

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Harold Fisch: S. Y. Agnon, Modern Literature Monographs*  
(New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975).

*Reviewed by William Braun*

Introductory essays on major writers demand exceptional capabilities on the part of their authors: sympathy for the artist, a thorough knowledge both of the work and its secondary literature, an enthusiasm easily communicated to the reader, and finally a talent for organization which can compress a life-time of artistic achievement into a limited number of pages without sacrificing its authentic essence and flavor.

Professor Fisch acquits himself well of this task in his introduction to S. Y. Agnon. Faced with the well-known difficulty regarding the chronological order in which the works were written and often re-written, Professor Fisch avoids the chronological approach altogether and instead selects certain themes and stylistic modes around which he can organize his discussion. By elaborating on common qualities as he retells the plots of Agnon's novels and short stories, he uncovers the threads which unify the work.

All of Agnon's work is *figural* in Erich Auerbach's sense. It contains, in different degrees and constellations, fully realized characters and situations, but they, at the same time, point beyond themselves, have further meaning, and are carriers of a more mysterious and more inclusive truth. Professor Fisch shows convincingly that this truth in each case is the existence, the history, the purpose and the possible redemption of the Jewish people.

The distinction between foreground and background is traced in the theme of the *Aguna*, the abandoned wife, for here the separation of the lovers points at the same time towards the separation of the people of Israel and the land of Israel from its Creator. The childhood oath, another frequent Agnon theme, a promise made by children or their parents, a lasting bond not easily broken, refers as well to the bond between the *shekhinah* and Israel. The lost key to the ancient *Bet Hamidrash* in Agnon's *Shebush*, his native Buczacz,

## Book Reviews

found later in Jerusalem, is also a symbol for the transfer of old values to a modern home. Agnon's digressiveness, which tends to delay his stories and make them meander and lose their way, are parts of the foreground, while in the background, the all-knowing author assures us that the pattern of destiny will unfold and that there is a providential force at work. The dreaming consciousness, the uncontrolled depth and range of associations, the patterns that seem to grow in circles, which are so characteristic of some stories, are all guided by the author who directs the thrust toward resolution.

At times, it may seem that the background overwhelms the foreground, as in *Sefer HaMa'asim*, (Book of Fables), a work too diffi-

cult to understand without an interpretation which takes the mythic Jewish background into consideration. At other times, as in *Sippur Pashut*, (*A Simple Tale*), the clarity of the foreground seems to prevail. In each case, however, Professor Fisch points out the tension between foreground and background, between reality and the myth of Jewish history with its endless cycles of exiles and returns, catastrophes and redemptions.

Professor Fisch's introduction stimulates the reader to return to the originals to seek out for himself the workings of the dialectic, and to experience that inner growth, as he plots the future from the past, that comes from reading Agnon. This invitation should neither be postponed nor denied.

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*Concise Encyclopedia of Jewish Music*, by MACY NULMAN (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

Reviewed by Eric Offenbacher

This encyclopedia represents a praiseworthy attempt to include in one "concise" volume (276 pages) about 500 alphabetical listings of what may be gathered under the collective—and quite ambiguous—term "Jewish music." The book reveals an immense amount of scholarship that has gone into its preparation, as evidenced by the valuable bibliographical source material after almost every entry. Cantor Nulman is to be commended for offering an inquiring public—both

laity and professionals—a quick reference work of merit covering multi-faceted terms encountered in the synagogue service (cantillations), descriptions of Biblical instruments, cantorial compositions, as well as 150 biographical sketches of *hazzanim*, of various Jewish composers, musicologists, etc.

The compilation must be judged indiscriminate, however, and poorly edited. The author's introductory statement explains in part, why. He states: "I was faced with the problem of selection and deletion of items, titles and names." Any such

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

encyclopedic undertaking must of necessity grapple with personal predilections of choice. Consequently, we may begin by questioning this choice through an analysis of the term "Jewish music" which never has been conclusively defined.

What is Jewish music? Is it music by Jewish composers *per se*, or by non-Jewish composers writing on Hebraic or Biblical themes? Is it traditional *niggunim* as they have come down to us over many generations? Is it the synagogue music of Western Europe, mostly in a "major" mode, and often fashioned under secular influences of the countries of origin? Is it the heart-rending cantorial compositions of Eastern Europe, mostly in a "minor" mode, reflecting the outpourings of souls hounded by pogroms and persecution? Is it the music of contemporary American Jewish composers, regardless of their subject, or of modern Israel? The answer may well encompass all of these.

In an analytical essay on "The Synagogue Music in its Historical Development" by one of Europe's well-known choir conductors, the late Max Neumann, Jewish music is well defined in the juxtaposition of "art" and "religion." They complement each other in both church and synagogue music. But while the former, says Neumann, with its organ, choir and other means, tends to create a reverential atmosphere at services from *without*, traditional synagogue services over the ages have called on musical (cantorial) renditions to express prayerful emotions from *within* ("Mi-ma'amakim karati kah"). Here, then, we may

arrive at one genuine aspect of true Jewish music and Macy Nulman, to be sure, is well aware of that. Yet his attempt at embracing his subject matter leads him to strange and arbitrary inclusions and omissions.

Astoundingly, one finds no entry for such world famous *hazzanim* as Kwartin, Sirota, Herschmann, Alter, David and Moshe Kusevitzky, Glantz, Waldman and many others. Among the important synagogue composers of the French school (in addition to Naumbourg) mention should have been made of Samuel David and Jules Franck. Also omitted is the outstanding Samuel Alman of England. On the other hand, articles of other cantor-composers who did find their way into print, could have been much more concise, deleting irrelevant material. For example, in the piece on Mombach: "He conducted concerts at the Jewish Workingmen's Club and served as a member of the Committee for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge." And while on the subject of editing, Nulman informs us under the heading Concert: "Public performance of vocal or instrumental music, or both." But most disturbing is the lack of cross-referencing. Who would look under *Hashkivenu* to find a work by Leonard Bernstein? Bernstein by himself merits no entry under his name. Who would look under First Symphony or Second Symphony to find compositions by Ben-Haim? Here, at least, an entry under the composer's name refers us to these works also. Who would look under *Hamaariv Aravim* to find a composition by—of all people—Morton

## Book Reviews

Gould? Violin Concerto refers to a work by Ernest Bloch, as if he were the sole inventor of this art form. Other composers represented in the Encyclopedia by the title of certain works *only* and not cross-referenced under their names are (in alphabetical order): Bruch, Copland (formerly Caplan), Halevy, Harris, Marcello, Moussorgsky, Prokofiev, Ravel, Schoenberg, Villa-Lobos and Wolpe. While looking up a certain piece of "Jewish" music how much easier would it turn out for the reader to find the composer by name first with an appropriate explanation as to his connection with Hebrew themes or subjects. These facts are frequently unknown, and perhaps even surprising, to the Jewish music lover. In this area, also, Nulman uses an arbitrary yardstick. Handel's Judas Maccabaeus receives an entry of about 125 words while "Israel in Egypt," another of Handel's religious oratorios, is not listed. Neither is Mendelssohn's "Elijah" nor Haydn's "Creation," both works quite literally based on texts in the Bible.

A number of contemporary women composers deserve to be noted by Nulman, such as Miriam Gideon, Judith Eisenstein and Tzipora Jochsberger. Bathia Churgin of Israel is omitted from the list of musicologists. Under the heading Chorus, the Zamir Chorale of New York, an important collegiate group founded by Stanley Sperber, should be included. It has branches in Boston and Israel. Information on the *Tal* and *Geshem* prayers, so often set to music and interpreted by outstanding *hazzanim*, are hard to come by. One can find some

oblique references under the headings *Kaddish* and *Missinai Tunes*.

A real service is offered by Nulman, however, in his descriptions of Biblical instruments and the many references to pertinent sources. Entries under the headings *Kinnor* and *Nebel* are fine examples of scholarship and can send the inquiring reader to further intellectual pursuits. One of the best collections of these original instruments is to be found in the Music Museum of Haifa, Israel (Moshe Gorali, Director and expert in this field). Their brochure "Music in Ancient Israel," published in 1972-73, can serve as excellent additional study material to Nulman's references.

As a sidelight, the following observation might be of interest. On page 101, on the subject of *Hatikvah*, Nulman writes:

"The first orchestral arrangement by Kurt Weill of *Hatikvah* was recently found (1971); it was first performed in New York City in 1947." And later on: "The original manuscript of Kurt Weill's harmonization of *Hatikvah* is also at the Hebrew University."

There is a story in connection with these quotations, never yet told to American readers. I was fortunate to "find" the Weill manuscript in a Greenwich Village shop of old books and music in 1970 (not 1971) and persuaded a New York philanthropist to purchase this unique *Hatikvah* orchestral score and present it as a gift to the Hebrew University. It is now known that the occasion for which Weill composed the grandiose arrangement was a Dinner at the Waldorf

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Astoria Hotel, held in tribute to the late Chaim Weizmann on November 25, 1947. The Boston Symphony Orchestra with their conductor Serge Koussevitzky had been flown to New York for the special purpose of entertaining the dinner guests with symphonic music (there exist personal letters of thanks written by Weizmann to both, Koussevitzky and Weill). The *Star Spangled Banner*, fully orchestrated, opened the proceedings. The *Hatikvah* which followed, could not possibly stand behind with the then customary piano accompaniment. And so, Kurt Weill, a popular Jewish composer of Broadway fame, was commissioned beforehand to write a "harmonization" (as Nulman has it) for large orchestral forces. That the idea was the result of an emergency situation and may have occurred to the hosts of the evening in the last minute, can possibly be surmised from the fact that Kurt Weill dated his manuscript 19 November 1947, six days before the first (and only) American performance.

The work of the late Cantor Asher Goldenberg, mentioned and illustrated on the same page as "unsuccessful" in his own *Hatikvah* ar-

angement, should not be belittled. Goldenberg (whose correct dates are 1887-1954) devoted a lifetime of effort to see the Hebrew language properly accented, in cantorial deliveries as well as in congregational singing; to wit, in his little volume *Shirat Hakahal*, first published in 1944. This matter had been neglected by many of our foremost *hazzanim* - composers. How "shocking" would it sound to an Englishman to have his Shakespeare improperly enunciated. Oftentimes we hear our Hebrew language "butchered" for the sake of fitting it into a given tune—and hardly anyone in the congregation bats an eyelash. For this "unsuccessful" effort, indeed, Cantor Asher Goldenberg should have deserved an entry of his own in this encyclopedia.

A chronological listing of "Highlights in the History of Jewish Music" is appended to the volume. As a recommendation for future editions, a total bibliography of all references appearing in the footnotes, alphabetically arranged by authors and placed at the end of the book, could enhance even further the usefulness of Nulman's painstaking research.

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