Daniel Galay (originally Goldwasser) is the only composer in this volume to have immigrated to Israel from South America. Other Israeli composers from this region include León Schidlowsky (Chile) and Ruben Seroussi (Uruguay). Galay’s music reflects elements of his varied cultural backgrounds and experiences, which includes graduate study in the United States. Also a pianist, Galay principally composes chamber music.

My meeting with Daniel Galay, the first composer to be interviewed, took place in his home in Ramat Aviv (near Tel Aviv) on June 8, 1986.

I was born April 17, 1945, in Argentina. In 1965 I came to Israel. I studied music at a conservatory in Buenos Aires, and at the Academy in Tel Aviv. There I studied with Schidlowsky, he’s from Chile. Later, in the States, from 1977 to 1979, I did my master’s in composition with Ralph Shapey at the University of Chicago. I had studied privately with Josef Tal, and they knew each other, and Tal recommended very strongly that I go to Ralph Shapey. I had two very intensive years of study.

Being an Israeli composer means a lot of things. First of all, it means also to be a citizen of the world. And it means to be aware
about Jewish history, Jewish people, and the specific area where we are living, about Arabic countries and neighbors, about the history of this place. When I was studying Jewish history, I was learning the Jewish past of the whole world, different countries, different centuries. These are different sources of consciousness. Of course, a composer doesn’t have to work with every source all the time, but he’s very aware of landscape. The composer has to choose from all these, what he has learned, and say it in a contemporary language. You have to choose what you want to say, something very particular or something very abstract. Sometimes you can try to put things together, and all this is what it means to be a Jewish composer living in Israel.

There are some particular problems with Jewish, Israeli music. We did not have a tradition of music here because, as a land, we became independent only in 1948. And when Jews were dispersed for over two thousand years, they did not have unified customs and musical life. We have here a lack of tradition in music. It’s not the same situation in literature.

I wrote a composition, a duet for flute and clarinet titled *Tzu Singen un Tzu Sogen.*\(^1\) In English, the title means “to be sung and to be said.” It is very much connected to a saying in Yiddish. The piece is in four sections, played without interruption. The first section is very much like oriental landscape and atmosphere, but very contrapuntal (ex. 14):

![Ex. 14](image1)

The second section does something Jewish, but most of all it has a lot of violence. It is built from a fermata sound and a sforzando sound, throughout—this is the motive. It is very abstract, and it’s a very violent and concentrated section (ex. 15):

![Ex. 15](image2)
The third section starts very much improvisatory and also a little bit oriental (ex. 16):

![Ex. 16](image1)

But it becomes an ostinato through an accelerando, and it's very intense, violent, aggressive (ex. 17):

![Ex. 17](image2)

And at the climax, suddenly you are in a Jewish mood of the shtetl. The shtetl is where the Jews lived in Europe, in Poland, and Russia. This is the fourth section, and there is also a small coda. You have, in one piece, four different movements that become one fresco—that is, representing different and contrasting fundamentals that are part of my life, and part of the life of this people. If I would do only one part of it, the piece would not be complete. All of them are different things related to places, but these are also parts of your mind, of your feeling, of your internal moods.

In this particular piece, the problem was melody and tonality. I'm very much interested in abstract languages and methods and
techniques of writing music, but it also bothers me—that is, how not to negate melody, but to use it as part of my language. There are more abstract languages and techniques that, in my conception, are related to an eye capturing reality or behavior. Melody is related to the verbal and conscious part. We can very easily understand why it was pulled apart in the last twenty, thirty years. But composers, in a natural way, are looking and trying to understand what it means.

The shtetl is very clear melodically, and in a very pure sense. It's not a quotation, but is in the style of the music—not with sentimentality or with longing to the past. It touches your heart more than the other parts, and I feel this when I hear it—I feel suddenly so happy and released. But I feel it because this part is very fast, even cool, and very strong and forward (ex. 18):

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\begin{music}
\newStaff\newClef\newKey\newTime\newStaffItems
\end{music}
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Ex. 18

If the same idea would be too relaxed, it would kill the piece. The melodic language, the part of the heart—of romanticism—you have to be very aware of it and use it in the amount that you need.

We are living in a new century, developing always forward, but we can keep some things from the past and combine them with other things. It's not easy, and you have to choose each time how to do it—what this means, and what this means—and what the connection is. Each piece is another world. The question is sometimes one of interpretation. It's very important, because there are things that are
not written—you cannot write each note out with interpretation. And if you have a performer who is aware of a lot of things, he will be able to interpret the content, to create communication—and not to create things through overemphasizing some parts at the cost of others. But these are more specific kinds of problems.

The Jewish language, Yiddish, was created through hundreds of years of wandering of Jewish people in Europe, putting together German and a lot of Hebrew, and some Latin and French. They created a language that is the face, and a lot of expressions, of the Jewish faith—this sad and intelligent faith. Here we don't speak Yiddish, we speak Hebrew. Hebrew, in its rhythms and as a Semitic language, is another world. At the beginning, my technique was to take the rhythms of this saying—"tzu singen un tzu sogen"—that are characteristic rhythms of Yiddish. But I make a rhythmic transformation, and I put it in an oriental atmosphere, related to the area where I live today.

One of the most interesting things in music is to try to analyze a modulation. What does it mean? We usually talk about that from the technical point of view and we are fascinated, but we are not always aware of the structural significance of modulation, and its connotations. It is the same thing in contemporary music. You create some conditions in a first section, you go to a new section—sometimes in two or three measures. It is an insight that's very important, because it is showing a secret link between the one and the other. These things may be understood on an analytic level. Any musicologist can follow this phenomenon—discover it, describe it, understand it. But for me as a composer, I can put it on paper only if I am living through it. You have to accept one vital experience, then another one—and to be able to put them together, and later, to understand the passing from one to the other—that explains modulations. It's very important to try to understand people, life, connections—in order to communicate with society. And after that, there is the pure compositional, professional world that autonomously exists.

The idea is to make connections between life and art. I will give you another example. I was talking about Jewishness, history—but let’s leave it for a moment. I am also a citizen of the world. In a contemporary society, we are very often thinking about violence and pressure and tension. If I want to describe life in New York or Tel Aviv, or another urban center—with all the differences—there are things that are common to big cities. This problem interests me, without
any direct connection to Jews, religion, or anything else. In 1984 I decided to write some etudes for piano solo, which I later performed. In one of them I was very much concerned to create an atmosphere of great pressure and violence, but my intention was to present it like a positive kind of pressure.

There is a borderline in our society between positive energy that attracts—with industries and creations and advances and new things—and pressure that is bad for the health. Where is the borderline? Sometimes the same thing, the same industry, the same situation may be good, but at some moment it’s bad for people, for their health. My interest in this particular piece was to make something with a great, but constructive, pressure. This is a problem, because of this world we are in. We cannot throw it away; it’s ours. The question is how to stress forces and answers that are on the side of the people, and that may be good for them. This particular piece was an attempt to deal with this problem of power—not negative, but positive power—and in this piece and other pieces, I have been dealing with this for about two or three years.

Let’s say you are living in the United States, but you are conscious about Japan, and about what happened to the Indians two hundred years ago—and you are living with these feelings, atmospheres, associations, and ways of life and tradition. But you are also living in a contemporary society with violence and progress, and all these are influences. People are very disoriented by them, and the task of the artist is to face reality, outside and inside—to try to put things together, and to try to reorient things. Because there is a big mess in the world, and there is a lot of fear about the future, insecurity, nuclear war, and violence. One of the tasks of the composer, of the artist, is to try to be a citizen of the world, to try to put things together on the level of feelings, on the level of—in a pure ethical and moral point of view—what is good and what is bad. He has to deal with this. The task of the composer—the artist—is a very complex one, a challenging one. Each of us is living in a particular society and has to understand his society and his point of view, his interests, but also to understand wider processes. And I’m trying to do it from here, from Israel.

The future of society does not depend only on politicians or military people or economists. The physical future of society depends on civility, on the capacity to listen to each other, to show the inside of society—and to create alternatives to the destructive forces that are operating today. I am talking to you as another composer—we
have to be very active, with a lot of initiative in our effort to put our concerns at the center of society. Artistic personalities have something to say that no other people have. Musicians are not discriminated against, but they don’t have good positions that people writing for the theater sometimes have, and it doesn’t have to be this way. I think that composers in particular have to be a lot more conscious about society, and about their own power. It’s not easy to do that, but I think it is very important to do our job as composers better and to stay more in communication with the society in which we are living. In each society there are also more specific problems that each composer can respond to, and try to understand, and I’m trying to do it from here. But as a parallel, I’m very much open and interested to know what is going on in Argentina, in Japan, and the United States. And the collaboration that Acoustic 7–11 is doing is very important. It’s very important that composers try to understand what other composers are doing, and have the personal contact.

Acoustic 7–11 is a group of composers, including Joseph Dorfman, Gabriel Iranyi, and myself. We have been active since 1980, and each year we have a series of concerts. We do them in cooperation with embassies and cultural institutions like the Goethe Institute, the Canadian Embassy, Istituto Italiano, and others. And in our programs, we try to include international music, or the music of a particular country, and Israeli music. Each time, one of us is the music director of the particular program. We use musicians—the best that we have in Israel—from the philharmonic orchestras, and also freelance. We are gaining experience in making concerts, and have a lot of dealings with audiences. Trying to create an audience for contemporary music is hard. One of the weakest points—not only for us, but in a lot of places—is the problem of how to attract more and more audiences, and not only professional people who are already coming to our concerts. We have had concerts with a lot of people, but we haven’t had enough success to make our audiences wider, so that we could repeat them.

My conclusions about this are related to things I was talking about earlier. We have not only to do our job as composers and music directors, but we have to look to society face-to-face, as a whole. We have to go into a lot of sociological politics, institutional politics, in order to understand the level of consciousness—where society is—and try to catch them, bring them to our concerts, and convince them that these contemporary music concerts are about their society and
about the possibility or impossibility of communication. That you have to listen to our complicated world, not only at the level that you read newspapers. A very sophisticated and concentrated level comes from listening to contemporary music. And it's not important which composer—maybe a bad composer, maybe a fantastic composer—but through a lot of pieces that are well performed, you can get closer to where you are living.

We have to fight, because it’s a question of finances and forces. We have to take some energies from other places—and create forces directed to meet people and institutions, at a very high level—in order to create audiences. Because these audiences will give us a sense of history, that we are able to change feelings, to create something new. If not, our music certainly does not have any future. You cannot know if your music is working, or which music is working, or what some particular music means to a public, if you don’t have a broad and varied kind of public. And it's very good to appeal to a nonprofessional public—it's open. There you can really feel what happens. I think that things will become better. I am optimistic. But it has to start from this, that composers understand they have to fight. This is not a question of public relations, having a manager—it is very good for public relations if you can have a manager. We have organizations that are doing some of this work, and all of it is important. But the composer has a particular spiritual force to do it.

Many people don’t understand music as something by itself. It’s a big problem, but we have to find a solution. I have spoken on occasion with Hans Ulrich Engelmann, a very well known composer who teaches at Darmstadt and Frankfurt. He was talking about why he writes music, and he said, “I wrote so many operas; they paid me lots of money, but they were not performed.” And he was talking about the hard part of writing music, that people hate contemporary music. He said, “Why do I write music? Because I have a strong need to write music.” This approach that we write because we have a strong need, or something tells us to, or we cannot stop—I understand it. But from some moment I started to develop a new philosophy that is openly contrasting with this one. I write music because I want to change; I want to have new experiences, and I want to bring to society these new and exciting experiences. I understand that each one of us has his irrational reasons for writing, and it has to be this way. But it’s very important to stress the other part, the intentional part, the part looking forward. Because this is a creative approach. This is the
approach of liberty, of choosing what you are doing—for what, and to what, you want to write. It's interesting that I spent twenty years in Argentina and twenty years in Israel. Now, as more years pass by, I am becoming more conscious about these elements. And it's also logical, because the first years when you arrive here, there is a big change. You have to get used to a new language, new and strange people.

The mind of man can accumulate a lot of things, but sometimes it has to be concentrated in one thing. So today I'm feeling more and more my capability to choose parts of my past from Argentina, and to develop it. I will give you one example. I wrote in the last few years a piece called España—Spain. This was created in the category of pieces about Spain, written by different composers, for different instruments. And it seems not to be contemporary music, because one of the characteristics of contemporary music in general is the universality of technique, and mood. And Spain is so much connected with the particular experience of one nation, and something like this looks to be very narrow. What I tried to do in this piece is something like this: there are some melodic designs that are very Hispanic, and each person will identify it like that. But the technique itself is very plastic, and open to different directions. Sometimes composing is like chemistry. Music is also a chemistry, like I was talking about how it works in Tzu Singen un Tzu Sogen. In this particular piece, I am totally aware that I'm emphasizing the Spanish moment, even too much. But this piece may be played for a lot of people, it could create some communication with them and bring them a little closer to contemporary music. My intention was to touch some very particular spirit, to touch the Spanish soul. And it's very hard to do it, because the soul is the sound that exists there. You cannot change it—it is. You can describe it, you can present it—that's it. Each piece has its history, its raison d'être.

Another problem that bothers me is how to create continuity without boredom. That is, how to create one thematic idea that develops constantly and can keep one particular feeling—how to extend it for a long time without boredom—and create a new thing that comes out from the first one. It's an interesting problem. As you can see in classical music, they had the technical development, taking the motive and changing it this or that way, or a part of it. We can take this as an antecedent, but we have to develop our own personal techniques according to the particular themes that we are dealing
with. Since our themes are not like then, the way of development may not be exactly the same.

It's very hard to describe my work in the context of Israeli music, because it brings together a lot of parameters—generational, stylistic, and national parameters. There are a lot of composers here from Russia, from Germany, and Israeli-born—but I will try to give you one answer to this complicated question. It is to be understood as a process, because what I am today is a result of the last decades of work.

My point of departure is one that stresses spontaneity, a kind of expressionism, romanticism, and a lot of humanity—a lot of things neglected by contemporary music. Contemporary music stresses intellectual approaches, structure, a lot of things, but not spontaneity. I am talking about the dominating forces over the last ten to fifteen years. Now trends are again changing a lot. You cannot exist in this world only being sensible, or only being romantic. Society pushes you to develop arms, weapons, to defend your humanity. If you only develop weapons, you will be very strong, but cold, and the question is if you can have both of these things together. A man is a complicated machine—sometimes strong, sometimes weak, sometimes it loves, sometimes hates—and it's a great challenge to integrate all this. I cannot say that I am not the same person I was fifteen years ago. But some ideas crystallize—the process of presentation of ideas, how to present it and how to stress it—that defines my way of writing. In general, I'm trying to put together expressionistic and romantic approaches.

Local and universal elements affect my work, but it's happening with a lot of composers, in a lot of places. It's because each one is speaking the language of his nation but is also aware of what is going on outside. The question is what to stress from each, what to stress in the techniques and in the content of your work. In some sense, composing means putting the world in motion again and again.

In 1990, Galay's Ritorno for flute and violin was premiered in Israel. In 1991 several of his works were performed: Hassidic Suite for solo violin; Rabbi of Israel for violoncello and piano; When the Ship Sails, four songs for voice and piano based on poetry by Oded Sverdlick; Chazunish for piano; and a premiere of “Twilight” and “Beneath My Tent,” two songs for voice and violoncello based on poetry by Yona Berkman. The composer participated in some of
these performances and gave a recital of his own works for piano in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1993, Galay presented his works in Israel in a series called “Open Stage,” and in 1994 he participated in the premiere of his Wish for soprano, clarinet, and piano, a setting of poetry by Miriam Lindberg. Galay writes that he is composing solo, chamber, and orchestral works devoted to Jewish themes and Yiddish language. He has performed his piano music in Israel and abroad, and he has lectured on improvisation and his system of “comprehensive piano performance.” He is currently director of the educational music center Beit Frankfurt in Tel Aviv, and of the Acoustic 7–11 Forum for Contemporary Music.