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ASPECTS OF MUSIC AND JEWISH IDENTITY IN ISRAEL TODAY

Abstract

One of the prerogatives of our time and place has been a protracted search to integrate Western artistic aspiration within a context of Jewish identification — a quest to find the indwelling spirit within contemporary and traditional compositional ethos and technique, content and form. Shared is an awareness of the tension between tradition and innovation, and the motivation to bring a timeless perspective to the fractured state of contemporary consciousness. This paper focuses on music as an art form and as an experiential educational medium in the renewal of an ingathered people who aspires to understand and walk in the ways of God, but isn't quite sure how this vision and ideal is to be realized as ancient sources of inspiration impose themselves against a backdrop of horror and despair.

Keywords

musical identity, Jewish music, cultural-historical issues of music, Jewish roots

“It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord,
and to sing praise unto His name” (Ps. 92:1)

While the concept of the sacred is universal, it has acquired unusually powerful overtones in relation to the unique origin and history of the Jewish experience. As residents of various nations, Jews absorbed cultural and behavioral norms, participating and contributing to their host cultures, while maintaining close ties to ancient texts and sacred precepts. As members of a modern body politic, all has been called into question. Too often excluded from the “all”, however is a self-conscious counter-stance-questioning the norms and format which comprise 20th century parlance; completing the circle by opening the possibility for a way back to ancestral springs. Attempts at reconstruction of a national culture have been wrought with thorns, from within and from without. Today even the idea of an Israeli culture that espouses a Jewish musical identity is considered politically incorrect by many.

SOME INSIGHTS AND BACKGROUND

It is not for nothing that the Jewish People are called the People of the Book. Fore it is the source of their language, their culture, their history and their destiny. From it the child learns to read and to chant its words. Its letters form his literacy. Its phrases become his vocabulary. Its stories tell of his heritage and ancestry. Its message of justice teaches him morality. Its message and promise of a divinely chosen land in which to dwell gave direction to his history and hope to his posterity. No matter where the Jew lived he carried this book with him. It was the source of his joy and his pride. It comforted him in times of sorrow; gave him hope against all odds in all climes and conditions. These words were tried a hundred thousand times and proved faithful to the Wandering Jew when he had nothing — no place to hold onto, no sense of what was right and wrong — these words, proved his hold on reality and hope.

To bring the Bible into the forefront of Israel's culture is a dream and an ideal the world is waiting for. But have we arrived at that point? Certainly Judaism is a major component of Israeli culture and constitutes the core of Israeli identity¹.

¹A. Pikar, Teaching Judaism in the Israeli Educational System, *Alpayim* 34, 2009, p. 148–158 [Hebrew].

Israel's official language is Hebrew, public holidays are Jewish holidays², and Zionist ideology draws from Jewish tradition, but the structure of Israeli society is not sharply divided between religious and secular. This society is composed of a continuity of identities, with most people situated at various points along the religious-secular continuity, and with a positive view of creating strong links with Jewish tradition and identity³. But most have long been dissatisfied with the manner and degree in which Jewish contents are being imparted⁴. Issues which are related to Jewish-Israeli identity and the historical heritage are controversial and reflect the rift among the public⁵. Despite polarization and disputes, over the years, innumerable attempts to cope with this issue have been made, based on the understanding that a Jewish state cannot exist without a Jewish identity.

SCHOOLING: INSTITUTIONALIZING CONTRASTS AND CONTRADICTIONS⁶

Until 1953 the Israeli school system was divided into three different ideological streams begun in the Yishuv (pre-state) period: the general stream, the workers (Laborers) stream, and the Mizrachi (religious Zionist) stream. Each ran an autonomous school system⁷. Ultra-Orthodox students were not included in this law. The State Education Law transferred educational institutions from the control of sectorial organizations to the control of the state, as an attempt to cope with the multiple streams and cultures both organizational and ideological. Originally the law intended to include one track — so as to realize the

²E. Ben Rafael and L. Ben Chaim, *Jewish Identities in an Era of Multiple Modernities*, The Open University, Tel Aviv 2006.

³Y. Mimran, *Being Ourselves: Neither Religious nor Secular*, *Eretz Aheret* 58, 2010, p. 60–63 [Hebrew].

⁴N. Resh and A. Benavot, *An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Shenhar Committee Report: Jewish Education in the State Sector Junior-High Schools*, NCJW Research Institute for Innovation in Education, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 1998 [Hebrew].

⁵*Ibidem*.

⁶N. Davidovitch & B. Bartana, *A New Educational Concept for Teaching Jewish History Values: Judaism, Zionism and Values and In-Between*, *Mo'ed*, *Annual for Jewish Studies* 13, 2007, p. 103–115.

⁷Z. Zameret, *Education in the First Decade*, Open University, Tel Aviv 2003 [Hebrew].

‘melting pot approach’ — a society entirely educated under a single system of values (i.e. secular). Due to the strong resistance of the religious parties, however, a compromise was arrived at, separating the tracks, with the hope of solving conflict between religious and non-religious. In the years that followed, two separate school systems were formed, secular and religious Zionist, with the ultra-Orthodox track independent from both⁸.

In those days no one thought of the ethical and educational meaning of this decision. Thus, an impression was formed that studying Jewish values and consciousness are the exclusive roles of the religious system. The topic reached public attention following an incident where an Israeli youth delegation visiting Russia (1956) displayed a thorough lack of knowledge of Jewish life and customs. This aroused the astonishment and served as a wake-up call for the Israeli school system. The state system had become secularized⁹. The general educational system became distanced from Jewish education, while the religious system underwent a process of religious extremism¹⁰.

Intense struggles concerning the place of Jewish consciousness ensued. Opponents objected to the “worship of religion”, “clerical coercion”, and the “mechanism called tradition”¹¹. Advocates sought “To emphasize Jewish literature rather than only the Bible”¹², “and instill youth in the integrity of the homeland, our historical right to the land”¹³.

The issue of Jewish identity mounted in the mid-1970s to include the culture of “Eastern Jews”, who had doubled their proportion in the population by the early 1960s. They sought to reclaim their lost Oriental voice and demanded recognition of the religious character of Eastern Jews, albeit, once again con-

⁸N. Reichel, *The Story of the Israeli System of Education*, Magnes, Jerusalem 2008 [Hebrew].

⁹H. Ben Artzi, *Directives for Enhancing Jewish Education in General State Schools*, Dapim 9, 1989, p. 62–69 [Hebrew]; N. Ben Bassat, *Shaping Jewish Identity in General Schools in the State of Israel*, PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University 1982 [Hebrew]; M. Kerem, *Towards Open Jewish Education in Israel. In The Meeting of Cultures: On Education, Judaism and the Kibbutz*, ed. A. Shkedi, Open University, Tel Aviv 1994, p. 127–141 [Hebrew]; G. Shaked, *On Secular Jewish Education*, School of Education, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1993 [Hebrew]; Z. Zameret, *Jewish Education: Reality and Its Problems in the General State System*, [in:] S. Stempler (ed.), *People and State: Israeli Society*, Ministry of Defense, Tel Aviv 1989), p. 307–315 [Hebrew].

¹⁰Y. Mimran, *Being Ourselves*.

¹¹Z. Zameret, *Israel in the First Decade — Development of the Educational System* (vol. 4), Open University, Tel Aviv 1997 [Hebrew].

¹²MK Rachel Tzabari, [in:] Z. Zameret, *Israel in the First Decade*.

¹³MK Esther Raziell-Naor, [in:] Z. Zameret, *Israel in the First Decade*.

flicting with the secular outlook of the Zionist movement, which had rebelled against late 19th century Eastern-European Jewish orthodoxy and manners¹⁴.

A PERSONAL SAGA

For the past 30 years I have played a key role in the ongoing development of Israel's musical culture as composer, educator, performer, and music critic. The ideals of creating a Jewish culture in Israel inspired me to leave my "quiet life" as a professional musician in New York City and begin to wander in the desert of Israel. I listened to traditional religious songs sung by the people, studied Yemenite cantillation, and the North African instrument *ud*, which besides the Arabs, was used by the Jews of Morocco. From the inspiration of the desert, folklore, and the Bible I created a series of compositions: "Ha'azinu", "Creation of the World", "Mosaic, Bedouin Impressions", "Nebhel & Kinnor", "Jacob and the Angel", "Prophet and King" — which combine traditional elements with the methods of modern serious music. The spiritual roots of these works are tied up with the Bible, but their expression is contemporary.

INSPIRATION FROM THE BIBLE

The Bible is a way of identifying with the Israeli experience. Its narrative and prophecies and poetry are often two dimensional. When read from the printed page, it becomes a kind of complicated verbal litany of archaic words and phrases, demanding clarification and interpretation, seeking meaning and morality. But behind the words and the superficial story is a texture, a quality of intent, and an emotional depth that hardly ever comes to the surface, except with considerable insight and imagination. It is this quality of inner essence that I have sought to understand and to endow with a musical voice. For, if we take the Bible as just another book, then its stories and promises may be viewed as national literature. But if we in Israel see it as an authentic heritage, as the heirloom and peculiar treasure of the Jewish People, then, it behooves us not only to learn, but to observe and do, to integrate it into our lives as living tissue, beaconing us to build a new world from its pages and create a renewed culture

¹⁴Ibidem.

from its message of faith. Fore, it teaches that man is not alone, and this people, the children of Israel were Chosen for a destiny and a land to call his own. If we have the opportunity, now that the Jewish people have come home once more to their own land and language, then it is our prerogative, even obligation not to waste the brief hour in which we stand, but to embrace the age old doctrine and press on, endowing the old forgotten creed with new life, dignity, and the stature it so deserves in our personal, national, and in consequence, our cultural lives.

A CASE STUDY / MAX STERN: “PEREK SHIRAH” FOR NARRATOR AND ORCHESTRA¹⁵

“Perek Shirah for narrator and orchestra” (1994) or “Chapter of Song” is based on an anonymous collection of sayings from the Psalms and other scriptural and non-scriptural passages said to have originated with King David, and placed in the mouth of all creation except man. It is a mysterious text (some date from the 10th century) pregnant with profound philosophical symbolism. “Everything that is called by My name was created in My honor: I created it, I produced it, I made it (Isa. 43:7)”. In “Perek Shirah”, the entire cosmos, inanimate nature, plants, animals, birds, and insects praise God — according to the Jewish view that all things are endowed with sensation: “He teaches us from the animals of the land, and from the birds of the heavens He makes us wise (Job 35:11)”. This conception is not only poetically expressed in the Bible, but occurs quite frequently in Talmudic and Midrashic literature, where the singing and praise of animals and trees are spoken of. God’s visit to the pious in paradise (with which the song of the rooster is connected) is frequently mentioned in mystic literature¹⁶. The psalmist says that the entire creation tells of the glory of God and sings its unique song of praise to the Creator: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and sing praise unto His name (Ps. 92:1)”.

“Praise the LORD from the heavens.

Praise Him, sun and moon: praise Him, all ye stars of light.

¹⁵Max Stern composer-conductor rehearsing “Perek Shirah” with members of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, 2012; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A19ZYrIh5zI>.

¹⁶L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 1–7, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1998 (1925), 5, p. 60–1.

Praise the LORD from the earth,
Fire, and hail; stormy wind fulfilling his word:
Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars:
Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:
Praise ye the LORD (Ps. 148)”.

The Prophets not only personify nature, they ethicize it, endowing natural phenomenon with the capacity of understanding moral distinctions.

“Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts and return unto the LORD,
Then shall the mountains and the hills break forth into singing,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isa. 55: 7, 12)”.

The earth says that ‘its fullness belongs to God’. The stars proclaim that ‘God alone made the heavenly hosts’. The horse says that ‘just as it looks to its master, so must all look to God’. The lion teaches the importance of might as well as the power of self control. The ant shows the slothful person how much can be accomplished if he will but utilize the gifts God gave to him. These are only a few examples of the praises of “Chapter of Song”. What do they represent? Simply this: God’s song of praise is sung whenever every part of creation performs its assigned task¹⁷. Here we see a universal message encased in a unique, though very particular source.

In a symphony orchestra, when the musicians play their assigned parts, the result is an outburst of ebullience that can seem almost heavenly in its beauty. But, if each player improvises as he pleases without regard to the fused outcome, the result will not be music, but noise — a deafening, horrendous cacophony. The concept behind “Perek Shirah” is that everything in the natural world teaches us a lesson for life, if we can, but only, listen and understand. When man hears the message of the heavens and the ant and everything in between, then all creation has value and becomes the symphony that God intended¹⁸. “Were it not for the daily hymns and songs of Praise”, says God, “I should not have created the world”¹⁹.

¹⁷Ibidem.

¹⁸M. Zlotowitz, *Song of Songs*, Mesorah Publications, New York 1977, p. xxxiv–xxxv.

¹⁹L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5, Baltimore 1998 [1925]), p. 62.

There is thus an educational thrust in the concept behind “Perek Shirah”. It reaches beyond mere schooling to show us that everything in the natural world may teach a lesson for life, if we can, but only, listen and understand. The particular need not be insular. When man hears the message of the heavens and the ant and everything in between, then all creation has value and becomes the symphony that God intended. “Were it not for the daily hymns and songs of Praise”, says God, “I should not have created the world”.

But, what seems to me, as a composer, to be no less interesting than its moral content is the musical style in which this ethical message is encased. Not the what, but the how. Here is a contemporary work based on Scripture which draws upon all the elements of contemporary expression — speech, sound-effects, extended instrumental techniques, improvisation, tonality, non-tonality, pulse, theatricality, humor and chaos. All these effects are combined and integrated into a sonorous fabric, interpreting the call to adoration by bringing to life each aspect and character of Creation its own unique voice. Bells and chimes sounding, wooden sticks beaten together, blowing and chirping into instruments, tooting into mouthpieces, snorts on trumpets and trombones, scratching on strings and wobbling baby carriages — all these sonorities and more become symbols for the enigmatic and often impenetrable vibrations of heaven and earth and inherent but unfathomable meanings behind the sounds of fowl, animals, and insects. This abstract international language — rather than folksong (Yiddish or Sephardic), liturgical chant, or ethnic music (be it Chassidic or Oriental, Klezmer or Arabic in origin) — is an expression of a contemporary Jewish identity. In other works, here is a creation born in the land of Israel that portrays the Bible, but without the usual clichés that characterize Jewish music per se. Yet it could not have been written anywhere but here. What is this quality? It is something spiritual, something abstract, something universal, yet, something specific to Jewish cultural identity via Hebrew language and Biblical ethos. Its essence has something to do with faith and the direction of mind we would like to think of as Holy. Is such a thing possible?

“Perek Shirah” (“Chapter of Song”) was originally conceived for the elementary school youth band at the “Ohel Shlomo Yeshivah” in Beer-Sheba (1980). The text as it appeared then and as it has been retained is as follows:

Rabbi (Yehuda Hanassi) says:

“Whoever occupies himself with Perek Shirah in this world is privileged to learn,

and his learning will be realized, and he will be delivered from the evil inclination,
and from punishment after death, and from the damnation of hell,
and will be worthy to witness the messianic age and the life of the world to come”.

1 Heaven says:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork (Ps. 19:2)”.

2 Earth says:

“The earth is the LORD’s, and the fullness thereof; The world and they that dwell therein (Ps. 24:1)”.

3 Wind says:

“I will say to the north: Give up; and to the south: Keep not back;
Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the end of the earth (Isa. 43:6)”.

4 Lightning says:

“Who maketh lightnings for the rain; Who bringeth forth the wind out of his treasuries (Ps. 135:7)”.

5 Trees say:

“Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the LORD;
For he cometh to judge the earth (1 Chr. 16:33)”.

6 Rooster says:

“At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, entered into the presence of the righteous in Paradise,
all the trees in Paradise exude fragrance and sing, and He too becomes elated and sings praises”.

7 Birds say:

“Yea, the sparrow hath found her a house, And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young, Even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, My King,
and my God (Ps. 84:4)”.

8 Goose says:

“O give thanks unto the LORD, call upon His name; make known His doings among the peoples.

Sing unto Him, sing praises unto Him; Speak ye of all His marvelous works (Ps. 105:1–2)”.

9 Chicks say:

“Trust ye in the LORD for ever; For the LORD is God an everlasting rock (Isa. 26:4)”.

10 Horse says:

“Behold, as the eyes of servants unto the hand of their master, As the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress; So our eyes look unto the LORD, Until he have mercy upon us (Ps. 123:2)”.

11 Mule says:

“All the kings of the earth give Thee thanks; For they have heard the words of Thy mouth (Ps. 138:4)”.

12 Donkey says:

“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all (1 Chr. 29:11)”.

13 Elephant says:

“How great are Thy works, O LORD! Thy thoughts are very deep (Ps. 92:6)”.

14 Lion says:

“The LORD will go forth as a mighty man, He will stir up jealousy like a man of war;

He will cry, yea, He will shout aloud, He will prove Himself mighty against His enemies (Isa. 42:13)”.

15 Bear says:

“Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit;

let the inhabitants of Sela exult, Let them shout from the top of the mountains (Isa. 42:11)”.

16 Ant says:

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; Consider her ways, and be wise (Prv. 6:6)”.

17 Mouse says:

“Thou art just in all that is come upon us; For Thou dealt truly, but we have done wickedly (Neh. 9:33)”.

18 Dogs say:

“O come, let us bow down and bend the knee; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker (Ps. 95:6)”.

Because it was written for children who could barely play their instruments, the message had to reach beyond mere technique. Mostly the students were able only to make sounds on their instruments, sounds that resembled animals: cymbals were lightening, drum sticks were trees, saxophones were roosters and geese, flutes and piccolo were birds, trumpets were horses, trombones were

mules, the tuba was an elephant, the clarinets were mice, etc. All this was performed with a minimal of written notation. Effects were communicated mostly by hand signals between conductor, players, and narrator. Early performances by the children elicited overwhelming local response from parents, teachers, rabbis, visiting dignitaries, and other students. The work was performed three times.

Here I witnessed a “grass roots” response to an ethical ideal inherent in Jewish culture; an ideal often drowned in religion and its minutia, but whose realization in sound satisfies the classic ethno-musicological requirements of traditional music, that is: it is created by, performed by, and approved by the group who hears it, identifies with its message, and embraces it as their own. In other words: music created by Israeli-Jews, performed by Israeli-Jews, and listened to by Israeli-Jews in an Israeli— Jewish framework is an expression of Jewish identity. The Israeli school environment reaches beyond nostalgia for a lost culture in Europe, or in the Levant, towards something new, vibrant, and creative in the ancient homeland. It is a realization of the verse O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lords, all the earth (Ps. 96:1).

A decade later, after notating the effects we had improvised at the above mentioned elementary school program, I submitted “Perek Shirah” for an international competition of music for children. I was surprised when it garnered an award from the Japanese Society for Contemporary Music at the International Music for Children Contest, Tokyo (1991). Later, in 1994, following the suggestion of Alexandra Melamed, coordinator for the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra of the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the work was expanded and adapted for symphony orchestra and narrator into its present form of 18 free-flowing variations. It was recently recorded by members of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and narrated by a well known Israel broadcast-journalist for Israel radio and television. An excerpt of the rehearsal appears on YouTube (see note 14).

ATTEMPTS AT RECONSTRUCTION: TOPICS AND COMPOSERS OF ISRAEL'S ART MUSIC

The above is a personal testimony. It is but one of many attempts by many composers, from many different Diasporas, over an extended period of time, towards the reconstruction of a national musical heritage based on shared cultural motivations and intents — ideals that have been central to Jewish con-

sciousness for centuries. Their place was in the synagogue, the “shtetl”, the ghetto, the extended family and ethnic community. Their expression was directed inwards towards the initiated. But the ingathering of the various tribes, in our own time, offers the challenge to bring these values alive to fruition in a contemporary and broader national cultural setting. The attempt, however, has been wrought with thorns; the ideation of these age old truths has been a continuing creative struggle for expression and stylization.

Many have sought to identify with the elusive indwelling spirit of Jewish identity in Israel and extend it beyond the cloistered restrictions of the past, from ethnic origins into the broader world of Western culture. This direction implies assimilation and absorption of technique, but no less, a self-imposed spiritual counter stance: questioning the norms and formats which comprise 20th century parlance, thus completing the circle of history, by opening up the possibility of a way back to ancient springs of inspiration.

The following mark demarcation points as well as creative solutions in the search for Jewish musical perspectives. I have divided these works into seven categories that have engaged Israel’s composers: 1. Holocaust, 2. Evocation of ancient voices, 3. Musical Theater, 4. Ethnic Influences, 5. Reflections of the Talmud, oral tradition, legend, or ritual, 6. Sources from Scripture, 7. Jewish prayers, meditations, imagery, and impressions²⁰. They demonstrate the free-willed option to choose, select, and reject — combining old elements and new, in an effort to generate integrally meaningful synthesis.

Israeli Music inspired from the Holocaust represents a response to Jewish history and tragedy. Such works include: Oedoen Partos: “Yiskor for viola and strings” (1946), Yizhak Edel: “In Memoriam” (1947) Artur Gelbrun: “Lament for the Victims of the Warsaw Ghetto” (1953), Josef Tal: “The Death of Moses, a Jewish Requiem” (1967), Ami Maayani: “Hebrew Requiem” (1977), Giora Rozen: “Yizkor” (1981), Eddie Halpern: “Aushwitz Epitaph” (1986), Max Stern: “Out of the Whirlwind” (rev. 2000) and others.

Neoarchaic evocation of ancient voices finds expression in various works: Ben-Zion Orgad: Mizmorim (1968), a multi-tiered interpretation of Psalm and other scriptural texts for voices and instruments (1968), Abel Ehrlich: “The Writing of Hezekiah for voice and four instruments” (1962), Sergiu Natra: “Song of Deborah for voice and orchestra” (1967), Moshe Kilon: “Vision of

²⁰M. Stern, *In Search of a Sacred Ethos, New Music in Israel 1985–1987*, Israel Composers’ League, Tel Aviv 1988, p. 16–20.

Dry Bones” (1984), Max Stern: “Nebhel and Kinnor for king David’s harps” (2007), Gabriel Iranyi: “Scroll Fragments” (1985) and others.

In the realm of musical theater and dance, Jewish content has been infused onto the dramatic stage in many forms: as opera, oratorio, cantata, ballet, and incidental music: Yoel Engel: “Dybbuk”, incidental music (1922), a classic blending of Hassidic melos and drama, Karel Salom: “Nedarim” (1955) scenes from the life of medieval rabbi-poet-philosopher, Yehuda Halevy, Josef Tal: “Saul at Endor”, opera (1957), Mordecai Seter: “Judith”, ballet (1962), Tzvi Avni: “On the Waters of Babylon”, oratorio (1971), Marc Kopytman: “Susskind of Trimberg”, opera (1982), Marc Lavry: “Song of Songs” oratorio (1939) and “Tamar”, ballet (1959), Max Stern: “Prophecy for the End of Days”, cantata (2010) and others.

Many works recast the ethnic music of Israel’s various oriental and Hassidic communities and into polyphonic instrumental or choral works: Yehezkel Braun: “Zemirot” (1980), Joachim Stutschevsky: “Four Jewish Dances” (1929), Alexander Boskovich: “The Golden Chain Suite”, on Eastern European folklore (1934), “Semitic Suite for piano four-hands”, after oriental Jewish folklore (1945), Ram Daoz: “Rhapsody on a Yemenite Jewish Song” (1971), Shimon Cohen: “Romancero”, on Sephardic melodies (1974), Shimon Shahal: “Bakkashot”, on Moroccan sources (1983), Joseph Dorfman: “Keyzmeriana” (1983), Max Stern: “Biblical Landscapes for orchestra”. on Sephardic “piyutim” (1999), and others.

Increasingly, new works drawn on the inner world of Jewish oral tradition, history, and Talmudic midrash. Some classic works include: Andre Hajdu: “Mishnayot”, a series of short pieces based on texts from the Mishnah for various combinations (1970s), Hanoach Jacoby: “King David’s Lyre” for strings (1948), Paul Ben-Haim: “Sweet Psalmist of Israel” for orchestra (1953), Mordecai Seter: “Sabbath Cantata” (1940), Abel Ehrlich: “Birothcha”, cantata of Cain and Abel (1970), Daniel Galay: “Meelematah Lemalah” (1985), Gideon Levinson: “Ovadia the Proselyte” (1986) and others.

Many works of various kinds and dimensions have drawn inspiration from the Bible: Leon Schidlovsky: “In the Beginning” for children’s choir (1985), Erich-Walter Sternberg: “The Twelve Tribes of Israel”, orchestral variations (1942) and “Joseph and his Brothers” for strings (1939), Jacob Gilboa: “Symphonic Paintings to the Bible” (c. 1970), Emanuel Amiran: “Comfort ye my People”, cantata (1939), Meir Mindel: “Genesis” for recorder ensemble (1983), and others.

Often shorter forms such as meditations, supplications, and laments take on the character of prayers for our time. These vary from classically oriented works to popular-folksongs: Yehuda Levy: “Mi Maamakim” (1977). Lev Kogan:

“Prayer” (1982), David Zehavi: “Hof Caesarea” (text: Hannah Senesh), Nurit Hirsch: “Oseh Shalom” (prayer book), Tuvia Shlonsky: “Sachki, Sachki” (text: Saul Tchernikovsky) and many others. On the periphery of a sacred ethos are those works which draw inspiration not for verbal texts but from characteristic Jewish subtexts, images, and impressions: Arie Shapira “Sacrifice” (1982), Ashe Ben-Yohanan: “Yafeh Nof” (1984), Naomi Shemer: “Jerusalem of Gold” (1967), Dov Seltzer: “Hakotel” (1968), and others²¹.

The above works lists are representative samples in an on-going symbiotic process by many of Israel’s composers to transform time-honored tradition and local idiosyncrasy into a repertoire representing national cultural identity. In the same way that a J.S. Bach or a Béla Bartók transformed the Lutheran Church chorale or the Hungarian peasant folksong into pan-German or Hungarian national expression, the composers of Israel forge ahead, often as lone individuals, seeking to go beyond music’s social function (i.e., as cantorial cantillation, hassidic wedding dance music, the accumulated lore of Oriental ethnic traditions, etc.) into universal utterance, by means of technical complexity, critical objectivity, and emotional vividness. Through the power of imagination and intellect, they demonstrate musical identities that are products of the recent past and present, living Jewish expressions that are possible only here and now in Israel.

CONCLUSION

The Bible tells us that man first made the harp and pipe for playing, and then, tools for working. “Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe... and Tubal-cain was the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron (Gen. 4: 21–22)”. In the days of King David music formed an important part of the divine services as a means of elevating the spirit of man to God. Twenty-two instruments are mentioned in the Psalms. On Shavuot, the day of the first-fruits, every one present marched after the flute players, and even the king carried a basket full of fruit upon his shoulder. The flutists continued to play until the procession reached the Temple court. Here they were met by the

²¹Compiled from: Israel Music Institute, Comprehensive List of Works, <http://www.imi.org.il>; P. Gradenwitz, Music and Musicians in Israel, Israel Music Publications, Tel Aviv: 1977 (1952).

Levites who chanted Psalms, while the High Priest received the fruit²². These are the images engraved in the genes of a people that somehow, still direct Israel's listeners and creators. But how times have changed!

Differences in the perception of culture, tradition, heritage, and orthodoxy have fragmented the public's reception to the creative voice revealed in Israel's art music of the renewed Third Commonwealth. If, in the extreme, there are halachic legalists (who view music only as a functional element in worship and to accompany dancing in joyous celebrations) place little value on the artistic mode of expression; there are, on the other extreme, secular 'culture fans', who appreciate the spiritual element in art music, but on the other hand, are largely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the content of religious doctrine or its inherited tradition. Secular audiences, by definition, seek to be entertained. Religious congregations, on the other hand, seek liturgical frameworks, and either avoid or minimize the imaginative element that art offers. The issue is not so much a private one as a public stance; for each person, in the quiet of his heart, finds a way around and through the pressured postures and group prejudices of a fragmented identity. The challenge to Israeli consciousness is: how to transform intimate intuitions of faith into public guides? Against such a strained background a new consensus — freed of the pride of movements, prejudice of institutions, and the hubris of political interests — must surely arise; one clinging to eternal truths rather than holding to time bound conventions.

The thoughts of the pre-state Yishuv's first Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook, in his essay, "The Works of Creation", written nearly a century ago in Palestine, are still pertinent; for they speak of redemption as a path towards a goal, a process towards a destination. He writes, "Eretz Yisrael is returning to life through modest efforts, directed by confused thinking, notions shot through with ignorance and despair, soiled with religious nihilism and an inclination to evil. In all these there is hiding the presence of the living God. "How great are your works, O Lord, your thoughts are very deep (Ps. 92:6)"²³. In these words we take comfort.

Art Music may strive for the sacred without necessarily being liturgical. Contemporary Israel's Jewish musical identity is inevitably linked to such a cultural ethos, for its deep roots are nurtured by sacred waters.

²²I. Kasovich, *The Eternal People*, transl. by M. Hurwitz, Hebrew Publishing Company, New York 1925.

²³A.I. Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems, The Works of Creations*, transl. by B. Zion Bokser, Paulist Press, New York 1978, p. 260.

Max Stern

**ASPEKTY MUZYKI I TOŻSAMOŚCI ŻYDOWSKIEJ
WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM IZRAELU**

Streszczenie

Artykuł niniejszy omawia żydowską tożsamość muzyczną traktowaną jako przestrzeń współczesnej izraelskiej ekspresji kulturowej. Podłożem jest tutaj ideologiczny rozdzźwięk pomiędzy żydowską a izraelską tożsamością, powodowany rozbieżnymi nurtami ideologicznymi w systemie edukacyjnym: ogólnym, socjalistycznym, religijno-syjonistycznym i skrajnie ortodoksyjnym. W dalszej części autor skupia się na osobistych doświadczeniach kompozytora i nauczyciela w procesie tworzenia „Perek Shirah”, utworu opartego na świadomości biblijnej, jak i jego wykonania w środowisku szkolnym i wywołanych nim reakcjach. Artykuł kończy się systematyką utworów klasycznych kompozytorów izraelskich reprezentujących różne diaspory, której celem jest rekonstrukcja narodowego dziedzictwa muzycznego w oparciu o kwestie związane z historią i kulturą Żydów. Tym samym autor pokazuje, że izraelska tożsamość muzyczna, rozumiana jako kultura, tradycja, dziedzictwo czy ortodoksja, czerpie z żydowskich korzeni.