

*From Swan Songs note.*

From Swan Songs is composed for and dedicated to violinist, David Abel and pianist, Julie Steinberg. The piece could not have been composed without the close collaborative support of these two musical titans. I have worked with Julie Steinberg many times in the past and felt very comfortable writing music for her instrument. The violin is another story. I started meeting with Violinist David Abel in 2004 to work on the piece. These enriching encounters included time for exploring violin techniques, discussion of the history of the instrument, talk of music in general, and plenty of time to complain about the state of music. Where in the landscape of the violin might a composer find some ground for making new music? Is the violin, with its difficult techniques, going to continue to survive in the coming ages? Outside our many laments, I was always amazed to find that at the end of a session I was excited about the instrument and I was excited that both of us had found something new to think about it. Collaboration is the thing to do in music and From Swan Songs could not have been written without the close collaboration of both Julie and David.

*From Swan Songs* is the opening piece in *Swan Songs*, a larger suite of pieces that has yet to be written. The piece opens with a series of disconnected miniatures each exposing some imagined past for the violin -- Beethoven to Lachenmann. The piece ends with a long melodic line, the first *Swan Song*.

The violin is a noisy instrument and underneath its beautiful tone is lurking all kinds of swooshes, bleeps and full spectrum explosions. In the hands of a master violinist such as Abel, these noise elements are so carefully choreographed with the tone that we hardly notice they exist. Like the opening scene in David Lynch's movie *Blue Velvet*, where the beautifully tended green lawns of suburbia hide the microscopic horror below, close examination of the violin sound exposes the chaotic turbulence caused by hundreds of tiny hairs violently ripping and grating across a high-tension string. Common practice western classical music, where the violin is king, had no assigned role, nor notation practice for noise, keeping the noise hidden in a fabulous array of techniques. I've long thought that the avant-garde's fascination with noise and new techniques was in large part the return of the repressed. Imagine a history of music where noise was recognized as a normal part of the compositional palette, an imaginary place where the avant-garde revolution and obsession with the emancipation of noise and sound was no longer needed, a place where harmony and noise exist on the same continuum of possibility. What would have that music sounded like? That thought is the inspiration for *Swan Songs*. I hope that the listener is able to discern the subtle cues that reveal that this music is neither neo-romantic, nor post-modern. As with all my music, it is what I call post-experimental. So the *Swan Songs* go on and on and hopefully there will be many to come. Thanks again to the duet of David Abel and Julie Steinberg!