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HEGGIE: For a Look or a Touch /
SCHWARZ: In Memoriam /
LAITMAN: The Seed of Dream (Music of Remembrance)

FOR A LOOK OR A TOUCH

Music by JAKE HEGGIE
 Libretto by GENE SCHEER

Commissioned by Music of Remembrance
 Mina Miller, Artistic Director

Lyrics and texts based on entries from Manfred Lewin's journal in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC; and interviews from the film Paragraph 175, directed by Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman, copyright Reflective Image, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Characters

MANFRED (lyric baritone), 19 years old. A ghost.
 Once Gad's lover in Berlin, he was murdered by the Nazis at Auschwitz in 1942.

GAD (actor), 80 years old.
 Once imprisoned as a homosexual by the Nazis, he is a gay survivor of the Holocaust.

The present. It is late at night. GAD sits alone trying to nod off, but he cannot sleep. Suddenly he senses another presence in the room. MANFRED enters.

[1] Prelude: Do You Remember?

GAD
 Who's there?

MANFRED
Do you remember?
Do you remember when night was for more than sleep?
Oh, my love.

GAD
 You? Manfred! A ghost! Why are you here?
 What do you want?

MANFRED
Remember?
Remember?

GAD

Look at you, Manfred. My God. It's been 60 years. You're as handsome as the day when. That day when. (Pause) You'll always be 19 and beautiful, won't you? Look at me. Alive. Falling apart. The world is a different place, I guess. Maybe we'd be okay now. Who knows? So much is slipping away. It's so late. You should go away. I need to sleep.

MANFRED
Remember?
Remember when night was for more than sleep?
Oh, my love. Oh my love, my love,
We stayed awake so often!

GAD
 You're not going away, are you?

MANFRED
Remember!

GAD
 You want me to remember. Darling, I have done everything I can to forget. It's too hard, Manfred. I survived the Holocaust. I had to

find a way to live. There was so much shame after the war and I had nothing. Nothing but your journal: the poetry of the beautiful, 19-year-old boy I loved. Fragments. Sometimes, I look through it and cry and curse and smile. Oh, but go now, Manfred. Let me forget.

[2] The Voice

MANFRED

A void consumes me.
My spirit and body are suddenly lame.
Terror fills the time that follows.
Will each new day be the same?

Often I feel utterly abandoned.
See myself on the edge of an abyss.
And I become dizzy as I look down.
With blood-drained cheeks that you would kiss.

Suddenly from the darkest depths,
A loving voice echoes and seeks me out.
I look down and ask: "Who is calling?"
And I hear a voice that ends all doubt.

It is the voice of a sanctified power,
The sacred place where fears dissolve.
The unyielding blessing, the generous heart
The voice of souls in perfect resolve.

GAD

A sanctified power? Souls in perfect resolve? Hm. I don't know. Nice poetry. I used to think that was possible, but I'm old now. Really old. I've seen such horror and cruelty. After the war, we men who wore the pink triangle and survived – we returned to a world that did not want to hear of our suffering. But how can speak to you of suffering? A sanctified power? Such a lovely, hopeful, naïve thought. But then, you were 19. So was I, once. Everything seemed possible then.

That's how it felt when I met you. Those golden years in Berlin. *Die Goldenen Jahre*.

[3] Golden Years

MANFRED

Wild. Free.
We are wild! We are free!
Topsy turvy, joyful Berlin.

You are free! You are wild!
Topsy turvy child of Berlin.
Golden years. Golden years.

Give me a look or a touch and I'll know.
A wink or a nod or a glance – mm mm –
We don't need words. Just stand very close.
Let's not miss out on a chance for love tonight.

A look or a touch and I'll know you're the one. A grin or a smile – mm mm Just for a while, tonight or a lifetime, Let's not miss out on a chance for love right now.

(musical break)

Dance with me.
This is the Schwanenberg,
hottest spot in Berlin.
Meet and greet and eat and cheat and swing.

(music builds)

What a band! What a crowd at
Schwanenberg!
Take my hand, dance all night at
Schwanenberg!
Let's have a laugh now. Let's have some fun.
Shout: "Police!"
Then watch 'em pull their skirts up and run!

Everybody's running around.
Screaming! Laughing!
Giddy from the joy of this town
And these golden years. Golden years

While we are young, wild and free let's keep dancing.
Let's not miss out on a thing.
And if we should find we're of the same mind,
A look or a touch could lead to a precious night of love.

(The band starts swinging again)

"Police!"

(Laughter)

GAD

(Laughing) We had so much fun! Crazy boys.
Crazy queens. What a wonderful family. It would never end! Then the police did come.
The clubs were closed and the Nazis

trampled the joy. You could be arrested for a look or a touch. And yet most of our stories have been lost because we were too afraid and ashamed. Nobody to talk to. Nobody to tell. Oh Manfred, I'll never know what you witnessed. What horrors you must have experienced.

[4] The Story of Joe

MANFRED

Horror and savagery are the law.
I am a silent, obedient shadow.
Dead to myself. Dead to the world.
A silent, obedient shadow.

Lined up for roll call,
They pull out Joe,
A loving friend, 18 years old.
Good boy. He's a good boy, Joe.

What has he done?
What is his crime?
His jacket bears a pink triangle.
Be still. Just keep in line.
Be a good boy, Joe. Be obedient, Joe.

They strip him naked,
Put a bucket on his head,
Then sic their dogs on him.
They bite his body,
Tear at his thighs,
Blood everywhere.
His screams and cries
Amplified by the bucket on his head.
Ah! Ah!

Goodbye, Joe.

And on the speakers
They play a waltz.
Back to work.
Silent, obedient shadows.

GAD

Silent. So many years of silence. Now there are so few of us left. But you couldn't talk after the war. We were still criminals! Who would I have told, if I could? After the war. After it was all over. When the shame and new anguish was beginning. Who would I tell?

[5] Silence

(MANFRED sings a wordless melody while GAD speaks the following)

GAD

It was so long ago. After my father died, I went on a trip. I left the hotel one night and a woman was following me. Down by the river, a hustler approached me. He pulled me into the bushes. "We're being watched," I said. "No one is there," he said. And that's when it happened, perfectly planned. "You are under arrest." I did not understand. I was sent away to the camp. Why? Paragraph 175 was written in large letters on our jackets. Later, it was the pink triangle. A yellow star for Jews; a red star for political prisoners; a black star for the mentally retarded; a purple star for Jehovah's witnesses; a pink triangle for homosexuals. Hard labor – backbreaking labor – brutality – torture – starvation – death. Death and suffering everywhere. Why? Why? What have I done?

When I returned, I never spoke of it to anyone. My mother? Not a single word. Nobody wanted to hear. One word and they'd say: "Leave it alone". It's over and done with. Would I have wanted to speak? Perhaps... Perhaps... Perhaps with my father.

What happened to you, Manfred?

[6] Der Singende Wald (The Singing Forest)

MANFRED

Der Singende Wald.
What is it?
Der Singende Wald.

There are holes in the ground,
In each, a tall pole with a hook on top.
Your hands tied behind your back
Your wrists slung over the hook
You are lifted up, posted high.
Your shoulders snap and break
And you swing and hang and scream.

Der Singende Wald!
Der Singende Wald!

They swing and hang.

All can hear their cries.
Inexplicable.
Beyond comprehension.

[7] Remember

GAD

I went to spend the night at your house. Your brother told me that you and most of your family had been arrested that day. I went to your boss. I was desperate. He asked me, "Do you have courage?" "Yes, I have courage." "My son is your size. He has a Hitler Youth uniform. Put it on and get Manfred out." My heart was pounding as I went in and saluted. "Heil Hitler! I must speak with the Obersturmbannführer." He came at once.

"Manfred Lewin was brought here yesterday. He worked for us and is a saboteur! He has keys to several of the apartments we are renovating. My father sent me here to get him so we can go back to work." Within moments, you and I were free, walking down the street. I said, "Go to Uncle Wobbi's. I'll call and meet you there." You looked at me:

MANFRED & GAD

"No, I can't go with you, Gad. If I leave my family now, I'll never be free again. I have to go with them. I am the strong one."

[MANFRED turns away]

GAD

We never said goodbye. You turned and walked away, and I walked in the other direction. I wasn't able to think. But, I knew something was forever broken.

MANFRED

Oh my love, my love...

GAD

I'm so tired. Manfred. So old. And I want so much to believe in what you believed. The sacred place where fears dissolve. The generous heart. Your journal is so full of hope – but I feel so hopeless.

MANFRED

*Do you remember when...
Night was for more than sleep?
Oh my love, my love
We stayed awake so often.*

GAD

Yes. Yes, I remember! Everything, my love. Holding you. Kissing you. On the roof. In the forests outside Berlin. Sharing your little bed upstairs from your parents. I remember all of it. I remember.

MANFRED

A single move. Destiny
Unleashes its terrible game
And sweeps you away to some distant land
where nothing will ever be the same.

Will the last bonds of our community be torn apart?

No. Do not lament.

Even though the fire torments your heart,
There is one sure support:
The voice of our love. Our love.

GAD

Take me with you, Manfred.

MANFRED

Love.

GAD

I remember. A look or a touch. Dance with me again?

(MANFRED goes to GAD, takes his hand and they hold each other, dance slowly and hum together for the first time, as the lights and music fade.)

THE END

THE SEED OF DREAM

Music by LORI LAITMAN

Commissioned by Music of Remembrance
Mina Miller, Artistic Director

Poetry by Abraham Sutzkever. Reprinted from **Literature of Destruction**,
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[9] I Lie in This Coffin

I lie in this coffin
the way I would lie
in a suit made of wood,
a bark
tossed on treacherous waves,
a cradle, an ark.

From here, where all
flesh is taken to eternity,
I call
to you, sister*, and you
in your distance
still hear me.

Something stirs
in my coffin,
a presence; you're here:
I know you by the stars
of your eyes, your light, your
breath, your tear.

This is the order of things,
and the plot:
today here, tomorrow not.
But now, in my coffin,
my suit made of wood,
my speech lifts,
my speech sings.

Vilna ghetto, 30th August, 1941
(*The reference is to his sister, who died in
Siberia during Sutzkever's childhood.)

[10] A Load of Shoes

The cartwheels rush,
quivering.
What is their burden?

Shoes, shivering.

The cart is like
a great hall:
the shoes crushed together
as though at a ball.

A wedding? A party?
Have I gone blind?
Who have these shoes
left behind?

The heels clatter
with a fearsome din,
transported from Vilna
to Berlin.

I should be still,
my tongue is like meat,
but the truth, shoes,
where are your feet?

The feet from these boots
with buttons outside
or these, with no body,
or these, with no bride?

Where is the child
who fit in these?
Is the maiden barefoot
who bought these?

Slippers and pumps,
look, there are my mother's:
her Sabbath pair,
in with the others.

The heels clatter
with a fearsome din,
transported from Vilna

to Berlin.

Vilna ghetto, 1st January, 1943

[11] To My Child

Because of hunger
or because of great love —
your mother will bear witness
I wanted to swallow you, child,
when I felt your tiny body
cool in my hands
like a glass
of warm tea.

Neither stranger were you, nor guest.
On our earth, one births
only oneself, one links
oneself into rings and the rings into chains.

Child, the word for you would be love
but without words you are love,
the seed of dream,
unbidden third,

who from the limits of the world
swept two of us
into consummate pleasure.

How can you shut your eyes,
leaving me here
in the dark world of snow
you've shrugged off?

You never even had your own cradle
to learn the dances
of the stars.
The shameful sun, who never shone
on you, should shatter like glass.
Your faith burned away
in the drop of poison
you drank down
as simply as milk.

I wanted to swallow you, child,
to taste
the future waiting for me.
Maybe you will blossom again
in my veins.

I'm not worthy of you, though.
I can't be your grave.
I leave you
to the summoning snow,
this first respite.
You'll descend now

like a splinter of dusk
into the stillness,
bringing greetings from me
to the slim shoots
under the cold.

Vilna ghetto, 18th January, 1943

[12] Beneath the Whiteness of Your Stars

Beneath the whiteness of your stars,
Stretch out toward me your white hand;
All my words are turned to tears —
They long to rest within your hand.

See, their brilliant light goes darker
In my eyes, grown cellar-dim;
And I lack a quiet corner
From which to send them back again.

Yet, O Lord, all my desire
To leave you with my wealth of tears.
In me, there burns an urgent fire,
And in the fire, there burn my days.

Rest, in every hole and cellar
Weeps, as might a murderer.
I run the rooftops, even higher,
And I search — where are you? Where?

Past stairs and courtyard I go running,
Chased by howling enemies.
I hang, at last, a broken bowstring,
And I sing to you — like this:

Beneath the whiteness of your stars,
Stretch out toward me your white hand;
All my words are turned to tears —
They long to rest within your hand.

Vilna ghetto, 22nd May, 1943

[13] No Sad Songs Please

No sad songs please:
Sad songs just tease
At sorrow.
Words, too, betray,
And names,
Forever,
And tomorrow.

Look out at the snow:
In memory's art
Is unexpected
Radiance, and in

The speeches of the heart
You yourself are
Resurrected.

Stretch your hand out
To that whiteness:
In its cold and burning
Veins
You'll feel returning
The redeeming life
It contains.

Narocz forests, 5th February, 1944