

ARTISTIC VISION

(Alexandre da Costa)

“The roots of this program are extremely personal for me as it represents a tribute to my grandfather. When I was 20 years old, he revealed not only to myself, but to our entire family, that he was Jewish. He’d hidden his religious background years ago upon immigrating to Canada from Jamaica to avoid further segregation and to be able to marry my grandmother. He died shortly after having found the peace and courage to reclaim and acknowledge his faith. Although I had not been raised in the Jewish religion, I embarked on an artistic journey of discovery into this part of my heritage, much as I had done in exploring the ethnicity of my Portuguese roots.

I wanted to have many composers who did things with the Hebraic inspiration. For example, Bruch was not a Jewish composer, but he did compose two very important works like the Kol Nidrei . He had many good friends in Liverpool and so decided to write this as an homage.

Bloch is an important composer of Jewish music. His whole work is of Hebraic inspiration: None of his symphonies, suites or sonatas are without the folkloric music of Israel or of the Jewish community. It is present everywhere, even in the Sonata for violin and piano, which is composed to be a straightforward musical work.

Schindler's List, in my view, is the most beautiful piece for violin that was ever written in the Jewish genre. Again, it's written by somebody who is not Jewish, yet it's so touching, beautiful and reaches everyone with the importance to take those minutes and think about the many sad events that occurred during the Second World War. Certainly, because it is associated with the movie we have no trouble bringing images to mind. Regardless of that, one can easily just sit and listen during those three pieces and appreciate that a lot is happening.

Last year, I was prepared to record the Williams pieces with the Biel Symphony. Just before the concert, a very old man came to the green room and requested that I ask the audience to refrain from applauding at the end. When I said “certainly, but why?” he said he would like the silence to be a reminder of what happened 60 years ago. After this piece, I was to come off stage to let the public think and pray. He rolled up his sleeves and showed me the tattoo. Both he and his wife were survivors. How could I not do what he asked?

After performing the piece, and then going into the heaviness of silence, I found the ‘way back’ very long. It was very emotional but I can say that this was one of the highlights of my career.

Although it was not intended this way, the first portion of the program includes the work of composers who are not Jewish, yet have written quintessentially Jewish music, while the last composer I have chosen was born a Jew but is not recognized as such insofar as his musical contributions.

It is known that Mendelssohn disavowed his religion at the insistence of his father who converted to Christianity to gain social acceptability. Who can say how this truly affected Mendelssohn? Personally, I see a parallel between Mendelssohn and my grandfather even though he chose to hide his Jewishness, not for gain, but to avoid pain for himself and his family. He was afraid all of his life, but was able to return to his religion before he died. I would give Mendelssohn the benefit of the doubt, and so included him in this program which is my tribute to the Jewish way of celebrating God.”

