11 From biblical antiquarianism to revolutionary modernism

Jewish art music, 1850–1925

JAMES LOEFFLER

Introduction

In his memoirs, the Russian Jewish poet and translator Leon Mandelshtam (1819–89) describes an 1840 visit he paid to the legendary Minsk cantor Sender Poliachek (1786–1869). A musical illiterate, Poliachek had won fame for his liturgical compositions that were said to evoke the "soul" of the Jewish past. Mandelshtam himself had fled a small-town life of religious traditionalism for Moscow, where he would become the first Jew to graduate from a Russian university. Yet he felt compelled to stop en route in Minsk to ask the venerable cantor a question: Where did this music of the Jews come from? Was it a product of the East, signifying that the Jews of Russia were descended from the medieval Khazars who had converted to Judaism? Or was it derived from Western Europe, proving that the Jews had migrated to eastern Europe from Spain and Germany, pushed on by the violence of the Crusades? Perhaps, Poliachek replied, since the Jews had lived under both Muslims and Christians, their music was a cultural hybrid: East and West had fused together to produce the distinctive "binational Jewish melody."

The conversation did not end there. For the cantor then surprised Mandelshtam with a question of his own. Why, he wished to know, would such a nice and talented young man abandon his people to go live in Moscow like a Christian? Mandelshtam replied with a pithy rabbinic maxim: "Better to be last among lions, than first among hares." Poliachek was unimpressed. He too had once felt the lure of Western music, he explained, before concluding that such a career would have ruined his distinctive Jewish voice: "A spring quenches the thirsty man if he is on dry land; let him be in the sea, and it is of little use. The moonlight dazzles your eyes at night; during the day it is but a pale patch in the sky. In my primitive national form I am distinct; mixed together with all the colors, I would become lost in the crowd." Undeterred, Mandelshtam countered that the modern world did not scare him: "A country is only a miniature image from space; a year is only time in a smaller form; the same is true of virtue, which, similar to

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genius, lies above space and time, and fears neither foreign lands on the road of wandering nor temptation in the era of modern life."[1]

This exchange between the cantor and the poet neatly summarizes the main themes of the history of Jewish art music from the middle of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth. Before 1800, only a handful of European Jews had ventured beyond the confines of the Jewish community into the world of European art music. Many rabbinical authorities frowned on secular musical education as a dangerously seductive pathway to heresy. Even knowledge of Western musical notation was regarded in some quarters with suspicion. In turn, Christian Europeans looked on Jews as an alien culture whose musical practices threatened to contaminate Western art. Yet, at the same time, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Jewish liturgical and folk music professionals – cantors and klezmorim – exhibited increasing interest in Baroque vocal genres, opera and operetta, and European court dances. The allure of art music proved quite strong. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Jewish musicians flocked in extraordinarily high numbers to conservatories across Europe with profound consequences for both Western music and modern Jewish identity.

Mandelshtam's query about the historical origins of the music of the Jews and the cantor's expansive yet curious reply (Christian-Muslim "binational Jewish melody") also point to the ambiguous place of "Jewish music" in the modern European imagination – both Jewish and Christian. From Richard Wagner's famous 1850 anti-Semitic essay "Das Judentum in der Musik" to the racialist theories of fin-de-siècle French and Russian critics, ideological fantasies about the essentialist character of Jewish music – and its indelible imprint in the works of composers of Jewish origin, and even in the styles of Jewish performers – surfaced repeatedly in European culture. Likewise, early twentieth-century Jewish nationalists produced elaborate musical theories of their own. Indeed, the entire project of modern Jewish art music can be characterized as an ongoing search for an answer to the question of how to define the genre of Jewish music horizontally – belonging to the "Oriental" East or Christian West – and vertically – as an autochthonous tradition extending from biblical antiquity to the modern times. Just as Mandelshtam's anecdote suggests, the modern dialogue with the Jewish musical past emerged as a constant theme across the first several generations of Jewish composers. For some of these artists, Jewish religious sonorities required delicate refinement to meet the new aesthetic dictates of Enlightenment rationalism in nineteenth-century Europe ("the era of modern life"). For others, modernity demanded a radical re-imagination of Jewish vernacular and liturgical traditions into a secular form of national art music (at once "primitive" and "modern"). Still other composers gravitated

to modernism as a utopian quest to liberate all art and artists – from the particularistic confines of nation and religion ("above time and space").

This chapter explores these developments through a chronological survey of the period between 1850 and 1925, highlighting major figures as well as shifts in cultural ideas of Jewish music and musicianship down through time. It is divided into three sub-periods: Hebrew Melodies: Virtuosity and Antiquarianism, 1850–1900; Aural Emancipations: Renaissance and Modernisms, 1900–17; and Revolutionary Echoes: Affirmations and Ambiguities, 1917–25.

Hebrew melodies: virtuosity and antiquarianism, 1850–1900

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the idea that a Jew might excel in the realm of European art music constituted an odd, if not unnatural, proposition. Over the next half-century, however, western and central European Jews began a dramatic ascent into the ranks of professional musicians. This socio-cultural trend, already visible *in nucleo* before 1800, swelled into a remarkable – and much remarked upon – pattern of Jewish virtuosos by the middle of the nineteenth century. Jewish child prodigies became the norm for the next seventy-five years, with hundreds upon hundreds of pianists, violinists, cellists, and other musicians concertizing across Europe at very young ages. Some of these notable performers went on to notable careers as composers, including the likes of Ignaz Moscheles (1790–1870), Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864), Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813–88), and Anton Rubinstein (1829–94). Many others swelled the ranks of the new conservatory faculties, symphony orchestras, and other musical institutions that emerged as prime features of nineteenth-century European musical life.[2] All contributed to an image of Jews as singularly talented in the field of art music, though contemporary observers differed widely in their estimation of the sources and meaning of that talent.

In hindsight, historians have explained the rapid gravitation of Jews to art music and extraordinary professional success as stemming from the confluence of several factors: the long-established pattern of music as a hereditary profession in pre-modern European Jewish life; the relative openness of new cultural spheres that catered to a newly ascendant urban bourgeoisie with a strong appetite for secular entertainment; the concrete economic opportunities represented by these new cultural realms, which also attracted a considerable quotient of Jewish musical entrepreneurs, sheet-music publishers, concert impresarios, and critics; the broader pattern of Jewish embourgeoisement, reflected in the popularity of both childhood musical training and amateur chamber music performance as key features of European salon

life; and the identification of many leading classical musical figures (though certainly not all) with the cause of political liberalism. In a larger sense, the Jewish movement into art music was a legacy of the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which framed music as a secular activity, musical talent as an innate human gift irrespective of particular origin, and art as a path to moral self-cultivation and modern individualism.[3]

Significantly, what does *not* appear to have played a strong role in this process, contrary to popular perception, was the force of Jewish religious tradition or traditional rabbinic cultural values. In spite of its significance in pre-modern Jewish life, including in synagogue and wedding rituals, music remained a low-status profession with musicians occupying an ambivalent position in the social hierarchy of the Ashkenazic Jewish community.[4] Nor, with a few notable exceptions, did most of these first few generations of nineteenth-century concert musicians evince much direct self-consciousness about their Jewish musical heritage or active compositional engagement with Jewish themes. Indeed, music beckoned precisely as an ostensibly unobtrusive path of acculturation and social advancement in mainstream European bourgeois society.

That religion was not the motivating force drawing Jews to classical music did not mean that art lacked spiritual significance. On the contrary, for many Jews – both professional performers and dedicated concert patrons – classical music constituted a veritable alternative religion. A case in point is the legendary Hungarian-born violinist Joseph Joachim (1831–1907). A pioneering force in European concert life and musical pedagogy, long a fixture of German musical life, and a close collaborator of Brahms, Schumann, and others, Joachim redefined the nature of violin playing and chamber music during his long career. A nominal convert to Christianity, he remained identified as Jewish yet practiced neither religion. Listening to Beethoven's music, he once wrote, was like listening to the "Religion of the Future" (*Zukunftsreligion*).[5] In this way, absolute music – instrumental music without words – offered an attractive ideal of a universalist realm beyond language, religion, and national differences that otherwise defined so much of the Jewish experience in modern Europe. A later quip retold by the German Jewish humorist Alexander Moszkowski, brother of the noted composer and pianist Moritz Moszkowski, conveyed a similar sentiment: "[I have] no sympathies for any ritual aspects of our religion. Of all the Jewish holidays the only one I keep is the concert of Gruenfeld [a famous Austrian Jewish pianist]."[6]

When Jewishness did surface as a specific theme in nineteenth-century European art music it came clothed in the Romantic garb of a virtuous antiquarianism. Like Jewish visual artists of the day, Jewish composers looked backwards to biblical antiquity in search of religious themes suitable for a

modern era of rational religion and improved Jewish-Christian relations. This trend might be said to have officially begun with the British Jewish composer Isaac Nathan's 1815 collection of song settings of the poet Lord Byron's "Hebrew Melodies," a common touchstone for many later composers of Jewish-themed music, both Jewish and Christian.[7] Like Nathan's work, these aural imaginaries often took the form of compositions that addressed the historic borderlines and commonalities between Judaism and Christianity, such as Felix Mendelssohn's oratorios *Elijah* (1846) and *St. Paul* (1836), Jacques-François-Fromental-Élie Halévy's opera *La Juive* (1840), Ferdinand Hiller's oratorios *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (1840) and *Saul* (1858), Joachim's "Hebrew Melodies" (1854) for viola and piano, Karl Goldmark's opera *The Queen of Sheba* (1875), and Friedrich Gernsheim's Symphony No. 3 in C minor, "Miriam" (1888), inspired by Handel's *Israel in Egypt* oratorio.

Particularly notable exemplars of this pattern came in the works of two of the greatest pianist-composers of the nineteenth century: Anton Rubinstein (1829–94) and Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813–88). Born in the Jewish Pale of Settlement and baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church as an infant, Rubinstein went on to global fame as a concert performer, composer, and artistic celebrity. At the same time, he introduced a modern conservatory system into the Russian Empire that generated a unique social pathway for two generations of Russian Jewish musicians to achieve an unprecedented professional status and legal freedom in an otherwise tightly regimented, illiberal society with onerous legal restrictions on its Jewish population. In his art, Rubinstein opposed both the Romantic nationalism of his Russian contemporaries and the growing cult of Wagner. Instead he often stressed biblical themes such as in his various "spiritual operas," including *Sulamith* (1883), *The Maccabees* (1884), *Moses* (1894), and *Christus* (1895). In the end, his oft-quoted self-evaluation came to summarize his estrangement from a musical world that increasingly insisted on assigning composers to national and religious categories: "To the Jews I am a Christian. To the Christians – a Jew. To the Russians I am a German, and to the Germans – a Russian. For the classicists I am a musical innovator, and for the musical innovators I am an artistic reactionary and so on. The conclusion: I am neither fish nor fowl, in essence a pitiful creature!"[8]

In contrast to Rubinstein's restless performance career, colorful personality, and complex personal identity, Alkan lived his entire life as a traditionally observant religious Jew who abandoned public performance. He rarely, if ever, left his native Paris, and for much of his later life lived as an enigmatic recluse. A graduate of the Paris Conservatoire, he emerged early on as one of the great pianistic talents of French musical life. He became close friends with Chopin, Liszt, and George Sand. Though he vanished

from public view, Alkan produced a large body of technically demanding piano music that sits comfortably alongside that of Liszt and Chopin as some of the most expressive, technically forbidding piano music of the Romantic era. Alkan's piety surfaced in his work with the main Paris synagogue and his compositional efforts to set both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible to music. He framed his Jewishness nearly exclusively in terms of religious referents, chiefly in the form of synagogue texts – and occasionally liturgical melodies – transposed for voice and piano or integrated into biblically themed works such as his "By the Rivers of Babylon" (1859).[9]

The notion of re-harmonizing Jewish and Christian sonorities took a much different form in the music of nineteenth-century Jewish cantor-composers, who reshaped the Jewish liturgical repertoire to reflect the contemporary norms of Romantic style and Christian liturgical music. Chief among these was Salomon Sulzer (1804–90), "father of the modern cantorate," whose career as a prominent cantor in Vienna stretched from the 1820s to 1880s. In his compendium *Schir Zion*, he created an enormously influential style of modern liturgy that amounted to a wholesale aesthetic reformation of Jewish synagogue music.[10] Sulzer trimmed Jewish liturgical music of its perceived Oriental characteristics, such as melisma, extended recitative, modal character, and flowing meter, in favor of a style that conformed more to Christian church hymnody. He adopted fixed meters, four-part choral singing, and conventional European tonal practices for the arrangements of Hebrew-language prayers. His talents as a composer and cantorial soloist earned the respect, praise, and curiosity of the leading critics and composers of his day. Outside the synagogue, Sulzer's career also epitomized the other growing artistic links between central European cantors and the world of modern classical music. He was a well-respected vocal interpreter of Schubert's *Lieder* and served as professor at the Imperial Conservatory in Vienna.[11]

Sulzer's pattern of liturgical reform spread gradually throughout European Jewish synagogue music, particularly in larger urban communities identified with the nascent Jewish Reform religious movement. Across England, France, and the Netherlands, cantors introduced four-part chorale-style singing, organ instrumental accompaniment, and standard Western harmonic practices.[12] Under the leadership of Cantor Samuel Naumbourg (1817–80), the Paris synagogue became a second major center for liturgical composition, and the composers Alkan, Halévy, and Meyerbeer all contributed choral settings of liturgical texts for use there.[13] So too in Berlin, where Louis Lewandowski (1821–94) emerged as a formidable choral composer, putting his German conservatory training to use in building a repertoire of psalm settings that became staples of synagogue music in his

generation and long after.[14] The transformation of oral traditions into textualized repertoires through musical notation had a profound effect on the self-understanding of Jewish communities in nineteenth-century Europe. This was equally true of the Sephardic religious communities of France, Germany, and Austria, which followed the same pattern of assimilating orally based liturgical traditions into the stylistic conventions of the surrounding European musical culture.[15]

Alongside this Jewish recasting of cantorial music in terms of modern European aesthetics, nineteenth-century Christian composers turned to the Jewish musical corpus in search of source material with which to color biblical-themed works and other exotic Oriental fantasies. This phenomenon appeared most strikingly in the Russian Empire, where from Mikhail Glinka onwards, composers transcribed contemporary Jewish melodies for use in their compositions, frequently titled "Hebrew Melody" or "Hebrew Song." These typically elegiac compositions by the likes of Rimskii-Korsakov, Balakirev, Mussorgsky, and others evoked a lost Hebraic melos from antiquity sometimes contrasted implicitly with a calcified or degenerated present-day Jewish folklore.[16] Though this philo-Semitic trend of Jewish folkloric melodies set by Christian composers continued on in later compositions such as "Chanson hébraïque" (1910) and "Deux mélodies hébraïques" (1914) by Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), a key turning point emerged with the 1881 "Kol Nidrei" of Max Bruch (1838–1920). Bruch's setting of the traditional Yom Kippur prayer for cello and piano, inspired by his musical contacts with the Jewish communities of Berlin and Liverpool, achieved tremendous popularity as a concert piece and aural symbol of Jewish identity (so much so that Bruch, a German Protestant, has often been erroneously claimed as a Jew by birth). Its continued presence in the classical repertoire speaks to its potent appeal as a document of Jewish liturgical tradition refashioned as modern art music.

Even as Romanticism prompted composers to experiment with elements of Jewish musical folklore, the idea of a distinctively Jewish strain of modern art music did not appear until the end of the nineteenth century. It would take two further developments for the notion of "Jewish music" to emerge in European discourse: the rise of Jewish ethnic nationalism and a hardening of the racial lines in European thought. A decisive factor in this process was the appearance of the explosive modern anti-Semitic musical myth propagated by Richard Wagner. In his 1850 essay "Das Judentum in der Musik," published anonymously in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, then again under his own name in 1869, Wagner presented a brutally racist diatribe against the alien Jewish presence in the world of European music and the other arts. For decades before Wagner's pamphlet the concentration of acculturated Jews in the classical music profession as both performers

and composers – and the ambiguous relationship between composition and performance as ideational poles in the Romantic artistic imagination – had existed as a locus for anti-Jewish ideologies. So too did the medieval "music libel" of Jewish musicians as noise polluters of Christian harmony persist into the modern era.[17] Wagner amplified these preexisting negative tropes, blending them with Romantic nationalism and modern racism to craft a new ideology of full-blown musical anti-Semitism.[18] For Wagner, Jewish racial identity was inescapable in music. Further, since diasporic Jews possessed no common national language or authentic folk culture of their own from which to generate original art, they were doomed to be imitators, manipulators, and defilers of German, French, and other European music. He thus condemned Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer for their Judaic limitations as composers and mocked the idea of Jewish music.

Wagner's essay was not the only such ideological expression regarding the links between Jews and art music to appear at mid-century. Franz Liszt's *The Gypsies and Their Music in Hungary* (1859; rev. ed. 1881), though not entirely written by the composer himself, presented a similar tranche of anti-Semitic stereotypes.[19] In Russia, England, and elsewhere, influential writers also proffered elaborated theories about Jewish musical talent.[20] Popular English novels such as Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby* (1844), Elizabeth Sara Sheppard's *Charles Auchester* (1849), and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) further engrained the cliché of an innate Jewish musical talent in the Western imagination – but with a significant difference.[21] Almost a mirror image of their anti-Semitic counterparts, these philo-Semitic theories often ascribed to Jewish composers a discernible Semitic character reflected in their compositions by linearity, ornamentation, or lyricism and a conversant weakness in terms of larger musical thematism.[22] Yet for all the parallels and overlap between the various nineteenth-century anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic theories of Jewish musicality, Wagner's essay stood out for its lasting influence on European musical thought. Buoyed by Wagner's towering reputation as a composer and cultural figure, "Das Judentum in der Musik" cast a long shadow over the critical reputations and public receptions of multiple generations of European Jewish composers, notably Mendelssohn and Mahler.[23] It also distinctly impacted the ways later Jewish composers attempting to forge a national style of Jewish art music understood their own relationship to the Western tradition.[24]

Aural emancipations: Renaissance and Modernisms, 1900–1917

After 1900, a new generation of Jewish musicians came of age in European musical life. With urbanization and secularization making ever-faster

inroads into central and eastern Europe, the pattern of Jewish demographic overrepresentation in classical music only intensified. Jewish residents of Vienna were three times more likely to study music than non-Jews, while Russian Jews constituted roughly one out of every three conservatory-trained musicians in their country. Indeed, the conservatories of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Berlin, Odessa, and other European cities became extraordinary breeding grounds for a generation of Jewish violinists, pianists, and other musicians who would predominate in the concert world of the twentieth century.[25] Of particular note is the impressive roster of violin prodigies that emerged from the St. Petersburg Conservatory studio of Hungarian-born violinist and master pedagogue Leopold Auer (1845–1930), himself a student of Joachim. Auer's pupils included the likes of virtuosos Jascha Heifetz (1901–87), Mischa Elman (1891–1967), Nathan Milstein (1903–92), and Efrem Zimbalist (1890–1985). The careers of European Jewish virtuosos would in many respects parallel those of their nineteenth-century forebears. Highly mobile individuals in an age of war, revolution, and emigration, these musical celebrities came to be heralded as the international torchbearers for the cultural prestige of classical music and objects of affection for European audiences nostalgic for the vanishing world of the nineteenth century. So too would Jews continue to play a significant role in Western art music as publishers, critics, and scholars.[26]

The post-1900 generation of European Jewish composers was the first to appear on the historical stage with an intensely ideological, self-conscious determination to break with the past. This revolutionary ethos took two distinct forms. In the Russian Empire, an explicitly Jewish national renaissance movement centered in the Russian Empire rejected the putative absorption of Jewish musicians into a universalist European culture. These Jewish nationalist composers called for the renewal of Jewish national identity through freeing a previously silenced Jewish voice within Western music. At virtually the same moment, a looser central European avant-garde school appeared, comprised of composers who aspired to emancipate music itself from the aesthetic conventions of nineteenth-century realism in favor of an abstract modernism. What linked these two cohorts – along with those Jewish composers who bucked both trends – was an acute awareness of the passage of European Jewry into a new historical era. In response to tremendous societal change, modernist nationalists and cosmopolitan modernists alike called for an immediate radical reconstruction of Jewish identity in music. Yet both found that the long shadows of the Jewish past continued to define Jewish identity in Western music.

In the Russian Empire, a number of conservatory-trained Jewish composers experimented with Jewish musical ethnography in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Inspired by the new spirit of secular Jewish nationalism,

emboldened by the Russian, Finnish, and other national schools, and encouraged by Russian musical mentors such as Rimskii-Korsakov, Balakirev, and the critic Vladimir Stasov, these composers began to collect and arrange Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs, traditional liturgical selections, Hasidic spiritual chants, and klezmer dance tunes.[27] The key figure in this process was the Russian critic, ethnographer, and composer Joel (Iulii Dmitrevich) Engel (1868–1927). A Moscow Conservatory graduate, Engel presented a concert of Yiddish folk song arrangements in 1900 in Moscow that subsequently came to be regarded by many as the first-ever concert of Jewish art music. With the stature that came as one of Russia's leading music critics, Engel went on to advocate a Jewish national movement in classical music. He also published several influential song collections, and pioneered the use of early sound recording technology to document *shtetl* musical traditions *in situ*.[28]

Engel was joined in his efforts by a group of young composers, among them Mikhail Gnesin (1883–1957), Solomon Rosowsky (1878–1962), Lazare Saminsky (1882–1959), and Moyshe Milner (1886–1953), who had all met in Rimskii-Korsakov's composition class at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1908, these St. Petersburg musicians launched the Society for Jewish Folk Music (*Obshchestvo evreiskoi narodnoi muzyki*). The new organization pursued a campaign on multiple fronts to encourage explicitly Jewish art music composition, to promote Jewish cultural nationalism among Russian Jewish conservatory musicians, and to define through research and polemical debate the legitimate paternity and national contours of Jewish music. Engel was named the organization's first honorary member, and in 1913 he opened a branch in Moscow.[29]

In the decade after 1908, the Society for Jewish Folk Music produced nearly 1,000 concerts across Russia and eastern Europe, launched branches in many cities, and issued a very popular songbook for schools and homes. Most crucially, they published a number of compositions by multiple composers that used Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs and klezmer instrumental dance melodies in vocal arrangements and small chamber music formats. Many of these early compositions reflected the tenets of Russian Romanticism and common-practice harmonies. The Russian influence could also be detected in performance practices and other extra-musical referents that signaled Jewish music to be simultaneously a recovered Jewish national voice, an enriching contribution to European culture, and a coveted object of Russian imperial patrimony. Building on Russian Orientalism and European antiquarianism, the Russian Jewish School also pioneered new techniques of Jewish auto-exoticism. Composers such as Engel, Ephraim Shkliar, Rosowsky, and Leo Zeitlin (1884–1930) pioneered a genre of musical miniatures that sought to preserve the folkloric qualities of ethnographically sourced melodies in the lead instrumental voices with modern harmonic

accompaniments and novel instrumentations.[30] Just as in other spheres of modern Jewish culture, many composers also imbibed the influence of pan-European modernism and French Impressionism. Composers such as Joseph Achron (1886–1943), Gnesin, and Alexander Krein (1883–1951) married the chromaticist experiments, intense tonal lyricism, and extended harmonies of modernist composers like Scriabin and Debussy to Jewish scales and intonational gestures.[31] They also moved easily back and forth between the larger European artistic milieu and the world of modern Jewish culture. It was not uncommon for these composers to set both Russian Symbolist poetry and modern Hebrew and Yiddish lyrics to music. They thus positioned Jewish art music simultaneously as one genre within a larger universe of Jewish cultural expression and as a stream within modern Russian and European art music.

The young Jewish composers of late Tsarist Russia balanced an attraction to the new universalist aesthetics of modernist abstraction with a particularistic commitment to representing Jewish identity in music. A similar phenomenon appeared in the Sephardic musical realm in the form of the Alexandrian-born Turkish-Jewish composer Alberto Hemsi, who collected and arranged Sephardic Jewish song texts and melodies in his landmark collection *Coplas Sefardies* (1932–73). By contrast, the central European Jewish exponents of modernism dispensed with all Romantic folklorism and realism alike in favor of a new avant-garde ideology of tonal experimentation and formal abstraction. In the eyes of composers such as Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) and Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), modern art demanded that artists transcend ethnic or religious parochialisms. Yet this utopian goal proved difficult to achieve in practice.

Born in the Austrian Bohemian hinterlands, Mahler rose to become arguably the leading conductor and symphonist of the fin-de-siècle. As a composer, he drew acclaim for his music's psychological intensity, ruminative beauty, and tonal complexity. Yet he also faced a series of devastating crises in his personal life, including illness and infidelity. He additionally possessed a vexed identity as an ambivalent convert to Christianity and an ongoing target of anti-Semitism. His aching sense of inner conflict, emotional displacement, and powerful longing for transcendence permeated his deeply lyrical, expressionist style. Scholars have differed about the presence of explicitly Jewish influences in his brooding modernist textures. Yet there is little disagreement that Mahler's life and art epitomized the mixture of triumph and tragedy, inclusion and exclusion that characterized the larger experience of generations of Jews in the fin-de-siècle world of European classical music.[32] He summed up his own fate with his famous remark: "I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed."

Similarly, Schoenberg launched a musical revolution over the course of 1908 and 1909 with works that stretched tonality outwards in pursuit of what he termed the "emancipation of dissonance." An Austrian Jew who converted to German Lutheranism, Schoenberg rejected realism for extreme chromaticism, unconventional rhythms, and eventually, the serialist approach of tone-rows. Paradoxically, Schoenberg extolled his antiparochial aesthetic universalism as a German cultural achievement. This complicated utopianism represented a dialectical response to the dilemmas of Jewishness in art music. Yet it did not prevent European anti-Semitic ideologues from collapsing Jewishness and modernism into a single essentialist view of Jews as arch-modernists when it came to music. This anti-Semitic attack on modernism grew even stronger after the rise of Nazism. This prompted Schoenberg to publicly renounce his Germanism and Christianity and formally re-embrace Jewish religion, politics, and eventually musical thematics in his own idiosyncratic way.[33]

The Jewish currents of nationalism and modernism were never completely sealed off from one another. A case in point is the Swiss Jewish composer Ernest Bloch (1890–1959). Bloch composed his first Jewish-themed works shortly before World War I. He soon attracted international fame. Indeed, to many Western observers, Bloch stood out as the "first Jewish composer." Yet in contrast to the Russian Jewish composers, he opted not to draw directly on Jewish folkloric material in most of his compositions. In iconic works such as his *Schelomo Rhapsody* for cello and orchestra (1914/1915), he avoided quotation from Jewish liturgical or folkloric music. Instead he spoke of himself as a composer whose Jewish essence simply bubbled up, flowing organically into his works. In this scheme of self-racialization or auto-exoticization, Bloch imagined his own "Jewish soul" to be an inescapable and defining element of his work. In works such as his Piano Quintet (1921–3), which employed a complex hybrid of expressionism and neoclassicism, avoiding any explicit Jewish quotations or musical markers, the quarter-tone intervals and Jewish scalar intervals gestured obliquely towards an East European Jewish melody. At times Bloch encouraged a Jewish reading of his work, while at other moments he bristled at this artificial demarcation of his music as Jewish and himself as a "Jewish composer." This ambiguity points to both the possibilities and the perils of modernism for Jewish art music in the World War I era.[34]

Other variations on Bloch's racialized Jewish modernism echoed across the Jewish musical world in important ways during the 1910s. In the Russian Empire, composer Lazare Saminsky denounced the "assimilated" Jewish composers who avoided their racial destiny. He urged his fellow Jewish composers to employ only purely Jewish liturgical melodies with an authentic biblical paternity instead of modern Yiddish melodies borrowed from

surrounding non-Jewish cultures of eastern Europe.[35] The Zionist music critic Max Brod (1884–1968) argued influentially that Mahler's music must be understood in terms of the composer's Hasidic soul. In Ottoman Palestine, Russian-born musicologist and pedagogue Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1882–1938) conducted a massive scholarly project to collect the true specimens of Hebrew music – ancient melodies uncorrupted by millennia of exposure to the diaspora – primarily from the "Oriental" sections of the Jewish nation, those Jewish communities in the Arab Middle East. He articulated the concept of a musical Hebrewism – an ideological rejection of exilic Western culture for a reborn Hebrew aesthetic based on authentic elements indigenous to the Middle East. In polemical writings in Hebrew, German, and English, Idelsohn called for a global racial awakening among Jewish composers. Though few responded directly to his manifestos, his ideas still cast a long shadow over the fields of Israeli and diasporic Jewish art music for decades to come. Idelsohn's massive ten-volume *Thesaurus of Hebrew-Oriental Melodies* became a chief source of motivic material and artistic inspiration for Jewish composers of modern Israeli, European, and American Jewish art music.[36]

Revolutionary echoes: affirmations and ambiguities, 1917–1925

The traumas of World War I and post-war revolutions had an explosive impact on Jewish art music. The displacement of individual musicians led to a collapse of many large-scale cultural projects, particularly in the Russian context. Yet the waves of emigration and resettlement also brought Jewish art music to new corners of the globe. So too did it lead to new attempts to institutionalize and propagate compositional efforts and novel forms of artistic collaboration. As a result, the period from 1915 to 1925 saw a great rise in the global profile of Jewish art music combined with increasing political pressures and ideological conflicts over its meaning.

For the Russian Jewish composers associated with the Society for Jewish Folk Music, the events of 1917 unleashed a tumultuous creative period. Emboldened by the Balfour Declaration's salutary effect on Zionism and early encouragement from Bolshevik revolutionary leaders, composers such as Engel, Krein, and Gnesin threw themselves into a new phase of activity. Socialist political themes commingled with settings of modern Hebrew poetry and modernist scores for the experimental Yiddish theater studios of Moscow and Petrograd. A new burst of chromaticist and harmonic abstraction in the first Jewish-themed piano sonatas and symphonic works by Krein and Gnesin signified a striking convergence between Russian

revolutionary avant-garde, Jewish musical nationalism, and European modernism as a whole. Works such as Gnesin's 1919 *Symphonic Fantasia à la Juif* and Krein's First Symphony (1921) also signified a trend of expanding musical forms. By the mid-1920s, Jewish symphonic works were commonly found on the programs of Soviet orchestral concerts as well as in Vienna, Berlin, and New York.

Jewish popular composers in the Yiddish theaters of eastern Europe, London, and New York had long experimented with light operetta forms, mixing liturgical motifs with Yiddish folk songs and Wagner and Verdi arias to form a musical pastiche. The 1910s and 1920s witnessed a flurry of unsuccessful attempts to compose the first full-fledged Jewish national opera. These included London cantor-composer Samuel Alman's Yiddish-language *King Ahaz* (1912); Gnesin's unfinished Hebrew-language work *Abram's Youth* (1923), begun while he was living near Jerusalem; Milner's Yiddish-language opera *The Heavens are Burning* (1923), briefly premiered in Leningrad; Idelsohn's never-performed Hebrew-language *Jephta* (1921); and Jacob Weinberg's 1925 Hebrew-language work *He-ḥalutz* (The Pioneers), composed in Jerusalem shortly before the Odessa-born musician's departure for the United States.

No less impactful than war, revolution, and migration on Jewish art music was the rise of new technologies of music publishing and recorded sound. The first commercial recordings of Yiddish and Hebrew art songs began to appear in the Russian Empire and the United States in the late 1910s, along with an important early recording of Joseph Achron's "Hebrew Melody," issued in 1917 by Jascha Heifetz. International music publishing earned the works of Jewish composers new audiences as reprint series and new editions carried the music across the world, inspiring other publishing initiatives in Vienna, Berlin, and elsewhere.[37] These publishing efforts were hallmarks of a new phase of the institutionalization of Jewish art music prompted by the consolidation of the Soviet Bolshevik state and the boost in fortunes of the international Zionist movement. The Society for Jewish Folk Music was reorganized in 1923 in Moscow as the Society for Jewish Music. Parallel organizations appeared in Vienna, Paris, Berlin, and eventually New York and Jerusalem.[38] In Riga, Vilnius, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv, music conservatories were started to train Jewish concert musicians.

In central Europe, the modernist avant-garde began to cross paths directly with the Jewish musical movement. The Russian-born cellist Joachim Stuchevsky (1891–1982), already a fierce proponent of Jewish art music based on the klezmer repertoire of Jewish eastern Europe, launched the *Verein zur Förderung jüdischer Musik* in Vienna. At the same time, he served as first cellist of the Kolisch Quartet, where he befriended Schoenberg

and performed the premieres of path-breaking modernist works by Berg and others. The Berlin-born Erich Walter Sternberg (1891–1974) wrote his first String Quartet (1924) in an Expressionist style with shades of Hindemith and Schoenberg. Yet he also incorporated a Yiddish popular song and the *Shema* prayer into the work. Similar cross-pollinations reflected a new interest in Jewish themes among modernists elsewhere in western Europe and the United States. In France, the bitonality of Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) included Jewish musical settings beginning with his 1916 *Poèmes juives*. The Russian-born Polish-French Jewish composer Alexandre Tansman (1897–1986) achieved renown for his mixture of neoclassicism with modernism, and Polish and Jewish folk influences, as evidenced by his *Rapsodie hébraïque* for orchestra (1933). In the United States, young Russian-born composers such as Lazar Weiner (1897–1982) and Solomon Golub (1887–1952) continued the development of a new genre of Yiddish art songs. In 1919 the Zimro Ensemble formed in revolutionary Petrograd by clarinetist Simeon Bellison (1881–1953) arrived in New York City after a round-the-world tour to raise funds for a Jewish national conservatory in Palestine. Their Carnegie Hall debut inspired Serge Prokofiev to compose his "Overture on Hebrew Themes" (1919).

By the mid-1920s, Jewish art music seemed to be on the verge of a new status in the larger world of classical music. Soviet and American critics wrote positively of a Jewish national school now emerging into view. In the United States, composers such as Saminsky, Bloch, Achron, and Leo Ornstein (1893–2002) pushed forward an artistic agenda that pledged equal parts loyalty to both European modernism and Jewish nationalism. In the Soviet Union, state support encouraged those composers who had remained. In central Europe, a larger Jewish cultural renaissance engulfed many composers and performers. British Palestine continued to attract a stream of Zionist immigrants and saw the launch of a music department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1925. For Jewish nationalist composers, the rise of a generation of international Jewish concert virtuosos who incorporated Jewish-themed compositions into their repertoires added to the prestige of their efforts to forge a distinct national school.

Yet the very factors that had stimulated the spread of Jewish musicians and musical ideas across the globe also contributed to their weakness and divergence. The politicization of musical life in the Soviet Union introduced discordant notes into the dialogue between avant-garde modernists, Bolshevik populists, and neo-nationalist Jewish composers. The success of Schoenberg, Bloch, and other more abstract modernists inspired envy and frustration among Russian Jewish composers committed to Romanticist folklorism. The currents of anti-Semitism in central Europe

continued to unleash torrents of attack on the Jewish presence in European musical life. Opponents of modernism blamed Jews as the agents of Western music's atonal demise. In the Jewish community of Palestine, the economic stagnation and political violence frustrated attempts to build a substantial European-style concert music culture. A mass exodus of recently arrived Russian Jewish composers only added to the disruption in the development of a national musical culture.

These contradictory trends inspired mixed reactions among contemporary observers. By 1925, some critics and composers spoke of Jewish art music as a coherent nationalist project still in its infancy. They proclaimed the dawn of a new era in which de-assimilation would produce a new generation of creative artists and reborn sounds. Still others saw nationalism as a trap for Jewish composers. For them the enduring ambiguity of Jewish identity in Western music was an insurmountable fact. It was also a dangerous mark of difference in a classical musical world increasingly defined by racism and fascism. They feared the increasingly loud claims of anti-Semites about the political meaning of Jewish music in Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States. Both anxiety and optimism, affirmation and ambiguity would continue to mark Jewish art music in the ensuing decades leading up to World War II and even afterwards. In the meantime, the larger intertwined fates of Jews and modern classical music would change dramatically in ways that few in 1925 could even imagine.

Notes

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