



## **Paul Ben-Haim: Variations on a Hebrew Melody**

Born in Munich in 1897 as Paul Frankenburger, Ben-Haim had a meteoric success as a young composer and conductor in Germany of his time. An assistant to the legendary Bruno Walter und Hans Knappertsbusch, he became the conductor of the Augsburg Orchestra at the age of twenty-seven. Composition remained an equally essential part of his music-making, and most of his output has been influenced by the late Romantic style.

With the political change of 1933 he made an "Aliya" to Palestine and consequently changed his surname to the Hebrew Ben-Haim.

However, it was nearly a decade later when he started composing under his new name. By that time he had developed what is now known as "The Mediterranean Style", a blend of Mizrahi-Jewish, Bedouin and Arabic folk music conjuring a local national color. The Variations on a Hebrew Melody for piano trio are among the first pieces composed under the name Paul Ben-Haim.

The piece is structured in one movement, divided into introduction, theme and variations. Somewhat an autobiographic piece, it reflects on different aspects of the composer's life; voices of Jewish life in the Diaspora are echoed throughout the introduction; the theme is a Tel-Avivian song, very well known at the time. The first variations depict the developing Israeli culture, presenting elements of Hora, Bedouin Sheppard's songs and a Debka. The last variation, however, both brings to life the "Mediterranean" present, symbolized by the song's melody and at the same time looks back at the "European" past, reflected by the western compositional approach and by the somber mood.

This trio is one of the first Israeli trios, and perhaps the best of them all...