

Aaron Avshalomoff, PRELUDE AND RONDO, 1958, piano 4-hands
Orchestrated by David Avshalomov, 1982

For my 12th birthday, along with a bicycle from my parents, I received in the mail from my beloved grandfather Arosha a most astonishing gift: Inside a handmade folder cover decked with ornamental Chinese paper stamped with red and green lantern patterns, was a score, copied in his characteristic calligraphy, to a piece of music for piano 4-hands which he had written for me (to play with my father, of course). The cover bore his characteristic pen-and-ink drawings of a proud little boy in a Chinese getup, and a bearded old Chinese man sitting under a very Chinese tree. He had added this inscription:

For a Joyfull BIRTHDAY, A Modest gift:

PRELUDE and RONDO

For my Beloved Grandson DAVID, 12, May 6, 1958.

My best wishes, L O N G L I F E And HAPPINESS

I was overwhelmed. Literally. Having started piano lessons late, I found the piece a little over my head. But Father, who had craftily introduced me to the rewards of four-hands playing with the Johnny one-note theme from the slow movement of Beethoven's 7th a little while before, encouraged me through the haunting, atmospheric slow Prelude, and I was amazed. It was beautiful. What a present!

The Rondo was hard, though; key of six flats, *tempo vivo*. True, it started with a simple black-notes Chinese tune, but it modulated and varied, at times cheery, at times mysterious, triumphant at the end. We (I) never did quite pull it together, though I loved banging out the wrists/elbows tone clusters at the end. I kept and cherished the manuscript long after I had given up any notion of being a pianist.

Then when I went to China with my wife Randi in 1982 as the professional conductor of an amateur orchestra on tour, one of my ways of manifesting my grandfather's and father's China history* was to take this piece with me and perform it there. I wrote it out for strings and available winds (2212/22), in an orchestration that Father later pronounced very like Arosha's own style (which you can hear full-blown on our recordings of his major symphonic works on Naxos). It went over decently in Beijing and even better in Shanghai. For a later performance in the US I added a second clarinet part and some characteristic percussion. I think he would have liked that. I still miss him. But I have his music.

(Program note by the birthday boy.)

(*For my father's book on their China story, do a Web search on "Avshalomovs Winding Way.")