

MUSIC | MUSIC REVIEW

## A Clarinet Does Scenes

'The Big Picture,' Movie Music at the Museum of Jewish Heritage

By NATE CHINEN JAN. 30, 2014

The formal and emotional crux of “The Big Picture,” David Krakauer’s 90-minute multimedia tribute to movie music at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, is “Shoah Trilogy,” a medley of themes from films about the Holocaust. Mr. Krakauer’s clarinet girded each with a piercing wail in the premiere on Wednesday night, communicating anguish, outrage and catharsis.

And connection. Mr. Krakauer, best known as a freewheeling authority in klezmer music, conceived of “The Big Picture” as another chapter in his exploration of Jewish-American identity. Billed as “a cinematic concert,” it features original graphic projections by Light of Day, a New York visual-effects firm, paired to live performance by Mr. Krakauer and a five-piece backing band.

That the Holocaust would feature prominently in this exercise is a function of both the subject’s filmic legacy and its central importance to the presenting institution. But in Mr. Krakauer’s spare, folklike arrangements — drawing from the soundtracks to “Sophie’s Choice,” “Schindler’s List” and “The Pianist” — he made that fathomless horror resonate on a personal scale, with stirring self-possession.

At the other end of the psychic spectrum were songs like “Keep It Gay” (from “The Producers”), a sashaying waltz that bursts into a barker’s frenzy; and “Honeycomb” (from “Lenny”), recast as a loping funk tune. Another three-part medley involved jazz and classical pieces used in Woody Allen films. The binding constant was Jewishness, as an experience if not a subject, with an effort to hit both highs and lows.

Mr. Krakauer is 57, and his choices could be said to reflect the cinematic

touchstones of his generation. (James Murphy's score for "Greenberg," the recent Ben Stiller vehicle by Noah Baumbach, will have to wait for somebody else's programmatic spiel.) Likewise the sound and spirit of the arrangements, which occasionally evoked specific downtown precedents, like John Zorn's "The Dreamers," during a poetically lilting "La Vita È Bella" ("Life Is Beautiful"), or Uri Caine's classical expeditions, in a version of the march from Prokofiev's "The Love for Three Oranges" (from Mr. Allen's "Love and Death").

But Mr. Krakauer got uniformly strong and balanced work out of his band mates: Sheryl Bailey on guitar, Sara Caswell on violin, Rob Schwimmer on piano and keyboards, Mark Helias on bass and John Hadfield on drums. (An album version of "The Big Picture," due out on Feb. 18, features Ms. Bailey but otherwise different collaborators, including the violinist Jenny Scheinman and the bassist Greg Cohen.)

And the play of sound and image sometimes worked beautifully, as in the blurred images for "Shoah Trilogy," and the abstract animations for "Abraham's Theme" (from "Chariots of Fire"), which created driving propulsion with little more than two parallel lines. Other projections were too literal-minded. Mr. Krakauer's terse, cogent solo on "Body and Soul" came against a backdrop of radio towers, microphones and "on air" signs — because the film in play was Mr. Allen's "Radio Days."

Mr. Krakauer, between songs, often indulged his tendency to explain the obvious. And he seemed not to have considered the perils of sending out his 20-something daughter, Alicia Krakauer, as a Barbra Streisand proxy on "People." (Ms. Krakauer carried herself well, but c'mon. In the projection, Ms. Streisand shot a sidelong look herself.)

That was the penultimate number, and it led inexorably into the "Fiddler on the Roof" anthem, "Tradition," offered up as the sincerest sort of kitsch, in a style approaching surf-rock. As with the klezmer tune in the encore, Mr. Krakauer gave it his all.

"The Big Picture" repeats on Sundays and Wednesdays through Feb. 23 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place, at First Place, Lower Manhattan; 646-437-4200, [mjhnyc.org](http://mjhnyc.org).

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