Noa Guy's compositions include orchestral and electronic music, as well as works for theater and multimedia. She has also written choral and instrumental chamber works, including *Circles* (1986), a virtuosic composition for solo alto recorder, which includes a variety of extended performance techniques. During my visit, two of her compositions were performed by the Ankor Children's Choir.

Between 1972 and 1979, Guy worked as a calligrapher and music editor for Norsk Musikforlag (Norway), Nordiska Musikforlaget (Sweden), and Wilhelm Hansen Forlag (Denmark). From 1979 to 1984 she served as a calligrapher for composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, and from 1980 until 1987 she served as head of the string department for Matan, a music education program for Israeli youth.¹

I interviewed Noa Guy on June 22, 1986, at Mishkenot Sha'ananim.

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I was born in Jerusalem in 1949 and grew up here. I'm seventh generation in this country. My family came from Russia in the middle of the last century. I studied theory here in the Academy, because when I started here there was no composition at all. And they opened a theory class only once in two years, with five students. After theory, I had private composition lessons with Abel Ehrlich in Tel Aviv, and
after studying with Ehrlich, I went to Berlin and studied with Boris Blacher. Later I had master classes with different people, including Milton Babbitt. He came here twice to give summer courses, and I managed to get private lessons with him. Also Stockhausen, Berio, [Erhard] Karkoschka. It was very strange, because when I studied here in the Academy I didn't know what I'd do with theory. And I went to Ehrlich just to study more music. And one day he said, "Why don't you write something?" That's the way I began, and I never stopped since then. So, it began just as a flower opens, suddenly, which has waited for that without knowing.

Being an Israeli composer is very hard, especially when one doesn't compromise. It's a very sensitive point, because—I'm surprised at myself saying it—I think I'm more a Jewish composer than an Israeli composer. There is no public here for contemporary music, and radio does not support it—musicians do not want to play the music. If I stay true to myself, if I don't compromise and I don't say, "Well, I'll make it less difficult for them to listen to"—well, that's my music and that's the way I write, and I don't compromise. And the result is that I'm played more and more abroad, and less and less here.

Just to give you an example, I wrote a big piece for a British singer, and we worked on this piece for a long time, about three years—a dream that became real. And now it's going to be performed at the Nettlefold festival in London, so I asked the foreign ministry here if they have support for artists, so I can be at the performance—because it's the only Israeli piece in a big festival. And they just told me: "We don't understand why you ask, because it's completely your private business." So, if it's my private business then I don't think of myself as an Israeli composer. You see, I live here, I was born here, OK—but I don't represent anything but myself. The radio is the same story, they don't want to play Israeli music now. They never did, actually, it was just to say they did. And it's not only the radio, it's the general education. I think it begins in kindergarten, in schools—they have absolutely no musical education at all. And all the wunderkinder that are here, it's up to the private effort of the parents. In Europe you have musical education in school. At least they know how to read music, they listen to music. They simply don't have anything here, it's unbelievable. And it begins there, because there is no public for that. Prokofiev is the most modern they can stand—they simply physically cannot stand it, it is too much for them. For example, they are
not allowed to broadcast contemporary music during the morning hours. But that's the only radio you can get here, you don't have any other choice.

They have programs of contemporary music twice a week, that's true, and Israeli composers are fairly well represented. Once a week there is a mixed program of Israelis and others, but I don't believe that more than a hundred or two hundred people in the whole country listen to that program. And it's really a desert. It is, in a way, a very uncultured place. There is nobody to talk to because people are so closed, and physically also closed. I remember that once I had a concert—it wasn't a real concert, it was mixed. The first part was music proper and the second part was a sort of performance with actors, and more a music theater piece. It had an audience of only twenty people. That's not my experience in Europe.

I find myself detached from any institution now. I find that it's for the best for me to be on my own, and find my own way and my own connections. Also, pieces that I write lately are more personal, more for people I know. I wrote a piece for [oboe] Heinz Holliger, and a piece for Michael Barker, a Dutch-American recorder player who performs a lot of contemporary music, and this music theater piece for the English singer John Potter. So I have more and more personal contact with performers, and I also know every corner of their playing so I can really write for them. It's giving me much more than just writing in the air. The two choral pieces of mine that were performed last week, by the Ankor Choir—that's an exception. These two works aren't published. The third one is. But also, I don't know, did they sell? Because it's already two or three years, and they never bothered to inform me or anything, as if I didn't publish. Money and music don't go together in this place.

I don't use oriental or Middle Eastern sources. My only sources of Middle Eastern or Jewish origin are usually the texts. I write in Western, international styles, and I also try never to limit myself to the sounds, or choose to work, for example, with folk origins—anything like that is limiting. But it also doesn't appeal to me. The whole sound of the Middle East is far from me. There is a work that I wrote for a trio of flute, viola, and cello, which I call The Echo of Stones. The idea of the piece came to me when I sat in a place—you have in the mountains here, terraces of very old stones, becoming black—and I began to see things on the stones, and I made six little abstract drawings, very abstract things. And I wrote a piece in six little movements, after the
drawings actually—so here was a work that was connected physically to the place where I live. But it doesn't necessarily have to be here—I mean it could have happened to me anywhere.

The sense of time—I feel like a foreigner here because everything goes so quickly, and is so tense. And I have many times been criticized for having too long pieces, like the choir piece that you heard. Many people here said it's too long. The public can't sit still and listen to a piece that's twelve minutes long. They lose their appetite or their interest, I don't know what. It's the same thing—look at how people walk here, how people work, and how people drive here. That's the way they sit in a concert. So I try to do the opposite. That's the whole way of life that we lead at home. We don't have television, we don't read newspapers. Everything is aimed at trying to be more relaxed. We listen to the radio once a day to hear the news, just to see if something happened. But I prefer good literature to newspapers. For me, its very hard to live here. I try to escape during writing, for example. I'm just with myself, or sounds, or people I want to write to.

This piece, Angel's Solitude, has both hurried and timeless qualities. But, for example, Who Knows the Secret, the work written for this English singer, is based on different creation mythologies of different parts of the world—which is also a timeless subject. I wrote the text myself, and I didn't take any story as such. I just took a word from here, a sentence from there, and made my own set of events. It's in seven parts. The time conception of this piece is compound. On the one hand it feels static at some places, as if it does not move at all. On the other hand these thirty minutes are over so fast—at least that's the reaction of everybody who heard the piece. It is slow and fast, standing and running—at the same time. I find that writing for a solo instrument, five or seven minutes is a nice time. Bigger works need more time. In the last theater work that I've done, there is almost no acting at all onstage. There is lighting, and the one man onstage moves to seven stations, which are lighted differently, but he doesn't have to sing, it's all talk. The piece lasts thirty minutes.

During Hanukkah they're going to have a marathon of three days of Israeli music, and I'm the only one included who does mixed media. I'm doing things with painting and lighting. So I don't know where to put myself, but I know that I touch many areas that many composers don't. What I like to do is be involved also in the staging, not necessarily doing it all by myself but taking part at least—I think more in a wide sense. Many times when I write a piece I
see also the staging. I would like, for example, the choir works to be performed differently—not just to stand like that and sing. For example the second one, *Colours*. It could be improved, they could move onstage and do things. It wouldn't do with this choir because they're so well behaved, but I can imagine it being done differently, more lively.

I haven't been to the United States, but I lived in Europe for six years—Germany and Norway, mostly Norway. For the first three years I didn't do anything but bring two children into the world. But many contacts, and most all of my connections now, are still from European days. Being in Norway especially, which is the absolute opposite of Israel—in the sense of society's behavior and how the things are run in the country—was a wonderful experience, it goes to the other extreme. It showed me that it's possible to live that way. We went to Germany in 1971, quite young, at the beginning of our twenties. I studied with Blacher, which was a very good thing for me. But we couldn't stay for more than one year. It was a hard experience, a difficult one for us. We came openhearted and we tried, but it didn't work. It's very personal—there are people who can, there are people who can't.

It's under the surface all the time—everything is alright, it looks like everything is OK, but it's not. And I remember taking a book from the library and it had this stamp with a swastika. Usually they put a black stamp on it so you can't see it. But you open the page and there it is, suddenly—in Bach chorale preludes for organ. It was from the time of the war, and it belonged to the library at that time—and it just stayed there. And for us to see it, it's shocking. You can say it's nothing—"They forgot, so what?"—but it's not. And there are many, many small things like that. But you can't really tell what makes it so unpleasant. I think I matured during this time, filled my batteries. Boris Blacher was a very special teacher, because he didn't try to influence the sense of style. But he worked very deeply into the sense of composition, to read a story into it, to see a picture and to analyze it—to hear music and analyze it. Your style is your own business, but compositionally it has to be done properly, and I learned a lot from this, because he never interfered in style. I was one of four pupils from four different countries, and we were really very different. He died in 1975, but there are other Israeli composers who have worked with him too, Noam Sheriff included. Blacher was born in China, but he's of Russian origin I think.
Our education, at the Music Academy—we learn Western music, harmony, and counterpoint. I believe we have almost basically the same education as you get. And for me to listen to oriental music is an effort, I have to listen to it. I believe I would react to folk, rock, and jazz the same way as I react to this kind of music. I grew up in a very, very unmusical family, and for me it was a revelation to hear music at all, at a fairly late age. I think I was fourteen when I heard, for the first time in my life, a ceremony in a church—Gregorian chant. And it was a new world for me, it was fascinating. And I used to run out of school on Sundays and go to listen, to different churches here in town. I also come from a very secular family. I'd never been in a synagogue until a very, very late age. So I hadn't any contact with music until very late. Then it came, with all its power and force.

It happened with my choir piece, *And Everyone an Earring of Gold (Impression from the Book of Job)*, that Arnon Meroz, the children's choir conductor, asked me to write a piece on that subject. I had several suggestions, and at the end I found this one. But in other works, it's other contemporary poets or my own texts. And the work with the mythologies, that is a subject that has fascinated me for a long time. I have a big collection that I collected over the years, of different stories, and I never knew what I was going to do with this until it came. I have Far Eastern, Middle Eastern, North American, South American Indians, Tibetan, Japanese, Hebrew, Mesopotamian stories. Really all kinds of stories. I have the text here—it's seven different sections, and I simply wrote seven poems. I wrote a score for a singer, he's my sound source for the tape. It's the singer and himself actually, except for two parts that combine the singer and synthesizer. He sings on top of the tape in the performance. The singer recorded the score I wrote line by line—there are sometimes eight voice parts—and I put it together on the tape. I manipulated the voice, changing its quality. The sixth part is built from the whispered text of the whole piece—recorded and then put on tape, multiplied twenty-four times. For the seventh part, the tape is created from a single note sung repeatedly, multiplied and changed. The singer is John Potter, he's doing a lot of contemporary music and music theater. The premiere is in October, and it's almost finished.

I have a few new works. One is a tape work and the other two are instrumental. I have a small studio at home, very limited. And this is a problem, because I couldn't make this voice tape anywhere here, I needed special equipment for working with voice. I looked for studios,
and the Basel Academy gave me a grant for doing the tape, and they really have a wonderful studio there. So I was there for four weeks and worked many, many hours every day—it was wonderful. I had an advantage, because it was the middle of winter—it's so cold there, you don't want to go out. But that is a problem, studios, a problem always.

In 1987, Noa Guy was awarded a prize from the Israel Music Institute for her piano composition *Over Fallen Leaves* (1986) and was appointed head of the master class program of the Jerusalem Music Centre, in conjunction with which she was involved in the production of concerts, broadcasts, recordings, and videotapes. Responding to an inquiry concerning her compositional activities, Guy wrote in 1990:

I think that basically not much has changed in terms of the society-composer relationship, but I myself have changed quite a lot. I complain less, I work more and I criticize less. I am played here and there. This summer I was teaching in a summer course in Switzerland (in Lenzburg) and there a new string quintet I wrote was played. Two weeks after I came back I was invited by surprise to England where the BBC singers performed my work on the Book of Job. Next Thursday a new work for voice and harpsichord is going to be premiered here in Jerusalem. It is not always that dense, but there is always something to look forward to.

To make a living I work full-time in the Jerusalem Music Centre, where I produce a series of concerts for young musicians and I am the coordinator of the master classes. All that means that now composing takes place only in the darkness when the rest of the world is asleep, quite an experience.

In 1990, *Over Fallen Leaves*, *At the Evening Tide* (for soprano and harpsichord), and Angel's *Solitude* (1981, tape alone) were all heard in live broadcasts, and the BBC Singers performed *And Everyone an Earring of Gold* in London. Performances in Israel in 1992 included *The Forbidden Fruit* (1991) for tuba and women's choir, and *At the Evening Tide*. Several of Guy's works were also performed during the First International Seminar of Contemporary Chamber Music at the Hed Music Center in Yahud: *Sparkles* for solo voice (1989), *Movement for String Quartet* (1992), and *Inter-Stellar* for string quintet (1990). Guy's *Du-Li-Ru* (text by the composer) for mezzo-soprano and piano was performed at the Hed Center in 1993, the same year she completed *Four Episodes for Orchestra*. In 1995 the Havana String Quartet...
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performed Guy's *Movement for String Quartet* in Cordoba, Spain. This performance was later broadcast on Spanish national radio.⁷

In connection with her duties at the Jerusalem Music Centre, Noa Guy traveled to New York in the fall of 1993, where she sustained injuries in an automobile accident requiring intensive rehabilitation and recuperation. She began painting in 1994, and was able to begin composing again only in 1996.⁸
Haim Permont, photographed by the composer.