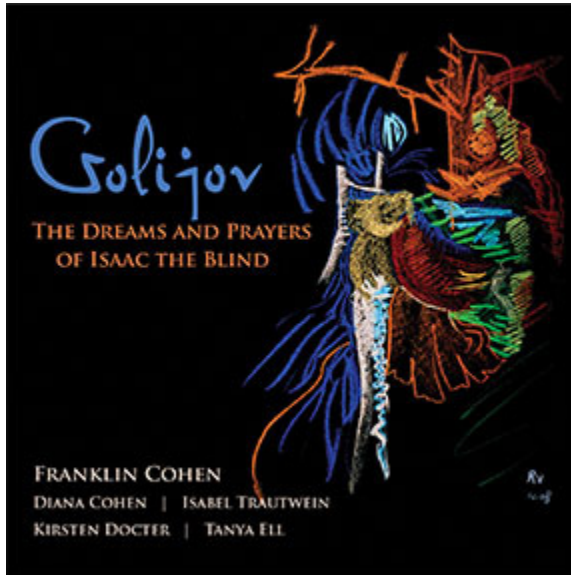


CD Report: Franklin Cohen in the quartet version of Golijov's 'Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind'

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by Mike Telin



On May 13 and 15, Franklin Cohen played the orchestral version of Osvaldo Golijov's 'Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind' with the Cleveland Orchestra under Tito Muñoz. At the same time, he released his CD of the string quartet version of Golijov's work, recorded in a single day at the Oberlin Conservatory's Warner Hall at the end of December.

'Dreams and Prayers', premiered at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in August, 1994 by Giora Feidman and the Cleveland Quartet (Cleveland Orchestra concertmaster William Preucil was first violinist at the time), has previously been recorded by Todd Palmer and the St. Lawrence Quartet, and by David Krakauer and the Kronos Quartet.

Mr. Cohen's quartet consisted of violinists Diana Cohen and Isabel Trautwein, violist Kirsten Docter and cellist Tanya Ell. Although the CD was self-released, he enlisted a top-notch team of recording industry veterans to assist with the project. The CD was recorded by the multiple Grammy-winning Five/Four Productions team of Thomas Moore, producer, and Michael Bishop, engineer, who were responsible for the sound and artistic direction of the recording.

Erica Brenner Productions served as part of the editing team and also coordinated all the details for the packaging, manufacturing, graphics, booklet copy, and licensing as well as all other details that are needed to get a CD ready for commercial release. They also created and circulated promotional materials and press releases.

"Dreams and Prayers" represents Franklin Cohen's first outing as a Klezmer clarinetist as well as his debut as a bass clarinetist. Although you don't need to have played Klezmer to perform the work, an understanding of the genre does help, and Cohen brings out its subtleties as though he were a veteran Klezmer artist. He produces a very even quality of sound from beyond pianissimo to above fortissimo, and he tosses off lalts and slides easily into notes, producing a focused, soulful sound that comes close to that of a human voice. When called upon, he gets a dark, rich and mournful tone out of B-flat, A, and bass clarinets alike (he manages a fat sound even in the latter's extremely high register) and the C clarinet really cries out in the Wedding Music.

Cohen's partners achieve a very cohesive ensemble sound -- admirably for a quartet that doesn't play together regularly. They produce steady ostinatos in the opening section, smoothly manage transitions between the many moods of the piece, and achieve beautifully hypnotic playing. At the very end, Cohen, playing the bass clarinet, expressively fades away into nothingness.

Balances are excellent, the sound is well focused, and the recording has a beautiful, chamber music feel that captures the many nuances of the score. This CD is a must-have for anyone who is a devotee of Golijov, Klezmer, chamber music, or the clarinet. For anyone who is not familiar with any of the above, this recording is a great introduction.

"Dreams and Prayers" is available from various online sources, or directly from Franklin Cohen (franklincohenclarinet@gmail.com).