

# QUE SAIS-JE?

for flute, clarinet, bassoon, violin, cello, piano, electronics and video

**By Amos Elkana**

## **Meitar Ensemble**

**Pierre-André Valade** - conductor

**Hagar Shahal** - flute · **Jonathan Hadas** - clarinet · **Nadav Cohen** - bassoon  
**Talia Herzlich** - violin · **Yoni Gotlibovich** - violoncello · **Amit Dolberg** - piano

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023 AT 7:30P, CONCERT HALL

Composed in memory of Yehuda Elkana, who passed away 10 years ago. The composition consists of fourteen parts which are separated by recordings in which Yehuda Elkana tells his life story in his own voice. In addition, there are two poems that appear throughout the piece. One by the Hungarian poet Petar Nadash called "Whither Do You Go Home" and the other by Gertrude Stein called "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso". Both poems are heard in the real voice of the poets themselves. Nadash in Hungarian and Stein in English. The duration of the piece is about one hour and ten minutes.

These are the texts heard during the piece in the order they are heard:

**I** There is a wonderful saying by Gertrude Stein, she said, as you know, more than "A rose is a rose is a rose", she also said "let me recite to you what history teaches, history teaches".

### **Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 1]**

*Human reason,  
at least according to Kant,  
is tormented by such questions –  
by whom? -  
perhaps by its fate,  
by the gods,  
its immanently personal life  
shakes out of it, in hairpin bends,  
the most banal questions of life and death,  
which it cannot answer,  
cannot reject,  
unless one can reject one's own breathing.  
Whither do you go home.*

**II** I was born in Yugoslavia 1934 from Hungarian speaking parents. The house in which we lived was a typical old-fashioned almost 19th century style salon - music, culture, artists, literature... But then the Hungarians came and occupied northern Yugoslavia and my father was immediately arrested as a Jew, Zionist, Freemason, Communist...

**III** And he led the sports delegation to the Maccabiah to Palestine in 1935, wanted to remain there having read Hitler and immediately got also a job as an engineer, he could have remained, and my mother adamantly refused, she wrote him: how can you be so cruel to take me and my one year-old child to the desert? so the foolish man came back in spite of that that he knew what was coming.

**Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 2]**

*The questions,  
says Kant,  
are posed by reason itself,  
reason alone can speak so softly  
the language of fate,  
or the words of reason's nature  
make such gentle echoes  
in the marrow-filled space of skulls.*

**IIIa** We were deported from Battonya and on the way to Auschwitz when two of those cargo trains stopped for some reason parallel and people were screaming through the... not windows... through those whatever... what do you know of that person? what do you know of that person? My mother who was standing, there was no sitting place, on one side of the wagon and I on the other, learned from people from Szeged that my grandmother and the two aunts committed suicide on my birthday 16th of June 1944, thinking that they will never see the darling child again.

**IV** I remember that the trains got into Auschwitz. That the gas chambers were too crowded, one had to queue for it, and we were waiting in these cargo trains for weeks on end. A few train loads were taken out of Auschwitz to clean up the rubbles. We got into Floridsdorf in Vienna, taken out every morning to clean up the cities, back in the evening and every day. Then the end started to come. The Russians were close and the Nazis started the so called death marches. And when we had to go my father forbid me to take my collection of glass churches and I don't remember ever in my life hating anybody as much as I hated him then.

**Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 3]**

*Never was a man born  
who could answer:  
whither do you go home –  
if reason  
wedded to its single destiny  
cannot find its home -  
your stubborn questions are repulsed,  
they outsoar  
your reason's  
immanent capacities.*

**V** And when these marches started it was clear that if we don't go along with the convoy we will be shot. We couldn't go along so these two families stood aside and we knew that the SS is going to shoot us. The SS came up to us and said - well, I'm supposed to shoot you but if you take down my name and number and you testify when the Russians come that I was a good one, I won't shoot you. We hid in a barn. There were Ukrainian collaborators with the Nazis also living in that barn. These Ukrainians decided they are going to give us up to the Nazis, instead they took the women, those two old paralyzed women, my mother and the other mother every night.

**VI** My father was relatively healthy, totally incapable of doing anything. If it depended on him we would have died of hunger. So this 15 year old girl and myself went out every night, garbage cans, wherever we could, potato peels, we collected enough for to have survived for a month, until the Russians really came. We went back to Yugoslavia. Didn't find anything from the existence of before. My father immediately got work and started working. My mother was a wreck in bed. 46, 47, 48.

**Gertrude Stein, "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso" [part A]**

*If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him. Would he like it would  
Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it. If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if  
Napoleon.  
Would he like it if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if Napoleon if  
Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him  
would he like it would he like it if I told him. Now. Not now. And now. Now.  
Exactly as as kings. Feeling full for it. Exactitude as kings. So to beseech you as full as for  
it. Exactly or as kings. Shutters shut and open so do queens. Shutters shut and  
shutters and so shutters shut and shutters and so and so shutters and so shutters shut and so  
shutters shut and shutters and so. And so shutters shut and so and also. And also and so  
and so and also. Exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as  
a resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance exactly a  
resemblance. exactly and resemblance. For this is so. Because. Now actively repeat at*

*all, now actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all. Have hold and hear, actively repeat at all. I judge judge. As a resemblance to him. Who comes first. Napoleon the first. Who comes too coming coming too, who goes there, as they go they share, who shares all, all is as all as as yet or as yet. Now to date now to date. Now and now and date and the date.*

**VII** We arrived in Israel with a ship called Kefalos. And the nice part (it took more than two weeks) of this ship travel was, that people were sea sick and vomiting all the time and I was eating up the food of everybody.

**Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 4]**

*A thing that is more  
than its sum,  
will be shaken by its destiny  
to no avail,  
it still cannot speak,  
not out of joy, not out of pain,  
as if  
it were a singularity,  
or it cannot speak  
as if  
a singularity were not more than one.*

**VIII** The kibbutz got together and decided - this little monkey should study! If he leaves the kibbutz, and the Jewish Agency pays half of his scholarship for a high school in Tel Aviv, then the kibbutz itself will pay the other half. I lived in a, you know, there were these containers where people brought their furniture, they were called Lifts, so I had a big 2x3 meter container standing outside the house on the dunes which I organized my library, my desk, etc, while I was going to high school.

**VIIIa** There was a very famous cow in Israel by the name of Stavit. And this cow at the time gave the maximum quantity of milk and until I got married I carried a picture of Stavit with me.

**IX** I went to Herzliya gymnasium. The first two years I had to learn Hebrew. I didn't know a word of Hebrew. I didn't know a word of English. I had to learn these things, but I did have to make money so I bred 200 rabbits, sold the meat, sold the fur, etc. This went on for two years.

**X** After two years I started giving private lessons because my English and Hebrew were already good enough and finally I earned quite a lot of money preparing young people for

matriculation in all disciplines. Then came the army. I couldn't bear it and developed asthma of a degree that it was clear that something has to be done. I was sent to a psychologist who after long hearings decided that I am not fit for the army and after three months of this kind of exercise I was expelled from the Israeli army with three items: slight heart disturbance, asthma and mad.

**XI** 1955 I was 21. I saw from distance a girl with a little, what we used to call in Israel, battle dress. Short hair, short coat, very blonde and I saw her from the back and I fell in love with her. I asked somebody to introduce us and I invited her for a cup of coffee, we went to little restaurant, had a cup of coffee and I explained her very rationally that I never had a girlfriend before, that it's the first time that I'm really in love and would she marry me?

**Gertrude Stein, "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso" [part B]**

*Who came first Napoleon at first. Who came first Napoleon the first. Who came first, Napoleon first. Presently. Exactly do they do. First exactly. Exactly do they do. First exactly. And first exactly. Exactly do they do. And first exactly and exactly. And do they do. At first exactly and first exactly and do they do. The first exactly. And do they do. The first exactly. At first exactly. First as exactly. As first as exactly. Presently. As presently. As as presently. He he he he and he and he and and he and he and he and and as and as he and as he and he. He is and as he is, and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and as he is and he and he and and he and he. Can curls rob can curls quote, quotable. As presently. As exactitude. As trains. Has trains. Has trains. As trains. As trains. Presently. Proportions. Presently. As proportions as presently. Farther and farther. Was the king or room. Farther and whether. Was there was there what was there was there what was there was there there was there. Whether and in there. As even say so. One. I land. Two. I land. Three. The land. Three The land. Three. The land. Two I land. Two I land. One I land. Two I land. As a so. The cannot. A note. They cannot. A float. They cannot. They dote. They cannot. They as denote. Miracles play. Play fairly. Play fairly well. A well. As well. As or as presently. Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches.*

**Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 5]**

*Still, who would say,  
that it wouldn't be,  
that of this painful lack  
the sole joyous common perspective  
wouldn't be thinking  
while  
its questions hang answerless  
in midair:  
where is your home,  
is there one,*

*reason be calm,  
does anyone  
have a thing like this.  
Let us start over.*

**XII** By the time we got married in 1960, I was a high school teacher, and my class were really living at home and this went on until she said finally, either me or your students...

**XIII. eulogy to Emil Grünzweig, 1983 [in Hebrew]**

If we remember one thing, that from now on we will not write hate articles, we will not use expressions like 'sticking knives in the back', we will try to manage the debate, which will only intensify in the coming years, we have not finished the debate, the debate in Israel is one of the most difficult, ideological and value-based, that Judaism has ever known ever in its history. If we don't learn to manage this debate in such a way that we don't hate and don't escalate the debate, it will turn into a third house like the previous houses ended. Our only hope, in my opinion, that is Emil's memory and Emil's spirit, is to manage the debate, stand up for our opinions and love.

**XIV** I'm critical of myself and of the people closest to me and of everybody else and I say it. And this created lots of trouble. There are no holy cows. And this critical attitude goes together with this self ironical, fundamentally humorous attitude of what do I know anyhow?

**Peter Nadas - "Whither do you go home" [in Hungarian, verse 6]**

*There is a small amateur photo,  
with jagged edges,  
slightly yellowed,  
taken in one of the long years  
of the first industrial size  
burning of humans  
on Sunday  
in Subotica, that is, in Szabadka,  
stuck in a family album,  
a desolate small town street,  
an earnest young boy in a great coat,  
it was our house,  
in front of our house  
am I.*

