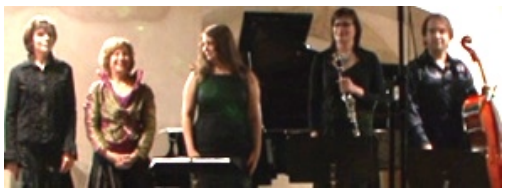
Laurence Sherr

Newsletter 2010–2011

Prague Holocaust Concert



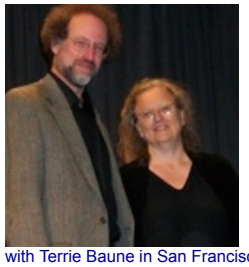
Prague *Flame Language* performers (from left): Kristýna Valoušková, mezzo-soprano, Patricia Goodson, piano, Michaela Rózsová, conductor, Jana Lahodná, clarinet, and Petr Nouzovský, cello

Sherr collaborated with pianist Patricia Goodson to produce the 2011 Prague event *A Holocaust Remembrance: Czech, Dutch, and American Chamber Music of Two Generations*. Staged under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy in Prague, the concert featured songs by Czech composers Viktor Ullmann and Ilse Weber, both of whom created new works while prisoners in the Theresienstadt "model" (i.e., propaganda) concentration camp. Both were killed after being deported to Auschwitz. Two instrumental works by composer Rosalie Wertheim, who went into hiding in her native Holland to survive the Holocaust, brought to life this expressive music that deserves to be more widely heard. Sherr, the child of a survivor, represented the second generation. For the premiere of the mezzo-soprano and chamber ensemble version of his Holocaust memorial *Flame Language*, Sherr spoke about the life and work of Nelly Sachs, upon whose poetry *Flame Language* is based. His *Elegy and Vision* for solo cello rounded out the program.

The Prague Post noted that "...Sherr's *Elegy* and *Flame Language*...neatly captured moments of meditation, discovery and despair" and "Memorial concerts can be overbearing, but this one felt more redeeming than depressing, in keeping with the goal expressed by the organizers...'We seek to honor [the composers'] suffering, but not to limit their contributions, which transcend the horrors of the Holocaust.'"

A concert web page offers video clips, the program booklet, links to press, and more. Several complete songs and works are on YouTube. Both the concert and its web archiving were supported by grants from the Kennesaw State University (KSU) Institute for Global Initiatives, Office of Diversity & Equity, and School of Music.

Premieres and Performances



with Terrie Baune in San Francisco

International staging of Sherr's work occurred in Turkey, where American guitarist Mary Akerman gave the Middle East premiere of *Blue Ridge Frescoes*, and in Nürnburg, where the crossover ensemble JJP and Friends presented the first German performance of his experimental *EIMI*. In the U.S., Bay Area violinist Terry Baune performed Four Short Pieces at the 2011 Festival of Contemporary Music in San Francisco, and Jacksonville Symphony violinist Piotr Szewczyk premiered *Midnight Dance* in Florida in 2010, with subsequent performances in Pennsylvania. In 2010, *Elegy and Vision* was presented by cellists Parry Karp in Colorado and Wisconsin and Michal Schmidt in Pennsylvania. New York City baritone Elliott Levine, recording artist with the Western Wind Vocal Ensemble, premiered the chamber ensemble version of *Flame Language* in Georgia in 2010. The Athens and Atlanta performances featured Levine with KSU student performers conducted by Sherr. At the KSU 2011 Festival of New Music, Helen Kim, Catherine Lynn, and Charae Krueger, the KSU Faculty String Trio, performed his String Trio.

New Publication

Two of Sherr's scores appear in the just-released 2011 *Anthology of*

Czech and U.S. Lectures/Recitals

Dr. Hee-Kyung Juhn

Following memorial presentations in 2009 in Germany, Sherr broadened his Holocaust lecture activities to the Czech Republic in 2011. He was invited by the Jewish Museum of Prague to present the lecture-recital *Shoah Memorial Music: Historical Precedents and the Development of Laurence Sherr's Work*. Noted Czech cellist Petr Nouzovský performed his *Elegy and Vision* to culminate the event (poster below, at left). To introduce his work *Flame Language* at his Prague Holocaust Remembrance concert, he gave the presentation *Nelly Sachs: Holocaust Poet and Nobel Laureate*. At the 2011 national conference of the College Music Society in Richmond, he imparted perspectives on teaching tolerance in his paper *Designing a College Course on Music and the Holocaust: Examining History through the Lens of Music to Achieve Global Learning Objectives*. Earlier in 2011, Temple Beth-El in Birmingham, Alabama invited him for a lecture on *Music at Terezín* and his talk *Klezmer Music: History and Style* at Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta featured pieces performed by Oy Klezmer! with Sherr on clarinet. In 2010, Hot Springs National Park (HSNP) in Arkansas engaged him for *Piano Journeys*, a lecture-recital that featured the premiere of his piano prelude *Ouachita Waters*, composed while he was a 2009 HSNP resident artist. He provided the commentary for the lecture-recital with pianist Hee-Kyung Juhn, who also performed his nature-influenced Nocturne.

European Holocaust Research

Auschwitz–front gate and Block 24, orchestral rehearsal location

Archives in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Austria hosted Dr. Sherr as he pursued research on music and the Holocaust in the summer of 2011. Source materials in the Jewish Museum of Prague, Terezín Archives, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and the Vienna Jewish Museum provided valuable information about the lives of musicians, and the music they made, particularly in the camps of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. His photo and video documentation of the concentration camp sites where musicians rehearsed and performed will allow greater understanding of their lives and roles. He also conducted video interviews with Czech survivors who performed in musical productions in Theresienstadt during the Shoah. Funding for Sherr's research was provided by his 2010 KSU Holder Award.

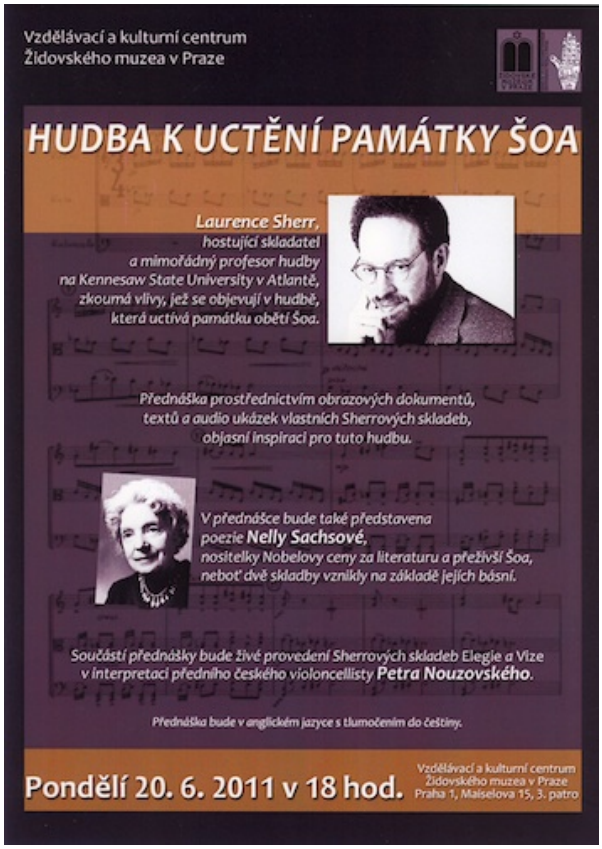
Violin Works in Prague

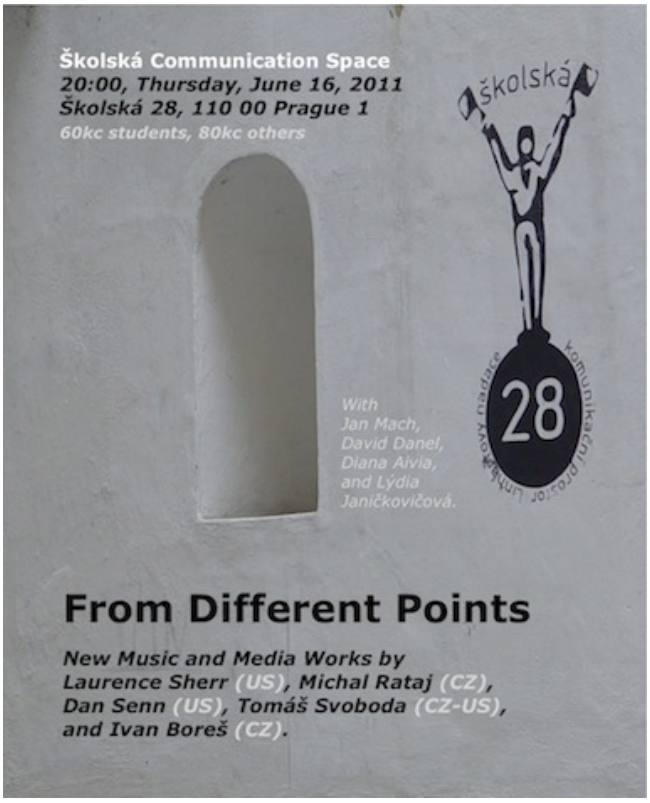
with David Danel, Školská 28, Prague

Czech violinist David Danel gave the European premieres of two solo violin works by Sherr at a June concert in Prague (poster below). The new music event, dubbed "From Different Points", was staged at the Školská 28 art gallery in downtown Prague, and included works by Czech composers Svoboda and Rataj along with the American creator Dan Senn, who produced the event. While Sherr's Four Short Pieces and *Midnight Dance* are both brief and virtuosic violin works, the 27-year span between them shows the composer's changing

Contemporary Concert Music, a project of PARMA Records. They are *EIMI* for violin, saxophone, percussion, and piano, and *Midnight Dance* for solo violin. *EIMI* is recorded on the CD *11. Komponistenforum Mittersill – KULT*, released on the European Ein-Klang label and available at iTunes.

interests and influences. The older Four Short Pieces explores lyrical dissonance and timbral inflections while the recent *Midnight Dance* draws on Eastern European and Yiddish folk styles. Audio and score excerpts from both works are at his composition web page.





Contact

Laurence Sherr, Composer-in-Residence
Kennesaw State University
E-mail: lsherr@kennesaw.edu
Phone: 770.499.3406
Web: http://ksuweb.kennesaw.edu/~lsherr/