. Though simple, it is an imaginative study in how to find variety in repetition. The Mazurka [7] is the earliest piece of the three, and also the wildest, revealing that he also had a mischievous side.

After his successful debut concert in Helsinki in December 1914, Pergament was asked by Gertrud Paloheimo to write incidental music for her play *King Solomon*, which resulted in a short passage of ‘night music’ for string orchestra, a song for baritone and piano based on The Song of Songs and ‘Sulamith’s Dance’ for piano [8]. Paloheimo was a neighbour of Jean Sibelius,<sup>13</sup> who wrote admiringly of Pergament’s musical talents in his diary around the time of the premiere.<sup>14</sup> It would seem that the young Pergament was under the influence of Wagner while writing this short but effective miniature.

The *Chanson triste* [9] appears to have carried a particular significance for Pergament. The original scoring is for violin and piano, but the edition published by

<sup>13</sup> She was also the mother-in-law of Sibelius’ daughter Eva, who in a letter to Pergament of 10 November 1975 recalls the premiere of the play, and asks him to confirm that the music was indeed by him and not by Armas Järnefelt. The letter also suggests that Moses and Eva played music together in their youth in Kallio-Kuninkala (the Paloheimo family estate in Tuusula, in southern Finland), as a violin-piano duo, in works such as Beethoven’s ‘Kreutzer’ Sonata.

<sup>14</sup> ‘The Jew Moses Pergament composes music for Kerttu Paloheimo’s piece. He has impressed them all with his confidence. Or cheekiness. (Moses seems to be a pleasant and talented person)’; diary entry from 23 July 1915, quoted in Dahlström, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

R. E. Westerlund in Helsinki contains additional parts for *violino obbligato* and cello. Westerlund published other works by Pergament while he lived in Helsinki, and it is probable that the work was written before his move to Sweden, later in 1915. It is also fair to assume that the additional parts were supplied by the composer, and can perhaps be considered optional. The piece was later incorporated into his *Concerto romantica* (1938), a re-working of his First String Quartet as a work for string orchestra, where the original slow movement was replaced with this *Chanson triste*. Parts for the piece have also been found among the materials used by the Jewish orchestra that Pergament and Leo Rosenblüth founded during the Second World War, consisting of Jewish refugees from the Third Reich. It is hardly surprising that such an orchestra would programme this work: intervals typical of Jewish music are heard throughout its characteristic melody, and the leading violin plays on the G string throughout.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of assiduous investigation, no information has been found to explain the origins of the incidental music for *The Feast of Esther* that Pergament appears to have written in 1936. Some movements have been found in the archives, in both versions for piano and arrangements for larger forces, in some cases including orchestra and choir. ‘Dance’ [10] is in simple ternary form, with a stern *Adagio patetico* framing a more expressive middle section. In an apparent nod to Jean Sibelius, the *Adagio* [11] begins like a distant echo of Sibelius’ *Finlandia*, starting on a chord in the same position and key (F sharp minor) and using the same falling half-note motif. But the resemblance goes no further; unlike *Finlandia*, Pergament’s music remains introspective in its quiet intensity. The incidental music also includes music for a choir of lamentation, using some of the same musical material as the *Adagio*, with the beginning of Psalm 140 as text.

Alf Sjöberg’s film *Med livet som insats* (‘They Staked their Lives’; 1939) contains an interesting portion of Second World War history in its own right. A part of it was filmed in Riga just before the outbreak of hostilities, and it contains an unusual combination of artistically inventive videography, overly theatrical acting and a plot that is at times absurd. A city is ruled by a totalitarian government, against which rebels are trying

<sup>15</sup> In the string-orchestra version, Pergament allowed the first violins to shift to the D string in the middle section.

to fight. A female government spy falls in love with one of the rebels, which triggers further dramatic actions. In a plot where elements closely resembled realities of the day, farcically unrealistic elements were also thrown in for good measure: all that is required for the rebels to win is to deliver them a single machine gun.

The opening vignette music immediately segues into ‘The Mill’ [12], as the work is called in a separate version for voice and piano,<sup>16</sup> and the camera follows a female protagonist, Vanda, on her walk throughout town with her pram. The unsuspecting viewer is unaware that there is no baby in the pram, which instead contains a machine-gun. The ‘Menuet’ [13] was originally written as a piece for violin and piano in 1916, but is used in a scene involving a kind-hearted, naïve baker who misses the pre-revolutionary past, some of his lost belongings and his dignity, and who is not involved in the activities of the rebels but helps them nonetheless. In each repeat of the main theme, Pergament finds ways to vary harmonies and inner voices. The lyrical ‘Valse lente’ [14] is used in a comical scene: it is heard through the gramophone as Vanda’s smuggler husband and a police officer consume large amounts of alcohol while awaiting her return to the apartment. The film received mixed reviews on its premiere in Sweden on 1 January 1940. It passed the Norwegian censor on 8 February 1940 and screening began the same month, but with the Nazi occupation of Norway it was censored only two months later and remained unseen until the return of freedom in May 1945.

Pergament’s responsiveness to music for stage and film is evident throughout his career. After *They Staked their Lives*, he would also produce scores for Hampe Faustman’s *Flickan och djävulen* (‘The Girl and the Devil’; 1944) and Alf Sjöberg’s *Barabbas* (1953).

In 1961, an open-air theatre had its opening in Hägersten, an urban district of Stockholm, and it was thought that commissioning a musical fanfare would enrich the occasion. Pergament contributed with a *Festive Fanfare* [15], and included a piano transcription in the score.

In 1974, the first performance of his masterwork *The Jewish Song* since the 1947 premiere took place in Stockholm Concert Hall. Among those who went to hear the

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<sup>16</sup> The song was published in 1943, so one can assume that it was written after the film score was finished. The transcription here is based on the song, which was dedicated to Moses’ daughter Eldi.

performance with the composer was his twelve-year-old granddaughter Nicole, who later in life would try to use the music for a Holocaust documentary containing interviews with survivors. It turned out to be an impossible task, since the music was too powerful and took attention away from the interviews. Later in 1974, the composer notes in his diary that he has written *For Nicole* [16], ‘at her request’. In all its simplicity, this short piece manages to surprise with its turns between minor and major. Anybody mistaking it for a piece from Bartók’s *For Children* should certainly be forgiven.

In 1955, Pergament finished one of his most important late works – a cello concerto, written for and dedicated to the major Catalan cellist Gaspar Cassadó. The letters from Cassadó to Pergament, rich in detail and with commentary on the concerto that was being born, are evidence of the respect that he had for Pergament. In more ways than one, it could be said that the ghost of Cassadó hovers over the late works involving cello that Pergament wrote in the years following Cassadó’s death. The works in question are two *Meditations*, a *Melodia Romantica* and the haunting *Fantasia differente*. The *Meditation* for solo cello [17] from 1974 opens and ends quietly, but is otherwise a more intense work than its title might suggest. Pergament’s diary indicates that Swedish cellist Frans Helmerson recorded the work, but this recording would appear to be unpublished. The *Meditation* for cello and piano [18] has a similarly sombre mood in its slow outer sections, which are contrasted by a partially more playful *Allegro* middle section. Jewish undertones can be noted throughout these works. The title-page has what might be a subheading, ‘Minor-Major’, below the title – why? Examination of Pergament’s carefully preserved scrapbooks, which contain his more than four decades of musical writings, reviews, opinion pieces and essays, reveals that he had used the same expression much earlier, in a very different context:

There is a key that is neither minor nor major, but a little of both. Theorists call it minor-major. A great deal of current events, not least in politics, are in this key. If the minor element spreads a bitter tone over the events, the major tone in turn sprinkles a few sweet drops over it. The whole thing easily becomes a little sweet and sour.

Like this grandiose battle in the capital's municipal administration, for example. With the clout of an impressive majority, Z's party colleagues on the city council declared themselves unable to cooperate with such a disloyal and critical gentleman as this bug-eyed and long-nosed socialist. One thought one could already hear them sounding the trumpets of victory, but then Z. drummed up his men, thousands of them, and silenced the fanfare. Now he stands there instead as victor, while his opponents bend the knee and kiss his graciously extended hand.

It was a spectacle in minor-major...

The Anglo-Italian agreement has been described by Winston Churchill as a brilliant triumph for Mussolini. The Roman dictator has won on every point. He has been proved right: England's 'Via' must be Italy's 'Vita'. Not: one man's death, another man's bread, but: one man's road, another man's life. Albion has had to bend its proud neck. Painful, but necessary! Especially as the shoulder – not Chamberlain's, but the German-Italian one – remained unharmed.<sup>17</sup>

This opinion piece appears to have come following news, earlier in May 1938, that the Italian fleet had gained parity with the English in the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> The political issues described surely have nothing in common with the work for cello and piano that Pergament wrote more than three decades later, but his idea of opposing ideas that create a whole that is 'a little sweet and sour' certainly seems fitting here. For a relatively eventful work like this, it is notable how it ends in an unresolved manner, with the cello dying out in its lowest register, accompanied by grey harmonies that sound neither major nor minor. The work was dedicated to Nagy el Habashi,<sup>19</sup> an Egyptian cellist who became a member of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Stockholm. And although the score of *Melodia romantica* [19] contains no dedication, a diary entry by Pergament shows that

<sup>17</sup> 'Dagens debatt', 13 May 1938. Pergament's scrapbook does not identify the newspaper in which this article appeared. The Anglo-Italian Agreements, also known as the Easter Pact or the Easter Accords (*Patto* or *Accordi di Pasqua*), were concluded between the British and the Italian governments in Rome on 16 April 1938 with the intention of cementing the political status quo in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North-East Africa. The British Prime Minister at the time was Neville Chamberlain; Churchill was then a backbench MP and a vocal opponent of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement.

<sup>18</sup> 'Mussolini som vågmästare', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 10 May 1938.

<sup>19</sup> The archival sources give multiple variants of his name.

Adagio      FANTASIA DIFFERENTE      "Cielo e terra" 7.

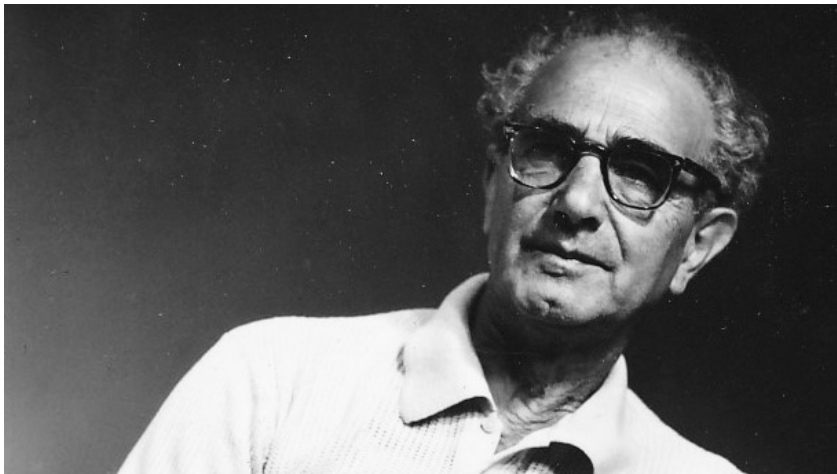
The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Fantasia Differente" by Pergament. The score is for a string quartet and solo cello. The first system includes parts for 2 Violins I, 2 Violins II, 2 Violas, 2 Cellos, Solo Cello, and Kbnb. The second system includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Kbnb. The score features various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, mf, cresc.), articulation (accents), and phrasing slurs. A first ending bracket is present in the second system.

The first page of the manuscript of Pergament's *Fantasia Differente*

this piece, too, was written with el Habashi in mind. Here, a simple melodic line in the cello is coloured by a more complex and ambiguous chordal piano part. Both Nagy and his wife, the soprano Karin Mang-Habashi, proved to be important in Pergament's final decade: it was for them that he wrote *Violoncellen* ('The Violoncello') for voice, cello and piano, to a text by Erik Blomberg (1967); and his *Lullaby* to text by Gabriela Mistral (1971), which will be heard on a forthcoming album of this Pergament series, was dedicated to Karin Mang-Habashi.

The thought of death seems to have pre-occupied the aging Pergament, and so it is far from surprising that one of his late works, the *Fantasia diferente* for cello and string nonet [20], appears to be a meditation on this very subject, which can be understood from its subtitle: 'Ciélo e térra' ('Heaven and Earth'). Did he give the work a Spanish label to memorialise Gaspar Cassadó, who died on 24 December 1966? The connection seems probable. Following New Year celebrations leading into 1967, Pergament began the new year by wondering how many years he had left to live, according to his diary entries. Such thoughts came to his mind a mere week after Cassadó's death. A little over two months later, in March, Pergament finished his work on 'The Violoncello', based on a 1943 poem about a bombarded city where the survivors try to salvage what little that has survived the ravages of fire. A lonely man carries his cello, pressed to his heart. There soon followed the *Meditation* ('Minor-Major'), *Melodia romantica* and *Fantasia diferente*. The *Fantasia* moves from inward contemplation to searing Expressionism, reaches an emotionally heightened climax following a cello cadenza and quietly dies out with lower strings in their bottom register. And whereas Pergament the critic had dismissed Schoenberg and the twelve-tone system many decades earlier, it is interesting to note that the solo cello line of the opening contains all twelve notes of the chromatic scale – and the cello part continues to use this 'tone row' in a relatively free manner in different sections of the work.

What, if anything, was Moses Pergament trying to convey in this eerie, mournful work? One potential answer lies in his conflicted views on religion. Having been brought up in an Orthodox Jewish home, as a young man he had nevertheless felt a



*Pergament in 1963*

certain distance from religious dogmas. Particularly telling here is an exchange of letters between Pergament and the Swedish philosopher Ingemar Hedenius, a renowned secular humanist, after the 1949 publication of Hedenius' seminal book *Tro och vetande* ('Belief and Knowledge'), which started one of the most extensive cultural debates in Swedish history. Writing to Hedenius, who happened to be an admirer of Pergament's educationally minded music journalism, Pergament questions Hedenius' notion of 'religious innocence', which Pergament understood as 'the liberating complacency of some non-believing people, for whom the religious problem has never played any part':

Is it really the case that people of the kind just mentioned, by their idealistic, at any rate morally and socially unimpeachable, activities, have every right to turn a blind eye to such

an intractable problem as religion? Or is it the case that these individuals, by banishing the problem of faith from their spiritual domains, have also excluded from their lives a factor without which their relationship to ethics and morality, to aesthetics and to human society as a whole loses considerable clarity and purpose?

Pergament then confesses to belonging to said group since an early age, but not without reservations:

I slipped into the group of intellectuals who [...] can shine with the label 'religiously innocent'. Which means that I no longer believe or ponder the concept of God. But there is a thorn somewhere in the soul, and in moments of deeper meditation it may sting so much that it can be felt... That's probably why I have opposed the term 'innocence'.<sup>20</sup>

For a supposed non-believer, Pergament wrote an impressive range of music influenced by religion. Biblical themes appear throughout his output, and at the time of writing to Hedenius he had not yet begun work on his two big operas in collaboration with Nelly Sachs, *Eli* and *Abram's Erwachen*, both of which deal with questions relating to faith. The question of finding a way to represent the voice of God in the latter opera was one that occupied Pergament for years, involving travels to Israel as well as electronical experiments.<sup>21</sup>

Is it the question of the existence of an afterlife that Pergament addresses in his last major work for cello, as a hopeful greeting to Cassadó on the other side? The ethereal music at times sounds as if coming straight from heaven, but it only lasts so long before the listener is taken back to earth. Unlike the two *Meditations*, with their cryptic endings, the final section of *Fantasia diferente* paves the way for a less enigmatic resolution – not in 'minor-major' but in the dark key of C sharp minor. With its sad conclusion, Moses Pergament seems, after much pondering, to give his unambiguous, sobering answer to this question.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Pergament to Hedenius, 10 March 1955. Hedenius was himself a musician, being a more than competent flautist.

<sup>21</sup> Ahlén, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-8.

The pianist **Martin Malmgren** is a versatile performer who loves exploring both the knowns and the unknowns of the repertoire. He has performed widely across four continents and enjoys making music in all possible settings – as soloist, Lied pianist, chamber musician and orchestral pianist, in contemporary-music ensembles as well as in folk-music bands.

His unusually wide repertoire allows him to take delight in surprising his audiences by programming unjustly neglected works and composers, in addition to the standard concert fare. His concert programmes typically show a thoughtful approach which builds bridges between different musical styles and periods. He is a founding member of the Agora Music Collective.

As a sought-after soloist, he has appeared with the Sinfonia Lahti, Tapiola Sinfonietta, Belgrade Symphony, Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra, Toruń Symphony Orchestra, Oulu Sinfonia, Jyväskylä Sinfonia and other major ensembles. He gave the Finnish premieres of Elliott Carter's *Dialogues 2*, Doreen Carwithen's Piano Concerto and Guillaume Connesson's Concertino.

He is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at the Sibelius Academy, where he previously received a Master of Music degree, with Ilmo Ranta as his main piano teacher. Other important teachers have included Henri Barda, Konstantin Bogino, Tuija Hakkila, Antti Hotti, Juhani Lagerspetz, Jerome Lowenthal and Liisa Pohjola.

**Tomas Nuñez** began his cello studies at the Åland Music Institute at the age of six. He continued his studies at the Turku Conservatoire and later at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, studying with Timo Hanhinen, Hannu Kiiski and Marko Ylönen. He performs often as soloist and chamber musician, playing with such orchestras as the Finnish Radio



Photograph: Hekki Tuuli



Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, the Finnish National Opera Orchestra, Sinfonia Lahti and the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra. He has also recorded and premiered many chamber and solo works.

In 2010 he won first prize in the XI Cello Competition in Turku. He was also rewarded for the best performance of the work commissioned for the competition and voted as the audience favourite. In the same year he was also appointed principal cello of the Finnish National Opera Orchestra; five years later he was named principal cello of the Helsinki Philharmonic; and since 2017 he has been principal cello of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

He plays a Lorenzo e Tomaso Carcassi cello from 1779, owned by YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company.

The Finnish conductor **Sasha Mäkilä** is gaining recognition as one of the most prominent talents of his generation in both opera and symphonic music. Since 2017, he has served as the Artistic Director of the Helsinki Metropolitan Orchestra, establishing himself as a versatile artist with a broad repertoire spanning from Baroque to contemporary.

In his previous role as the Music Director of the St Michel Strings, Sasha Mäkilä revitalised the orchestra, taking it from near-oblivion to national fame. Under his leadership, the ensemble embarked on international tours and music festivals, featuring world-class soloists and introducing innovative concert webcasts.

Sasha Mäkilä's conducting career has taken him to four continents, collaborating with major ensembles such as the Cleveland Orchestra and the Mariinsky Theatre. He has performed at prestigious events like the Savonlinna Opera Festival, Mikkeli Music Festival, Pyeongchang Music Festival in South Korea and the Nargenfestival in Estonia. Noteworthy collaborations include performances with Kyung-Wha Chung, Clara-Jumi Kang, Vadim Repin and Jian Wang. He has also conducted several world premieres, including the collective operas *Lovers of Mankind* (Musica Nova Helsinki, 2009) and *Free Will* (Savonlinna Opera Festival, 2012).



Originally a cellist, Sasha Mäkilä studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy and the St Petersburg State Conservatoire. After a three-year tenure as Kurt Masur's assistant at the Orchestre National de France, he was nominated as a Conducting Fellow at the American Academy of Conducting in Aspen. He is a prize-winner of the Vakhtang Jordania International Conducting Competition (USA, 2006), and in 2013 the University of Helsinki honoured him with the Pacius Award for his contributions to Finnish musical life.

**Aku Sorensen** is a Finnish-American conductor, born in California but based in Finland for the last ten years. A sought-after guest conductor, he has frequently appeared before orchestras throughout Finland, including the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, Jyväskylä Sinfonia, Finnish National Opera and Ballet, Pori Sinfonietta, Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra, Tapiola Sinfonietta and others. In 2022, he was named the twentieth principal conductor of the esteemed student orchestra Ylioppilaskunnan Soittajat.

He has a keen interest in programming and curation, with a specific focus on integrating less-often-played and contemporary repertoire into concept programmes. He has conducted numerous Finnish, European and world premieres, both of contemporary repertoire and works found forgotten in the archives. Nowhere is his interest in programming more obvious than at the festival 'The Sounds of Luosto', of which he has been artistic director since 2019. The festival has proven popular, with an increasingly international audience, and Finnish composer Kalevi Aho has said that it has an attraction much in the way of the Savonlinna Opera Festival or the Salzburg Festival.

Aku Sorensen completed his master's degree in conducting at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts in Helsinki, under the tutelage of Sakari Oramo. He has also received tuition from conductors such as Peter Eötvös, Paavo Järvi, Hannu Lintu, Susanna Mälkki, Sir Roger Norrington, Jorma Panula, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Johannes Schlaefli.

A former professional violinist, he is also a founding member of the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra and served as its original concert-master.



Photograph: Mario Ramirez

The **Helsinki Metropolitan Orchestra** (HMO) was founded in the summer of 2017, when the pianist Alina Sorjonen and conductor Sasha Mäkilä decided to gather their musician friends together for a symphonic concert in Helsinki. The debut of the Orchestra in the Tempeliuukio Church was a resounding success – the large size of the audience (about 800 listeners, of whom 100 were standing) took the musicians by surprise, and left them intent on keeping playing together.

The HMO is a grassroots orchestra community which offers its members an opportunity to play symphonic repertoire at a high artistic standard. It provides its audience with accessible concert experiences and also brings music to locations and venues where orchestral music is not usually heard. The HMO musicians reflect the diversity of music-lovers in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and their desire to work together and create opportunities for themselves. In its first full year, 2018, the HMO proved its versatility by playing in a conducting master-class and an opera production on top of its symphonic concerts, by starting a tradition of summer concert tours, and by making its first foreign tour, in China. In 2019 its operations were further organised and expanded: it performed at the Emma Gala Music Awards and in a production of Fredrik Pacius' *Kung Karls jakt* ('King Charles' Hunt'), the oldest Finnish opera, and made a (private) recording. The culmination of the year was a large production of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, together with Suomen Laulu choir and a stellar cast of soloists.

The HMO aims to be a major player in the cultural life of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and fill the gap that exists between amateur and professional orchestras. It works with educational institutions and plays an important role in giving young music-students the opportunity to experience what it is like to work in a full symphony orchestra.

The **Agora Music Collective** is a formation of musicians sharing the belief that there are vast amounts of classical music beyond the standard repertoire that deserves to be heard and brought to light. The members plan to organise concerts, recordings and seminars and to publish articles and blog texts. Its activities began in earnest in spring 2024. In the very first concert, the pianists Ido Akov and Miikka Taipale explored Baroque and late-Renaissance music: Ido Akov performed music by the composers found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, as well as *Farnaby's Maske* by the contemporary British composer David Gorton, which takes its inspiration from a number of works by the virginalist Giles Farnaby. The next Agora Music Collective concert, in February 2024, in the Hietsun Paviljonki (a local communal and cultural building next to the oldest and most popular public beach just to the west of central Helsinki),

was dedicated to the music of Moses Pergament, when the violinist Sebastian Silén and pianist Martin Malmgren performed his complete works for violin and piano – probably for the first time in Finland.

The **Helsinki Chamber Orchestra** works to produce high-quality performances of western classical music written for chamber orchestra or chamber ensemble, to bring classical music to new audiences through accessible performances and well-constructed concert-programmes and to celebrate the variety in classical music by performing works that span a breadth of different styles and by championing lesser-known works. In addition, the Orchestra also seeks to promote and employ young talented classical music professionals seeking to find their place in the music industry, with the support of major institutions such as the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, the French Institute in Finland and the Sibelius Academy.

One of the central tenants of the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra is the importance of chamber-musicianship and individual musical responsibility on the part of all of its players. The rehearsal process is based on democratic principles, with the conductor and concert-master serving as moderators for the process rather than as executives. Additionally, all the players are hand-picked by the section leaders for each project, creating a rare human and musical link within the ensemble. The enhanced communication and awareness between players, combined with the advanced ensemble-playing skills, results in a unique synergy within the orchestra.

The Orchestra was dreamt up in 2018 by a group of international musicians from various backgrounds, united by the desire to perform a larger variety of western classical repertoire while bringing new and youthful energy to the Helsinki orchestral scene and beyond. The orchestral community extends to artists from all around the world who specialise in various styles of music, from the Baroque to the avant-garde. The HCO also works with other existing projects and ensembles, including such initiatives as the Far Away Ensemble, the Polska Travels project, and the Key Discoveries piano-recital series. Audience education is central to the HCO mission, and it strives to perform accessible and understandable concerts for new audiences.

## Acknowledgements

Beyond the musicians, piano technicians, producers, sound-engineers and grant foundations credited elsewhere in this booklet, some other names played a vital role in making this recording happen and ought to be mentioned.

I am particularly indebted to the librarians Sebastian Lindblom and Marina Demina at the Music and Theatre Library of Sweden, who responded warmly to my never-ending list of requests and helped me in my searches for musical material.

I must also thank two pre-eminent Moses Pergament experts and biographers, the historian Henrik Rosengren and the musicologist and critic Carl-Gunnar Åhlén, for their help and support over the years.

It has been particularly heartwarming to receive such a kind welcome and helpful attitude from members of the Pergament family – in particular, his grandchildren Katerina Lejonsdotter Pergament and Nicole Pergament Crona, as well as Ann-Charlotte Pergament, Moses' daughter-in-law. The discussions with Aviva Nemes-Jalkanen, Joel Nemes, Dan Linder, Babette Gottschalk, Leo Skurnik, Dan Crona and others connected to the family have been equally memorable. I extend my thanks to all the heirs who graciously granted permission to release the previously unpublished piano works heard here.

In addition to generous support from grant foundations, the recording of the Pergament Piano Concerto was also funded via a crowdfunding campaign, where a noteworthy contribution came from Daniel Sherwood, technology entrepreneur, philanthropist and pianist from Tamworth, New South Wales, Australia. I am also indebted to Jonas Lång from the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland for his help in solving some problems in the later stages of finalising this recording project.

This recording would not have happened without the endless help (and patience) of my dearest Evgeniia Kriuchkova, who has found herself living side by side with Pergament for the past few years. Similarly, I extend my most loving thanks to my parents, Sven-Göran and Marzena, who have been endlessly supportive in my endeavours.

Last but most certainly not least, this album would not have become what it is without the inspiration, help and support of two individuals: my piano teacher Ilmo Ranta and my kindred spirit Allan Evans (1956–2020) – Allan, because his work in 'musical archaeology' is what taught and inspired me to do the same in recordings such as this one, and Ilmo for his detailed guidance on almost all of the music in this album. This recording is dedicated to Ilmo Ranta and the eternal memory of Allan Evans.

—*Martin Malmgren*



Recorded on 7 and 8 August 2021 in Nya Paviljongen, Grankulla (Piano Concerto), 20 March 2022 in Järvenpäätaalo, Järvenpää (*Fantasia differente*), 30 November 2022 in Nya Paviljongen, Grankulla (cello-and-piano works) and 12 June and 29 November 2023 and 17 March 2024 in Organo, Music Centre, Helsinki (works for solo piano).

Piano: Steinway D

Piano technicians: Matti Kyllönen and Ville Hytönen

Recording engineer: Matti Kyllönen (assistant: Sofia Riippi)

Producers: Mikko Nisula (Piano Concerto), Sebastian Silén (works for cello and piano, and solo-piano works), Ido Akov (solo-piano works and *Chanson triste*) and Martin Malmgren (*Fantasia differente*)

General producer: Martin Malmgren

PUBLISHERS

**Svensk Musik**

Piano Concerto

*Meditation* (both works)

*Melodia Romantica*

*Fantasia Differente*

*Festfanfar*

**Gehrmans Musikförlag**

*Lyriska Danser*

'Kvarnen' ('The Mill'), one of *Tre små sånger* ('Three Little Songs')

Menuett

**R. E. Westerlund**

*Chanson triste*

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