# Czernowin, Chaya (1957–)

Mark Barden

Arguably the most important Israeli composer to emerge in the late 20th century, Czernowin, born 7 December in Haifa, is much sought-after as a composer and pedagogue in the US and Europe. She earned a BA in 1982 at the Rubin Academy of Music, Tel-Aviv University, an MFA in 1987 at Bard College, and a PhD in 1993 at the University of California San Diego. Her principal teachers include Abel Ehrlich, Dieter Schnebel, Brian Ferneyhough, and Roger Reynolds. Among her many honours and distinctions are the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis (1992), a year residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude (1996), an Ernst von Siemens Stiftung Förderpreis (2003), the Fromm Foundation Award (2008), and a Guggenheim Fellowship (2011). She has held professorships at the University of California San Diego, Vienna’s University of Music and Performing Arts, and Harvard University. In addition to faculty positions at major contemporary music festivals like the Darmstadt Summer Courses, impuls academy, and the SWR Experimentalstudio’s matrix academy, Czernowin has initiated elite international courses for young composers on three continents: the Summer Academy at Schloss Solitude (Germany), Tzlil Meudcan (Israel), and Harvard’s Summer Composition Institute (USA).

Influences of Japanese, German, and American languages and cultures can be found in several works (*Shu Hai Mitamen Behatalat Kidon,* *Die Kreuzung, Pilgerfahrten*, *Anea Crystal, Lovesong*) and she frequently uses instruments that are underrepresented in Western classical music (e.g., sho, u, singing saw, tubax). Her native language and culture are, however, also often apparent: many pieces bear Hebrew titles (*Dam Sheon Hachol, Afatsim, Maim, Sahaf*) or set Hebrew texts (*Manoalchadia, Shu Hai Mitamen Behatalat Kidon*) and two operas explore aspects of Israeli identity (*Pnima* deals with first- and second-generation Shoah survivors living in Israel while *Adama* centers around a doomed heterosexual love affair between a Palestinian and an Israeli).

Integral to her music and pedagogy are metaphor (especially in reference to nature or natural processes) and moments of transformation: that is, formal breaks in which previously established modes of organizing musical materials within a given work are shattered and replaced by new ones, often as the result of overt or subcutaneous organic development. Though marked by some gestural vestiges of her atonal and late serialist forebears, especially regarding melodic contour, Czernowin’s compositions tend to eschew systematic organization, relying instead on an intuitive, sound sculpture approach. Graphic and spatial notations attest to this sculptural mentality and frequently occur in her orchestral writing, albeit within traditional metric frameworks. Disfiguration, smearing, corrosion, and other forms of denaturing to which she commonly subjects her material illustrate an aesthetic predilection for ugliness or rawness (e.g., the “undigested material” or “open wounds” in *Pnima*)[[1]](#footnote-1) as well as the privileging of materials’ morphology over their indwelling sensuous qualities.

**Key Works**

*• Dam Sheon Hachol [the hourglass bleeds still]*, for string sextet (1992, rev. 1999)

*• Afatsim [Galls]*, for nonet (1996)

• Shu Hai mitamen behatalat kidon [Shu Hai practices javelin], solo for female voice, nine pre-recorded versions of the same voice, and live electronics (1996–7)

*• Pnima [Inwards]*, chamber opera for four voices, six instrumental soloists, string orchestra, and electronics (1998–9)

*• Adama* *[Earth]*, opera fragments interwoven with Mozart’s unfinished singspiel *Zaide*], for three voices, five-member male chorus, and chamber orchestra (2004–5)

*• Maim [Water]*, triptychon for large orchestra, a quintet of soloists (with tubax as pre-recorded main soloist), and electronics (2001–7)

## Further Reading

1. Needs cleaning up and proper citations. (My responsibility, right?)
2. How many are appropriate?
3. Include German sources?
4. Include descriptive/evaluative notes in parenthenses?

Czernowin, C. (2006) “Compositional Ideas and Trajectories in Recent Works” and “Fragment from the lecture by Chaya Czernowin”. *Komponieren in der Gegenwart : Texte der 42. Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik 2004*, pp24–38. Pfau, 2006

(Illuminating description of her own work followed by transcription of a dialogue with Jörn Peter Hiekel and Brian Ferneyhough. Both in English.)

Kutschke, Beate: “Die Kompositionen der israelischen Komponistin Chaya Czernowin” *MusikTexte*, v.90 (2001)

(composer portrait in German)

—. “Identitätsdebatte in Noten. Zur soziokritischen Dimension in Chaya Czernowins Kompositionen.” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, v.5 (2002), 50-55.

Nyffeler, Max (2005), “Der starke Widerhall im Inneren. Zur Musik von Chaya Czernowin”, Programme book, Salzburg Passagen, Salzburger Festspiele 2005, p.42 ff.

(excerpt thereof entitled “Über die Notwendigkeit des Erinnerns” available online at http://www.beckmesser.de/komponisten/czernowin/czernowin-portrait.html)

Seter, Ronit. “Czernowin, Chaya”, *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* 2001

Takasugi, Steven Kazuo: “Chaya Czernowins *Afatsim*. Melodische Resynthetisierung und Zeitenstellung.” *Musik und Ästhetik* (1997), July, 66-81.

“Gespräch mit Chaya Czernowin” *Klangperspektiven.* 249–255.

**Supplemental Materials** (digital materials/links I intend to include)

1. photo portrait: <http://www.schott-music.com/news/archive/show,7277.html>

2. homepage on publisher website: <http://www.schott-music.com/shop/persons/featured/38323/>

3. “A Strange Bridge to Engagement” text & video portrait: http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/chaya-czernowin-a-strange-bridge-toward-engagement/

(video only: http://vimeo.com/24177634)

1. Czernowin, C. “Chaya Czernowin on *Pnima…ins Innere* with Brian Brandt” *Pnima…ins Innere*. mode records, 2006. DVD [↑](#footnote-ref-1)