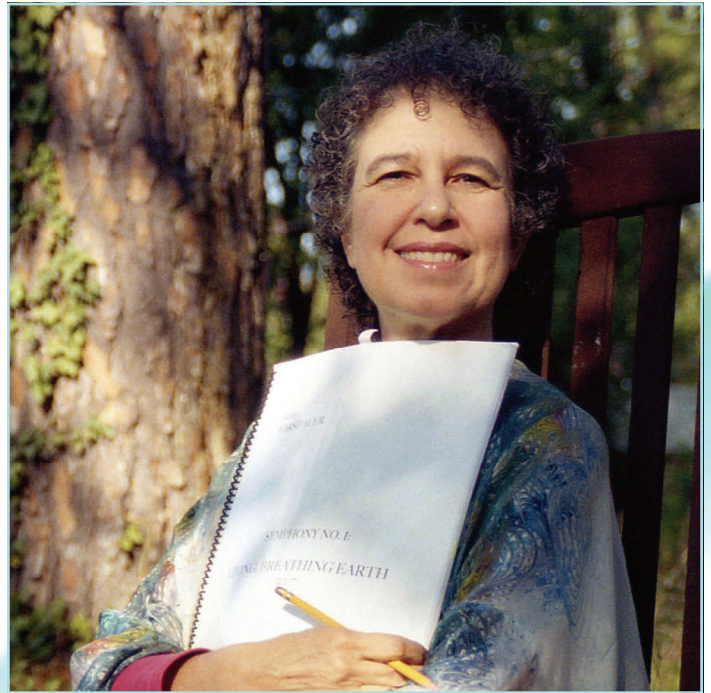


A Composer's Journey



Meira Warshauer - Hearing the Call from Within

In 2007, my *Symphony No. 1 LIVING BREATHING EARTH* received its world premiere in Hickory, North Carolina, with the Western Piedmont Symphony. The symphony was inspired by my great love for the earth and a hope that somehow, a symphony dedicated to the earth might help spur us to take better care of our precious home planet. The title came to me in contemplating the rainforest as lungs of the earth, and imagining the whole planet pulsing with breath. I wanted to hold the image of a healthy, breathing earth, as a prayer for healing the earth's imbalance.

The day before the premiere, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had announced its finding of human responsibility for global warming. While the performance was a great success, and I was floating afterwards, I woke up the next morning thinking, "now what?" What would it take for us to actually do what is needed to heal the earth? How could we wake up *INSIDE*, to make fundamental changes in the way we relate to the earth and to each other? I thought of the *shofar*, the horn of a ram or other kosher animal, which is sounded on the Jewish New Year to awaken the soul, and felt that it might help bring us to the next place.

Trombonist Haim Avitur was the featured soloist on the concert with my symphony. We had a chance to spend time together during the rehearsal week, especially because heavy snow in NC had caused cancellations in our schedule, and we were thinking about my writing something for him to perform.

After the concert, I asked Haim if he could play the *shofar*. With a big smile, he said he loved to play the *shofar*, and had access to an amazing instrument which he had been using for High Holiday services at a synagogue in Manhattan.

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Haim Avitsur and the *shofar*, an instrument made of the horn of a ram or other kosher animal, which is sounded on the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashannah). “When I hear the *shofar*, the sound penetrates my entire being,” says composer Meira Warshauer. “Its soul-cleansing vibration clears the way for a deeper connection with the Infinite, a path to my true essence.” (Photo by Ed Zirkle)

Meira Warshauer - A composer's journey

I wanted to make a big statement, a concerto with full orchestra. Because of the tonal limitations of the natural *shofar* horn, I felt it would be helpful to have the soloist play both *shofar* and trombone: a concerto for *shofar* and trombone and orchestra. The idea for *Tekeeyah* (a call) was then planted and began to grow.

We approached several orchestras about forming a consortium to help with the commission and to schedule performances. Donald Portnoy, conductor of the University of South Carolina Symphony, agreed to join the consortium; and the Filler and Stern families of Columbia, SC, offered to assist with the commission in memory of their parents, Jadzia and Ben Stern. John Gordon Ross invited us to return to Western Piedmont Symphony as part of the new commission. Neal Gitelman, whose Dayton Philharmonic had partnered in the consortium for Symphony No. 1 LIVING BREATHING EARTH, committed to this one, too. When Steven Errante and the Wilmington Symphony joined the consortium, and Don Portnoy suggested including the Brevard Philharmonic, we had our 5-orchestra consortium!

In several meetings with Haim at the Mannes College of Music, we explored the qualities of different *shofarot* (plural for *shofar* in Hebrew). I decided the large horn of the African Antelope, which Haim had originally mentioned, would be the ideal match for the trombone. It's color and range blended well with the trombone, and we could switch back and forth between the two instruments as needed.

Haim began exploring extensions of that *shofar's* capabilities. We knew we had two stable pitches: the E above middle C, and the C a 6th above that. With the E, Haim could play

any dynamic level, and with practice, was able to control a glissando ranging down a 5th and (with effort), up a 3rd. The high C was only one dynamic: loud. And no glissando worked there.

This exploration gave me the information I needed. The high C would be the climactic arrival pitch. We could begin quietly with the E, and move around in that lower register. The 6th between them would become an emblematic interval of the piece.

I applied for a residency at the MacDowell Colony to begin writing the music, and was privileged to spend the month of May, 2008, in that beautiful and supportive setting. I was able to leave MacDowell with a good sketch of the opening, and a working sense of the shape and direction of the piece.

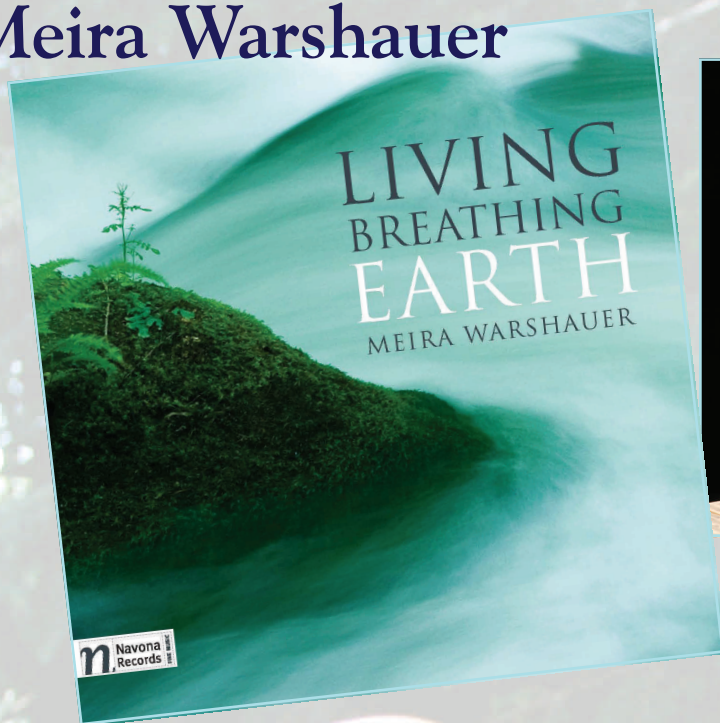
It begins with gentle sounds of whispering, string harmonics, and rustling harp glissandi. I wanted a mysterious aura that might evoke the experience of the soul before entering the body. The idea was to coax us into remembering and reconnecting with our spiritual essence.

As the music developed, I listened to the sounds I was receiving and followed that flow. In my compositional process, I often go back and forth between improvisation and revision, with the goal of creating music that sounds inevitable.

Over the next year, I worked on the music and orchestration, keeping in close communication with Haim when any questions arose about the trombone and *shofar* part. I also relied on musicians closer to home (Columbia, SC) when exploring special instrumental effects, such as the string harmonic glissandi

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Meira Warshauer



Composer Meira Warshauer — her music celebrates life, earth, the Creator and that “we are one”.

in the opening. It was Steven Errante’s suggestion to use plastic megaphones to amplify the whispering of orchestra musicians.

As work on the concerto progressed, life also progressed. My daughter gave birth to her second child in fall, 2008, so I had a chance to witness life beginning, and contemplate the concerto’s opening.

Later that year I volunteered to be a citizen intervener in the Public Service Commission of South Carolina hearing on whether to allow SC Electric and Gas to build a new nuclear power plant. The hearing came in spring, 2009, as I was writing the middle section, “Breaking Walls.” This section recalls the biblical story of Jericho, when the sound of 7 *shofarot* for 7 days broke the physical walls of the city for Joshua and his army. During the hearings I felt like a citizen warrior, returning home to work on the concerto between the sessions.

In “Breaking Walls,” I wanted the music to help break down the walls we create inside — walls which insulate us from our true feelings. This section is the most dense and complex musically, with the orchestra functioning as the loud *shofar*, and the low register of the trombone and other low brass and percussion helping to create strong vibrations. At the end of this second section comes one of my favorite places in the piece, when the *shofar* softly pulses, as if caressing the heart to open to its sweet essence. This quiet music gradually opens to a celebration of freedom.

It was a relief to finally arrive at the last section, the joyful “Dance of Truth.” Here I relied on traditional rhythms for sounding the *shofar*. As noted in my program notes, on *Rosh Hashannah* (Jewish New Year), the *shofar* is sounded in three distinct patterns: *tekeeyah*, a long tone; *shevarim*, three shorter tones; and *teruah*, at least nine staccato notes. *Tekeeyah g’dolah*, a very long *tekeeyah*, concludes the sequence of blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashannah*, and is sounded again at the end of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), concluding 10 days of *teshuvah* (return or repentance).

In “Dance of Truth” the 9/8 meter derives from the 9 staccato notes of *teruah*. The 3 dotted quarter notes, which punctuate cadences, refer to *shevarim*. And the very long sustained C, first in the *shofar*, then passed to trumpets, horns and trombones, refers to the *tekeeyah g’dolah*. This orchestral *tekeeyah* is longer than humanly possible for a single instrument, and is meant to inspire the greatest release from spiritual constraints. The *shofar* returns for the final sequence of the traditional blasts and the last *tekeeyah g’dolah*, in hope that its raw animal sound will penetrate where orchestral instruments cannot reach.

Tekeeyah (a call), premiered in Wilmington, NC, with the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra, October 24, 2009. Subsequent performances were with the Brevard Philharmonic, November 15 and University of South Carolina Symphony, November 17, 2009. The Western Piedmont Symphony performed the piece February 5, 2011, and Dayton Philharmonic plans to present it in two performances in fall, 2012.

It was recorded in July, 2010, by the Moravian Philharmonic for Parma Recordings’ Navona Records, along with *Symphony No. 1 Living Breathing Earth*. The CD, titled *LIVING BREATHING EARTH*, is due to be released April 26, 2011.

As far as I know, *Tekeeyah* is the first concerto to feature the *shofar* so prominently, and certainly the first for both *shofar* and trombone.

I hope the concerto, paired with the symphony on this recording, will help inspire us to hear the call from inside us, from the earth, and from the Creator, that we are one.

A page on my website about the new release includes purchase information, press reviews and listener comments from the live performances, and a YouTube clip of the Brevard Philharmonic performance: <http://meirawarshauer.com/>