

CHAPTER NINE

STORIES FOR OUR TIME BY FAYE-ELLEN SILVERMAN

Year of Composition: 2007

Duration: ~14 minutes

Movements: 3 (“First Tale,” “Calming Tale,” “Tale of Joy”)

Range: G3 - C6

Instrumentation: Trumpet in C, Piano

Composer Biographical Background:

Faye-Ellen Silverman is a pianist, composer, and educator. Her musical notoriety began at the age of thirteen with her victory in the Parents League Competition judged by Leopold Stokowski. She performed the winning composition in Carnegie Hall, marking her debut as a professional pianist.⁹⁴ It was at this point that Silverman began considering herself a composer,⁹⁵ and since then, her compositions include works for orchestra, chamber groups, electronics, voice and opera.⁹⁶ She has written numerous works for brass instruments and is a founding board member of the International Women’s Brass Conference.⁹⁷ Her most recent composition for trumpet is a work for unaccompanied flugelhorn titled *A Time to Mourn*, dedicated to Joan Fann and premiered by Amy Gilreath at the 2022 International Women’s Brass Conference. Additional chamber compositions with trumpet include two trumpet duets, a trumpet trio, and a brass trio. Her works are published through Subito Music and recordings of many of her works are

⁹⁴“Faye-Ellen Silverman,” Faye-Ellen Silverman, 2022, <https://www.fayeellensilverman.com/>

⁹⁵Faye-Ellen Silverman, email message to author, September 24, 2022.

⁹⁶Holly Ann Schwartz, "Operas by Women in Twentieth Century America," Ph.D. diss., (The University of Texas at Austin, 2008), 129-130.

⁹⁷Alicia Joyelle Kosack, "American Women Composers: Selected Published Works for Flute and Piano and for Unaccompanied Flute Composed between 1930 and 2008," Ph.D. diss., (University of Maryland, College Park, 2010).

available through her personal website.⁹⁸ Silverman was recently interviewed on the “Composers Now Impact Series”⁹⁹ and will have published articles in the Fall 2022 *International Women’s Brass Conference Noteworthy Newsletter* and the upcoming issue of the *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music*.

There was never a doubt that Silverman would grow up to be a musician. She recalls her mother redirecting her attention from running around her family’s apartment to intently listening to classical music in her early childhood,¹⁰⁰ and whenever she considered what she wanted to be when she grew up, Silverman thought, “If I weren’t a musician, I might want to be...” Her passion for both teaching and composing was present in her earliest memories. She began studying music before the age of four at New York City’s Dalcroze School of Music, where she was given weekly composition assignments. She describes herself as a restless child and the Dalcroze method of teaching was well-suited to her as it emphasizes body movement, improvisation, and solfege.¹⁰¹ Her parents, though not musicians, loved music and attended her performances, sacrificing to make sure that Silverman was enrolled in lessons at Dalcroze and in clarinet lessons. Silverman wrote, “I was playing the clarinet in the school band and orchestra, and my screeching tone annoyed my mother—hence the need for lessons. I always tell people that I chose my parents well!”¹⁰²

Silverman recalls composing being a way of life in her childhood. In addition to her composition assignments, her education at Dalcroze heavily emphasized improvisation—the students would take turns improvising at the piano. She recalls her early compositions, including

⁹⁸“Faye-Ellen Silverman,” Faye-Ellen Silverman, 2022, <https://www.fayeellensilverman.com/>

⁹⁹Composers Now, “Composers Now presents IMPACT: Faye-Ellen Silverman,” September 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sn-TjRbQCh4>

¹⁰⁰Faye-Ellen Silverman, “On Becoming a Composer.” *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 17, no. 1 (2011): 17.

¹⁰¹Faye-Ellen Silverman, email message to author, September 24, 2022.

¹⁰²Ibid.

Sunset and Twilight, which was performed for the Parents League Competition judged by Leopold Stokowski, as well as a theme and variations that Silverman performed on Sonny Fox's children's show, *Wonderama*. She recalls, "Until this event, I thought that everyone wrote music. For me, it was a way of life rather than a special talent. It was only when I saw the awed expressions of my junior high friends that I realized the fallacy of my thinking."¹⁰³

Silverman earned a bachelor's degree from Barnard College, then attended Harvard University where she studied with Leon Kirchner and Lukas Foss, whom she credits as a strong positive influence and supporter of her. Regarding her time at Harvard, Silverman recalls, "when I was at Harvard getting a master's degree in music composition, there was a survey of department Chairs (women's issues were just coming into the forefront, hence the survey), and mine wrote that there were some things that women shouldn't do, such as shovel coal and write music. He also thought that women shouldn't be trained in composition since they would just go on to have babies. I was also told by one of my Harvard professors that I would never be able to earn a doctorate in composition anywhere."¹⁰⁴ Upon graduating from Harvard, Silverman entered Columbia University's doctoral program, earning her doctorate in composition and studying with Jack Beeson and Vladimir Ussachevsky.¹⁰⁵ She later returned to teach at Columbia University, as well as the Aspen Music Festival, Eugene Lang College, the Mannes School of Music, Goucher College, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, the Peabody Institute, New York University, and is currently on the faculty at the Juilliard School and New York University.¹⁰⁶

Silverman says that some highlights of her career include hearing her compositions performed by orchestras. Her work, *Winds and Sines*, was the winner of the Indiana State

¹⁰³Faye-Ellen Silverman, "On Becoming a Composer." *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 17, no. 1 (2011): 17-18.

¹⁰⁴Faye-Ellen Silverman, email message to author, September 24, 2022.

¹⁰⁵Schwartz, "Operas by Women in Twentieth Century America," 129-130.

¹⁰⁶"Faye-Ellen Silverman," Faye-Ellen Silverman, 2022, <https://www.fayeellensilverman.com/>

University Orchestral Composition Contest and was performed by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and the New Orleans Philharmonic. She also fondly recalls a concert of her works organized by two of her students, Baron Fenwick and Matthew Jaroszewicz, and their friend, Melanie Ashkar. Now available for listening on YouTube, the concert, held at the Mannes School of Music, featured a performance of *A Free Pen*—a work that Silverman had composed twenty-five years prior but had never heard performed. A world premiere of one of her piano concertos was also given as part of this performance—another piece that had been written many years before the concert.¹⁰⁷

Jewish folk music has a strong influence on Silverman’s compositions. During her childhood, she attended a Sholem Aleichem Folk Shul where she pursued a non-religious study of Judaism for those who consider being Jewish a cultural identity. There, she learned Yiddish and studied Jewish history, Jewish literature, and Jewish folk songs and dances. An opera that she studied during this time, *The Miracle of Nemirov* (1974), would later become part of her doctoral dissertation at Columbia University. Several Jewish folk songs served as inspiration for Silverman’s compositions. She wrote, “To cite but two examples, I used ‘Oyfn Pripetchik’ in my solo marimba composition, ‘Snippets of Memory,’ the first movement of *Memory and Alterations* (2008); and the Jewish Passover song, ‘One Kid,’ in *Connections* (1994) for clarinet, cello, and marimba, a work first created as a dance score.”¹⁰⁸ In addition to these folk songs, Silverman cites American folk songs, the classical music and Broadway tunes that were beloved by her mother, and Russian music that her father enjoyed as influences on her compositional style.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Faye-Ellen Silverman, email message to author, September 24, 2022.

¹⁰⁸Faye-Ellen Silverman, “On Becoming a Composer.” *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 17, no. 1 (2011): 18.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

Silverman's compositional process begins with setting the length and orchestration for a piece. She often listens to recordings and studies scores of pieces written for the instruments that she is composing for, planning how she will handle range, balance, and other instrument-specific factors.¹¹⁰ With commissioned works, she will sometimes incorporate a reference to the commissioner, whether that be their initials somewhere in the piece or passages that highlight a performer's unique strengths. She settles on a title early, as it helps her shape the piece. Silverman occasionally starts composing from the beginning of the piece and sometimes works from the interior outward, re-writing many times until she reaches a final product. She does not alter pieces once they are finished, with the exception of implementing suggestions from performers of a work's world premiere.¹¹¹ Though she has not played a brass instrument, Silverman has written several works for brass and has attended numerous IWBC Conferences. She wrote, "By listening to so many brass concerts and talking with players over meals, brass writing has become part of my musical fiber. I have the sounds indelibly in my ear."¹¹²

Overview of Work and Pedagogical Notes:

Faye-Ellen Silverman's *Stories for Our Time* is a challenging work well-suited for an advanced trumpeter looking for a substantial piece to perform. Containing many instances of atonality and varied styles throughout, this work allows the performer to cultivate a variety of skills and, with diligent preparation, results in an exciting and rewarding performance. The piece is written for C Trumpet and features three movements. The two outer movements are more technical in nature, while the second movement is more lyrical.

¹¹⁰Ibid, 20.

¹¹¹Faye-Ellen Silverman, email message to author, September 24, 2022.

¹¹² Faye-Ellen Silverman, "On Becoming a Composer." *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 17, no. 1 (2011): 22.

The first movement of *Stories for Our Time*, “First Tale,” opens with an ascending seventh leap in the trumpet line, followed by a leap of a ninth from F4 to G#5. At first, these leaps are articulated and echoed by the piano, but are slurred shortly after, requiring great flexibility. Measures 8 to 9 contain a slurred F#5 to a flutter tongued G#3. These wide interval slurs and atonality will require the performer to practice both singing and mouthpiece buzzing the passages in order to play them accurately. In addition to hearing the intervals, maintaining a horizontal approach and avoiding building tension by aiming up or down at each note is a challenge in the opening movement. Lack of a consistent airstream and horizontal approach can result in uncentered pitch, loss of accuracy, and premature fatigue from excess tension. The wide range in the first movement, and even in the first page alone, requires the performer to play with ease and efficiency throughout the register of the trumpet at all times. The opening thirty measures span the range of G#3 to C6, demanding that the performer play with great resonance in both the extreme high and low registers. Daily practice, especially of the later exercises, from Bai Lin’s *Lip Flexibilities for All Brass Instruments* will assist the performer in tone development throughout the register of the trumpet and in ascending and descending smoothly throughout the range of the trumpet in a short amount of time.

A muted section follows the opening passage, requiring strong intonation, especially when descending into the lower register of the trumpet. Throughout “First Tale,” the piano and trumpet alternate with interjections, at times echoing each other, and spending equal time playing independent lines. Careful counting throughout the meter changes and thorough familiarity with the full score is essential for coordinating this movement and ensuring that the performers are able to focus on playing efficiently and musically without being overly consumed in technical thought. Trills in both the upper and lower registers occur in the second page of the trumpet part,

requiring both dexterity and flexibility. Practice from Robert Nagel's *Speed Studies for Trumpet* will assist the performer with cultivating the finger dexterity and precision necessary to execute these demanding passages.

Movement two, "Calming Tale," is played entirely with a cup mute. Consistent practice with the mute, both in the context of the piece and as part of the daily fundamental routine, is required to work through any intonation challenges that can result from muted playing, which generally tends to be sharp. This movement, while still challenging, contains far fewer technical considerations and therefore allows the performer to focus on beauty of sound and expression. There are many varied dynamics and opportunities to exaggerate phrasing in "Calming Tale."

Movement three, "Tale of Joy," opens with the trumpet alone followed by an echo in the piano, similarly to the first movement. Repeated articulations are more present in this movement than those preceding it and lightness and clear fronts are necessary to perform this movement with accuracy, also demanding the performer be able to phrase effectively through articulated passages and shape the musical line. Like "First Tale," there are several instances of wide interval slurs that will require diligent preparation. Measures 80 through the end of the piece are played with a stemless harmon mute which, like other mutes, comes with intonation demands and will require practice outside of the context of the piece. The last few measures contain a quickly articulated sixteenth note run beginning on a C6 and spanning down to a G3, requiring the performer to play with great efficiency through the end of the piece. Ample time spent on slow practice of the dexterity and articulation challenges in this movement is required for consistency and ease.

Silverman's *Stories for Our Time* is similar in difficulty level and potential programming use to Eino Tamberg's *Trumpet Concerto Op. 42* and Fisher Tull's *Three Bagatelles*. It presents

challenges in every aspect of trumpet technique, including range, finger dexterity, coordination with piano, intonation, and endurance, as well as some minor articulation demands. Beyond these technical challenges, the performer must also find their musical voice and convey phrasing. With diligent preparation, an advanced student can give an impressive performance of *Stories for Our Time* in the context of a recital or select individual movements as semester projects to work towards.