

Paul Ben-Haim: **The Oratorio *Joram* and the Jewish Identity of a Composer**

LIRAN GURKIEWICZ



Figure 1 Paul Ben-Haim (Frankenburger), courtesy of the Paul Ben-Haim Archive, The National Library of Israel, Mus55, M

The *Joram* oratorio for mixed choir, soprano, tenor, baritone, and bass was Paul Ben-Haim's last large-scale composition.¹ Written in Munich in 1931-33, prior to the composer's escape from Nazi Germany and immigration to Israel (Palestine), the oratorio was, in Ben-Haim's own view, his *magnum opus*. A difficult and challenging work, *Joram* was first performed almost half a century later, in 1979, under the baton of Aharon Harlap, and even then only partially and not in its original German. The first complete and authentic performance, organized by Prof. Jehoash Hirshberg and Dr. Thea Vignau was performed by Hayko Siemens and the Munich Motet Choir and took place in Munich

¹ A different version of this paper, in Hebrew, will appear in a forthcoming volume in the series *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel (Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society; Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, in print)*, edited by Orna Miller.

in November 2008, as a special concert to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. Additional concerts were given in 2010 by the same ensemble of players, performing in Dresden and Nuremberg, and, on April 3, 2012, by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, playing in Tel Aviv's Smolarz Auditorium to a large and enthusiastic audience.²

Ben-Haim's emigration in 1933 disrupted a distinguished career as a conductor, pianist, and composer. In Israel, Ben-Haim has long been regarded as a founding father of Israeli art music, and as one of its most important and influential purveyors.³ Ben-Haim's *Joram* is not merely a musical achievement in its own right, but a precursor of modern Israeli art music, as well as being a musical representation of Jewish-German culture on the eve of its extinction. Yet, despite *Joram's* multifaceted importance, no thorough academic discussion of it exists, with the exception of the relevant chapter in Hirshberg's monograph. More generally, Ben-Haim's compositional works from Germany have not received adequate recognition and are nowadays rarely, if ever, performed. Given Ben-Haim's centrality to Israeli art music, it would be of great importance to reevaluate his German works and examine their affinities with the later works written in Israel.

The accepted view today is that Ben-Haim's emigration represents a break in his compositional approach. In a biography published in honor of the composer's seventieth birthday, Peter Gradenwitz writes of a "clear break in his style," from a central European style of composition to a style influenced by the folk music of the Middle East.⁴ Similarly, Ben-Zion Orgad claims that "the encounter with the musical culture of the East stylistically revolutionized [Ben-Haim's] work."⁵ Israel Shalita adds: "Upon his emigration, [Ben-Haim] was confronted with issues regarding content, language, and style. He turned to the 'source' and started everything anew."⁶ Jehoash Hirshberg, author of Ben-Haim's only book-length biography, does note the composer's desire to write music of Jewish content in Germany, yet views *Joram* as Ben-Haim's most German work, his last attempt to cling to his German heritage in the face of hostility and rejection.⁷ And Neil W. Levin writes: "Many truly Judaic and Judaically inspired works were to come, but only after [Ben-Haim's] *aliya*"; *Joram* is accordingly, in his view, an intensely spiritual, even religious piece, but by no means a Judaic work.⁸

These claims stand in marked contrast, however, to Ben-Haim's own view of his work. When asked in his later years why, on immigrating to Palestine in the 1930s, he

² A commercial live recording of the *Joram* oratorio with the Israel Philharmonic and Hayko Siemens from April 2012 is available as of November 2012 (Helicon Classics). On the reception of *Joram* in Tel Aviv, see Noam Ben Ze'ev, "Lost in 1933 Germany, Jewish Composer's Grand Opus Finally Reaches Israeli Stage," *Ha'aretz*, 2 April 2012: <http://www.haaretz.com/culture/arts-leisure/lost-in-1933-germany-jewish-composer-s-grand-opus-finally-reaches-israeli-stage-1.422050>.

See also: Malcolm Miller, "Paul Ben-Haim Oratorio heard by Malcolm Miller" *Music and Vision Daily*, 6 April 2012: <http://www.mvdaily.com/2012/04/benhaim.htm>

³ Jehoash Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim: His Life and Works* (2nd edn.) (Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 2010).

⁴ *Paul Ben-Haim* (Tel Aviv: Israel Music Publications, 1967), 4. The biography was published anonymously; the author is assumed to be Ben-Haim's publisher, Peter Gradenwitz.

⁵ Ben-Zion Orgad, "From Israel: An Orchestral Suite by Paul Ben-Haim" [Hebrew]. In *Listening Guide to Israeli Music*, ed. Dalia Golomb & Ben-Zion Orgad [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-merkaz ha-methodi le-muzika, 1984), 84.

⁶ Israel Shalita, *Jewish Music and Musicians: A History of Jewish Music from Antiquity to Modernity* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Joshua Chachik Publishers, 1960), 263.

⁷ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 57.

⁸ <http://www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/591/Ben-Haim,+Paul> (accessed 17 March 2011).

sought the “foundations for a newly forged Israeli music” in “Middle Eastern folk music,” Ben-Haim replied:

First, I must correct a widespread mistake: I started doing this not in the 1930s, when I first came here, but already in the 1920s, abroad. In 1921, I befriended the composer Heinrich Schalit, [who] persuaded me that we must seek a different way in music, Jewish music, and gave me one of Idelsohn’s books that had just been published. Together we engaged in various experiments.⁹

Describing his early period in Palestine, Ben-Haim wrote: “Not only were the [musical] problems not new to me—though the [physical] realities that confronted me were completely new—but the Jewish, the Eastern, especially the Yemenite melodies were already rooted in me, already a part of me.”¹⁰ As these comments clearly indicate, Ben-Haim’s ambition to write music containing Jewish elements had its origins already in Germany, long before Ben-Haim thought of immigrating to Palestine.¹¹

My aim in this article is to point out several aspects of Ben-Haim’s style in the *Joram* oratorio and indicate their affinities with his later works written in Israel. The composer’s (non-religious) Jewish identity,¹² as expressed in *Joram*, is central, I will argue, to Ben-Haim’s aesthetic, personal, and musical approach, projecting itself onto much of his later oeuvre. My intention in what follows is thus to show how the unique compositional techniques of *Joram* reflected Ben-Haim’s affinity with and interest in Jewish music and culture already during his years in Germany.¹³

Jewish Musical Life in Munich: “My Heart is in the East and I am in the West”

An adequate appreciation of *Joram*’s place in Ben-Haim’s oeuvre requires a better understanding of the work’s historical background, specifically of the musical and cultural environment that surrounded Ben-Haim during his thirty-six years in Germany—which no doubt affected his views and shaped the nature of his work.

In the early twentieth century, Munich’s Jewish community enjoyed a period of prosperity and growth. Despite their minority status (in 1910, the city’s Jews numbered 11,000 in a population of half a million), Munich’s Jews enjoyed prominence in law and

⁹ Paul Ben-Haim, “So as not to damage the free spirit of the song” [Hebrew], in the “Ofek Survey of Composers, Choreographers, and Musicologists,” *Ofek le-sifrut, hagut ve-bikoret* 2 (1972): 197.

¹⁰ Interviews with Itzchak Adel, Paul Ben-Haim, and Prof. Oedon Partos, *Ha-chinuch ha-musikali* 12 (Jan. 1968): 24-25.

¹¹ Ben-Haim’s interest in Jewish musical traditions may have been related to his interest in Zionism already in Germany (“through him [i.e. Heinrich Schalit],” he wrote, “I also met with Zionist organizations”: see *Hachinuch Hamuzikali* [12 Jan. 1968]: 24-25).

¹² Klára Móricz suggests an approach that emphasizes the “Jewish identity” of certain composers. See Klára Móricz, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianisms in Twentieth-Century Music*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹³ Two comments concerning the present discussion are in order: First, any study of Ben-Haim’s years in Germany faces the challenge that many of the documents and letters pertaining to this period of his life are missing from the Jerusalem archive. Second, the many “Western” compositional elements of *Joram*, though worthy of special attention, are beyond the scope of this paper, the focus of which is the “Eastern” elements in the oratorio.

medicine, and to a lesser degree in commerce and manufacturing. The local Jewish community was exemplary in fostering mutual tolerance and cooperation among its various components, most notably between the Reform-Liberal faction, to which Ben-Haim's family belonged, and the Orthodox community. Ben-Haim's father, Heinrich Frankenburger, was highly active within the Jewish community, though his mother Anna came from a mostly assimilated Jewish family. In general, the local Jewish community supported assimilation and emancipation as a condition of personal and political freedom. Many of its members saw themselves as thoroughly German—"Germans of the Mosaic faith," different from their neighbors only in religion.¹⁴ The liberal faction of the Jewish community observed many Jewish traditions (circumcision, Bar Mitzvah, wedding and funeral ceremonies, *Kaddish*), but conducted the ceremonies in a somewhat more liberal fashion and in German, often using the church organ in its services.¹⁵

Musical life within Munich's Jewish community had a crucial effect on Ben-Haim's early musical development.¹⁶ Jewish musical life in Munich consisted mostly in liturgical music performed during synagogue services, with which Ben-Haim, a regular synagogue visitor since 1920, was probably well acquainted.¹⁷ A major musical figure during this period was Emmanuel Kirschner (1857-1938), who for forty-seven years, from 1881 to 1928, was the principal cantor of Munich's central synagogue. A musical conservative, Kirschner opposed what he regarded as "foreign" musical elements—German folk music, the chromatic and dissonant elements of modern art music, and the Eastern European Jewish music popular in the Jewish communities of northern Germany, where Kirschner had received his education. The latter sort of music was characterized by the use of the Jewish *Steiger* (scales) and the augmented second. Kirschner aspired to rid the music of the synagogue of these "foreign" influences, and to strengthen certain aspects of liturgical Jewish music from southern Germany, which in his view reflected the ancient, Middle Eastern sources of Jewish music. To promote the type of Jewish music he supported, Kirschner published several volumes of the music he himself performed in the synagogue.

Kirschner was not the only contemporary figure to have regarded Eastern elements as central to the music of the Jewish people. Other German Jews also showed interest in what they saw as the Eastern roots of Jewish music.¹⁸ One such figure was the ethnomusicologist Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, with whom Kirschner had a long-lasting friendship starting from 1903. Two years later, Idelsohn immigrated to Palestine for an extended period of research, which lasted until the early 1920s. During this period, Idelsohn published his comprehensive study of Jewish music in Germany,¹⁹ contributing to Kirschner's interest in the Oriental origins of Jewish liturgy. Other figures included Arno Nadel, who urged the Jewish community to adopt a new musical approach, at once

¹⁴ See also Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002).

¹⁵ For further background, see Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, pp. 9-13.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, I rely in what follows on Jehoash Hirshberg, "Heinrich Schalit and Paul Ben-Haim in Munich," *Yuval* 4 (1982): 131-49.

¹⁷ For Ben-Haim's recollection of his regular synagogue visits with his father, see Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 12.

¹⁸ On this matter see also Jehoash Hirshberg, "The Vision of the East and the Heritage of the West: A Comprehensive Model of Ideology and Practice in Israeli Art Music," *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online* 7/II (2008-09): http://www.biu.ac.il/hu/mu/min-ad/8-9-II/06-Hirshberg_The%20Vision.pdf; and "Heinrich Schalit and Weimar Jewish Music," *Musica Judaica*, 15 (2000): 32-65.

¹⁹ Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, *Hebräisch-Orientalischer Melodienschatz*, 10 vols. (Berlin-Vienna-Jerusalem: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1914-32).

“oriental and cosmopolitan,”²⁰ and composer and musicologist Alice Jacob Lowenson, who called for a “return to pure, ancient Jewish music” and for increased “familiarity with the expressive monotonal character and the melodic tonal system of the old Orient.”²¹ Similar ideas were expressed also by musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt, by German-Jewish composers such as Herbert Fromm, Heinrich Schalit, Hugo Chaim Adler, and the Swiss-born Ernst Bloch, and by such Eastern European Jews as Lazar Saminsky and Joel Angel, who published their writings in Germany.²²

Ben-Haim’s Musical Path in Germany and the Influence of Heinrich Schalit

It was against this general background that Ben-Haim developed his own views in the early decades of the century. Born Paul Frankenburger in Munich in 1897, Ben-Haim began studying piano and composition in 1914 at the Munich Academy of Music. In 1918, after two harrowing years as a German recruit on the French and Belgian fronts, he resumed his studies at the Academy, graduating in June 1920 with excellent grades. He then approached Bruno Walter, among the foremost conductors of the period (and a close friend of Gustav Mahler’s) and was accepted as Korpetitur and choir assistant under Walter’s guidance. During the 1920s, Ben-Haim established his reputation as a conductor in southern Germany. Slowly climbing the rungs of world conducting, he was appointed Third Kapellmeister and Choir Conductor of the Augsburg Opera Theater in September 1924. In 1929, he became chief conductor at Augsburg, conducting during his tenure there the major works of the operatic canon.²³

At the same time that he developed his career as a conductor, Ben-Haim also focused much of his energy on composition, a matter of utmost importance to him. Through most of his years in Germany, he perceived himself as a German composer, heir to the rich German musical heritage in which he was educated and whose composers—Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Max Reger, to mention only a few—he admired. Ben-Haim’s musical course was to change dramatically, however, following his meeting in the 1920s with the German-Jewish composer Heinrich Schalit (1886-1976).

Born in Vienna but later active in Munich, Schalit employed a post-Romantic musical language under the clear influence of Richard Strauss in his early work.²⁴ The experiences of the Great War left their clear mark on him, however. During the war years, malicious accusations spread within Germany according to which Germany’s Jewish citizens were shirking their civil and military duties, betraying their country and contributing to its defeat.²⁵ These deeply upsetting experiences and the alienation they caused within German Jewry led to a marked change in Schalit’s musical style, ending, according to his own testimony, his Romantic—and straightforwardly German—period.

²⁰ Arno Nadel, “Die Renaissance der synagogalen Music,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, 28 September 1928.

²¹ Alice Jacob Lowenson, “Zur alten und neuen liturgischen Musik,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, 28 September 1928. Both Nadel and Lowenson are mentioned in Elliot Kahn, ‘Heinrich Schalit and Weimar Jewish Music’, *Musica Judaica*, 15 (2000), p. 58

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 62.

²³ Hirshberg, *Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, pp. 47-48.

²⁴ For further background on Schalit, see Michael Schalit, *Heinrich Schalit: The Man and His Music* (Livermore, CA, 1979), p. 31

²⁵ For more on this issue, see Kahn, above, n. 20, p. 41, and Jacob Rosenthal, *An Episode of Malice: The “Counting of Jewish Soldiers” in Germany during World War I* [Hebrew] (Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad & Leo Baeck Institute, 2005).

“The realization that I was a Jew,” Schalit wrote, “penetrated more and more deeply into my musical works and continually reminded me of my responsibility.”²⁶

To express his new found Jewish identity, Schalit gradually infused his work with new musical elements, including, as Elliot Kahn notes, a “reliance on added 2nds and 6ths to triadic harmony, open 5ths, [and the] revoicing of quartal and quintal chords ... [all apparently as] part of the composer’s plan to give his music a distinctly ‘Jewish flavor.’”²⁷ The change in Schalit’s style did not escape the composer’s contemporaries, including a critic for Berlin’s *Musikalischen Signale*, who described Schalit’s *Seelenlieder* (“Soul Songs”) as “pervaded by the atmosphere of the ancient Temple.”²⁸

Working alongside Emmanuel Kirschner in 1927-33, as general manager and organist of Munich’s great synagogue, Schalit clearly shared the cantor’s proclivity for ancient Eastern sources of inspiration. But Kirschner was a conservative, active mainly as a liturgical composer within the confines of the synagogue. He thus drew his inspiration from such composers as Salamone Rossi and Louis Lewandowsky, both dominant composers within the German Jewish community in the 1920s. Schalit, however, cultivated different aesthetic ideals in search of Jewish identity, developing a more independent musical technique that increasingly relied on modality, diatonic harmony, and chords in fourths reflecting musical archaism.²⁹ Schalit’s archaism is evident, for example, when he harmonizes a theme from Idelsohn’s *Thesaurus* in the following organ part for a Sabbath Eve liturgical piece:

Example 1 Heinrich Schalit, organ part of “Torah Service—S’u Sh’Oreem,” from “Sabbath Morning Liturgy” for cantor (baritone or tenor), mixed voices, and organ (1951): Bars 1-2



It was several years earlier, in 1921, that Schalit first met the young Ben-Haim (then still Frankenburger), in a concert devoted to the latter’s works. Describing their initial contacts, he wrote:

Upon my first hearing the works of Paul Frankenburger, I was deeply impressed by his great maturity and his technique and style. He wrote in a modern style—but without a trace of the national heritage of our forefathers.... I felt it my duty to try to convince him of the need to channel his talent into the music of the Jewish culture. [...] We became friends. He became acquainted with my music and its Jewish spirit, appreciating it greatly, successfully conducting a concert of my hymnic songs for Baritone. This was how the Jewish flame was kindled....³⁰

²⁶ Cited in Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 52.

²⁷ Kahn, “Heinrich Schalit,” above, n. 20, p. 56.

²⁸ Cited in Hirshberg, *Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 53.

²⁹ Hirshberg, “Heinrich Schalit and Paul Ben-Haim,” above, n. 15, p. 134.

³⁰ Letter to Anita Heppner, cited in Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, no. 2, p. 55.

Several musical traits evident in Schalit's work began also to appear in that of Ben-Haim, namely the use of musical archaism and diatonic harmony, which the young composer apparently employed to distance himself from the German music of his time. In 1928-29, while still a conductor in Augsburg, Ben-Haim composed several vocal works that are of special importance: three motets for mixed choir, *Psalm 126* for male choir, and two liturgical arias for soprano and organ—all works with “Jewish” content and character, bearing the clear stamp of Schalit's influence. Most obvious, perhaps, is Ben-Haim's use of biblical texts in these *a-cappella* works, a clear reflection of his deep interest in the heritage of Jewish spirituality. No less important, however, is the works' musical style, which differs markedly from the style of Ben-Haim's earlier religious compositions, relying increasingly on “musical archaism.” In the three motets (1928), for example, the influence of the Renaissance motet is evident in form, texture, and melodic treatment. Other musical elements present in the work are harmonic enrichment through the use of 7th and 9th chords, the use of modal cadence, open fifths, and parallel chords constructed on fourths—all of which would become central to Ben-Haim's compositional technique in later works, including *Joram*.

A similar shift in style is evident in *Psalm 126*. Whereas the earlier, post-Romantic *Psalm 22* (1922) had been written for a mixed choir and large orchestra, and relied on the major-minor tonal system and the tonal-chromatic idiom characteristic of German music, *Psalm 126* was written for an all-male choir and relies more on the “neo-archaic” models.³¹ An important musical element found in *Psalm 126* is the use of the augmented second that is characteristic of the *ahavah rabbah* steiger (similar to the Phrygian). Similar musical elements are also found in the two arias for soprano and organ written in 1931: open fifths and superposed parallel fourths under long pedal points in *Search me, O God*; quartal and quintal harmonies in *Strengthen ye the weak hands* (Isaiah 35:3). All these elements attest to Schalit's growing influence on Ben-Haim already in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the period leading up to the writing of *Joram*.

The *Joram* Oratorio, 1932-33

Ben-Haim's choral works of 1928-29 were his biggest success to that point, and were received enthusiastically by the German press. The wave of anti-Semitism that flooded Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s did not spare him, however. For several years, Ben-Haim had to endure anti-Semitic attacks, which targeted him both as an individual (at one point he slapped a violinist who made a racial slur during rehearsal) and as a composer accused of producing “racially inferior art.”³² In 1931, he was fired from his post at Augsburg by the new manager of the opera theater, a member of the Nazi party. Returning to his father's home in Munich, Ben-Haim decided to use the free time imposed on him to compose a large-scale oratorio based on *The Book of Joram* (*Das*

³¹ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, pp. 57-64.

³² See *ibid.*, pp. 68-70. These attacks continued throughout the composer's remaining years in Germany. In March 1933, two months after Hitler's rise to power, Ben-Haim experienced his last public success in Germany—a performance of his *Concerto Grosso* in Chemnitz, which, according to the composer, enjoyed great success with the audience. The next day, however, the newspapers reproached the theater's management: “How can it be that at this time of German revival the work of a Jew is performed?” Paul Ben-Haim, “My Immigration to Eretz Israel: Recollections from 1933” [Hebrew], *Tatzlil* 11 (1971): 185.

Buch Joram) by Rudolf Borchardt (1877-1945), a work he had admired since his teenage years. Only now did he feel ready to set it to music. “I admired Borchardt’s book,” he later said, though “the idea to compose music to it came to me suddenly in 1931.”³³

Joram is perhaps Ben-Haim’s most personal work, in Germany or in Israel. It is also his first (and only) piece drawn on such a large canvas—the oratorio lasts well over two hours. Ben-Haim’s mature writing technique comes well to the fore, both in his ability to portray musically the epic drama of the text and in the direct dramatic content of the piece. *Joram* is dark, gloomy, and even pessimistic in character. But it is also a highly dynamic work, strewn with outbursts that perhaps indicate the composer’s sense of helplessness at the time.

Overall, the oratorio gives the impression of late Romanticism bearing the direct influence of Mahler and Strauss.³⁴ Classifying the work simply as post-Romantic is misleading, however, for it is tied to post-Romanticism mainly because of its orchestration.³⁵ Compositionally, the oratorio departs from post-Romanticism by including not only neo-classical and neo-Baroque techniques but also archaic or “neo-archaic” elements, in particular quartal and quintal harmonies that appear on every page of the partiture.³⁶ Superficially, this may indicate the influence of Hindemith or Debussy; as I hope to demonstrate, however, these elements in fact stem from Ben-Haim’s interest in Eastern music and his own Jewish identity. As I will try to show, his use of the quartal harmony differs from contemporaneous European usage and is identical, rather, to the use of this technique in many later Israeli works.³⁷

But before we turn to a fuller discussion of the Jewish musical elements in *Joram*, some remarks about Ben-Haim’s use of his source material is in order. A comparison between Borchardt’s original *Book of Joram* and Ben-Haim’s adaptation of it in the oratorio’s libretto reveals much, I believe, about the composer’s intent.

³³ “Bein – Tavim, Portrait of the Composer Paul Ben-Haim,” Radio Transmission, Kol Hamuzika 19. March 1979. First Program.

³⁴ For a discussion of the work’s post-Romantic influences, see Malcolm Miller, ‘Munich: Ben-Haim’s *Joram*’, *Tempo* 63 (2009), pp. 52-53 - Beside Mahler and Strauss, Miller also mentions the influence of Orff and Schoenberg.

³⁵ Other features that may be classified as post-Romantic are the use of a tonal center and the integration of more “traditional” or “conservative” writing techniques, such as fugal writing and almost functional harmony.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95. Yehuda Cohen notes the tension in the piece between modern polyphony and such ancient elements as the use of ostinato, narrow intervals, and unison choral parts, all of which complement in his view the work’s (Middle) Eastern elements; see Cohen, *The Heirs of The Psalmists*, Am-Oved, Tel-Aviv, 1990, p. 18, 46 – 47.

³⁷ It might be derived from Ruth Hachohen’s view, that the very fact that Ben-Haim chose to compose the work as an oratorio is explained at least partly by the affinity of this essentially Christian genre to Western Judaic culture. See Ruth Hachohen, “Between Noise and Harmony: The Oratorical Moment in the Musical Entanglement of Jews and Christians,” *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006): 250-77. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Germany’s Reform Jews increasingly integrated non-Jewish elements into synagogue services (264, 270 – 271). Hachohen notes certain aspects of the oratorio that probably appealed to Jews, for example its emphasis on a *historia sacra* figure (*Joram* being in this respect the equivalent of a Jesus or a Samson), and the nonfictional character of the oratorio that bore a resemblance to the Jewish *Seder* (270-71). In particular, the German oratorio is linked almost directly in her view with Jewish recitative elements of the kind that appear in Mendelssohn’s oratorios and in Louis Lewandowsky’s liturgical works for the synagogue (275). Naturally, recitatives abound in *Joram*, from the recitative of the third scene (“Der Traum des Pinchas”) to the English horn recitative in the final scene (which is somewhat reminiscent of Beethoven’s recitative in the first movement of “The Tempest” Sonata in D minor). In this context, consider also Hirschberg’s claim that Ben-Haim’s choice reflected his preference for Mahler’s oratorical work over Richard Strauss’s dramatic operas.

Rudolf Borchardt and *The Book of Joram* (1905)

Born to a Protestant family of Jewish origin, Rudolf Borchardt received an extensive education in disciplines ranging from philosophy and literature to classical philology and archeology. Together with Hugo von Hoffmanstahl and Rudolf Alexander Schroeder, he formed an intellectual movement that came to be known as the “conservative revolution,” the goal of which was the spiritual restoration of Germany. This, they believed, could be achieved only by a return to past origins, through the rich European legacy and ancient Greek culture.³⁸

Borchardt wrote *The Book of Joram* in Italy in 1905. In his analysis of the work’s rich and complex symbolism, Werner Kraft argues that the text is based intentionally on archaic models.³⁹ Linguistically, it draws inspiration from Luther’s translation of the Bible. In terms of content, it is highly influenced by the Book of Job, and no doubt also by Homer’s *Odyssey*. It was presumably this literary archaism of Borchardt’s work that drew Ben-Haim’s attention and inspired the musical archaism of his oratorio.

In 1917, Borchardt’s book caught the attention of David Frischmann, who decided to translate it into Hebrew.⁴⁰ Describing the work as “a kind of contemporary Job, only with modern feelings,” Frischmann viewed the book as presenting “an arsenal of modern-day problems: God and mankind, crime and punishment, life and barrenness, love and the sexes, wind and nature.”⁴¹

Synopsis of *The Book of Joram*

The book’s narrative takes place in ancient Israel. Joram, son of Pinchas, marries Isabel, who turns out to be barren. His father implores him to divorce her, but he refuses. Saddened, his father retires to his bed and has three dreams. In the first, he sees a leafless fig tree inscribed with the word “barren.” In the second, a storm threatens to uproot the tree. In the third, heavenly fire consumes the tree. Pinchas gathers the wise men and asks them for the meaning of his dreams, but they cannot decipher them. Pinchas dies shortly thereafter, bequeathing all of his earthly possessions to his son. Later, Joram sets out on the trading trail, leaving his property in the hands of his wife, promising to return in a few days. En route, however, robbers attack his caravan; his slaves are murdered and he is taken captive in Chaldea (the biblical Ur Kasdim).

Six long years and many tribulations later, Joram finally returns to his home, only to find his house deserted and overgrown by bushes. As night descends, he stops to rest near a neighboring well. When the local women arrive with their children to draw water from the well, Joram addresses them in the Chaldean language, since he has forgotten his Hebrew. Joram recognizes the women (though not their children), but they do not recognize him, and they do not understand his foreign tongue.

³⁸ For more on Borchardt see Richard Exner, “Rudolf Borchardt,” in *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1967), 151-52.

³⁹ Werner Kraft, *Rudolf Borchardt: Welt aus Poesie und Geschichte* (Hamburg: Claassen, 1961).

⁴⁰ David Frischmann’s complete Hebrew translation can be found in the piano arrangement (Klavierauszug) of the oratorio: Paul Ben-Haim, *Joram*, piano reduction (Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications, 1978).

⁴¹ Frischmann, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, p. 4.

Joram then summons up his courage and decides to go to his deserted home. As he makes his way through the overgrowth, a harlot lures him in and he decides to follow her. To his astonishment, he realizes that the woman now offering him her services is none other than his own wife, Isabel. He asks her handmaidens to leave them alone, but they refuse and mock him. Distraught and outraged, he takes hold of a lamp hanging nearby and brutally murders one of the handmaidens. He then reproaches his wife for her infidelity and God for the calamities brought upon him. God takes pity on Joram and sends an angel to comfort the suffering man. Joram makes peace with his wife and returns with her to Chaldea. On their way there, Isabel gives birth to a white-haired son. The child is given to a Hebrew handmaiden, and at the same time heavenly fire descends from the skies and kills both Joram and Isabel. The child grows up to be a prophet known as the “Messiah.”

Interpreting the *Book of Joram*: Ben-Haim’s Adaptation of Borchardt

As Werner Kraft has noted, the key to understanding *The Book of Joram* lies in a 1927 letter written by Borchardt entitled “Artistic Restoration” (“Schöpferische Restauration”) as well as in his postscript to the work.⁴² As both texts indicate, Borchardt harbored a complex, often negative approach toward Judaism, which, for him, represented a lower level of spiritual development than Christianity, which was in turn lower than “Germanness.”⁴³ Accordingly, Borchardt tried to portray himself as a thoroughly German poet. In “Artistic Restoration” he writes: “We [Germans] must recognize only the tradition of the whole, not of the individual. We break through each and any individual tradition, so as to attain the whole.”⁴⁴ By this, Kraft explains, Borchardt indicated his intent to break with his own personal—that is, Jewish—heritage in favor of the “whole” of a unified German culture.⁴⁵ Similarly, Hirshberg claims that Joram’s decision to return to Chaldea and make it his home—the book’s original title was *Geschichte des Heimgekehrten*, “The Story of the Return Home”—represents Borchardt’s own spiritual journey away from Judaism and toward Germanness.⁴⁶

These interpretations of Borchardt’s intent do find ample support in the plot of *The Book of Joram*. Borchardt’s Christian leanings are evident in his choice to end the story with the birth of a messianic redeemer; and, while the story’s first part relies on narrative motifs derived from the Book of Job (in particular the series of personal disasters that befell Joram), Borchardt deviates from the biblical model by having Joram defiantly reproach God. But the most blatantly anti-Judaic element introduced by Borchardt is Joram and Isabel’s death by celestial fire, a scene that appears to represent the death of Judaic tradition. The protagonists’ demise is foreshadowed, I believe, by the earlier scene in which heavenly fire consumes the fig tree on which the word “barren” is inscribed—a clear reference to Isaiah 54:1 (“Rejoice, O barren one”), in which the

⁴² Cited in Kraft, *Rudolf Borchardt*, above, n. 38, p. 68.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 68. As R.A. Schroeder notes, Borchardt’s negative view of Judaism was central to his ideological-philosophical work and remained constant throughout his life, becoming even more trenchant in later years; see Rudolf A. Schroeder, “Einführung,” in Rudolf Borchardt, *Reden*, ed. M.L. Borchardt, R. A. Schroeder & S. Rizzi (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1955), 12.

⁴⁴ Cited in Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 86.

⁴⁵ See Kraft, *Rudolf Borchardt*, above, n. 38, pp. 62-63, where Kraft claims that despite its somewhat Jewish character the story aspires toward a Christian solution.

⁴⁶ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 86.

prophet applies the term to Zion or Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Clearly, the analogy drawn here between Isabel's infertility and Zion's barrenness is meant to indicate Borchardt's view of Judaism as obsolete, a dead tradition in need of supersession.⁴⁸

Similar import must be attributed, in my view, to Joram's exile to Chaldea and his eventual return to that land with Isabel. The birthplace of Abraham, patriarch of the Hebrews and subsequently of the Jews, Chaldea may be taken to represent here the cradle of the Jewish religion. It would not be too speculative to assume that in placing Joram and Isabel there only to have them killed by heavenly fire, Borchardt is suggesting the annihilation of Hebrew culture at its very roots. (Less clear, admittedly, is Borchardt's choice to have the child given to a Hebrew handmaiden, perhaps indicating a desire to preserve some Jewish element after all.)

Against this background, Ben-Haim's own adaptation of *Joram* is best interpreted, I believe, as a deeply political work. Describing his adaptation in 1937, Ben-Haim claimed that the piece was "not merely an oratorio in the usual sense of the word, but a work seeking to touch the depths of the problem my people face, [a problem] that has lately arisen anew."⁴⁹ Even a cursory look at Ben-Haim's version of the Joram narrative shows, however, that his own solution to the problem in question contrasts sharply with Borchardt's.

Some of the Christian elements of Borchardt's narrative no doubt remain in Ben-Haim's work. Ben-Haim's libretto even incorporates, at the end of the fifth chapter, a poem by Borchardt entitled "Einem Jüngern in den *Joram*." Written in 1912 and intended to close Borchardt's first song cycle, *Jugendgedichte* ("Poems of Youth"), the poem reflects its author's Christian proclivities by emphasizing individual suffering as a reflection of the suffering of Jesus ("the whipped one with the crown, "der Gegeitschte mit der Kron").⁵⁰

Ben-Haim's libretto omits, however, some crucial details from Borchardt's narrative in ways that fundamentally alter the story's meaning. First, as Hirshberg states, there is great importance to Ben-Haim's omission of Isabel's description as "a flowering tree": this occurs when Joram discovers her to be a harlot and chastises her for her moral decline. Though Hirshberg does not clarify this, I believe that this description is again analogous to the fig tree destroyed in Pinchas's dream, which for Borchardt represents the barrenness and "moral deterioration" of Jewish culture. (It is true that Joram soon forgives Isabel; but this turns out to be of no real significance, for in the final scene she, along with him, is killed, presumably punished.) Ben-Haim's omission of this disparaging portrayal of Isabel may therefore be taken to indicate his rejection of Borchardt's judgmental and derogatory view of Judaism. Second, and even more importantly, Ben-Haim's work omits the death of Joram and Isabel at the end of the story. In Ben-Haim's version, Joram and Isabel survive and remain in Chaldea, formerly the land of Joram's captivity. Rejecting both Borchardt's fantasies of the supersession of Judaism and the Zionist longing for the Land of Israel, Ben-Haim's narrative choices thus

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Ben-Haim set the same verse to music in 1957, in the motet "Sing, O Barren One" ("*Roni Aqarah*").

⁴⁸ According to R.A. Schroder, Borchardt's negative approach toward Judaism was consistent throughout his life and occupied a central part of his ideological-philosophical work. In later years, he writes, this approach was more clearly stated than in the *Book of Joram*, a work that still bears the signature of a struggling young artist; R.A. Schroder, "Einführung," above, n. 42, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 87. Hirshberg notes that the poem's title ("To the Child in Joram") clearly ties it to *The Book of Joram*, clarifying the book's Christian theological message.

clearly reflect his wish for the Jews to become an integral part of Germany while retaining fully their Jewish identity and heritage.

Yet, insofar as *Joram* is a political work, it is also, I believe, a tragic one, ultimately pessimistic about the happy solution described above. Emotionally, the oratorio conveys a deep sense of grief and tragedy. It does not end on an optimistic note with the birth of the child, as one might have expected. Instead, the final scene is based on a recitative for the English horn that conveys a grave sense of loneliness and isolation, probably echoing Ben-Haim's personal state at the time. As the oratorio's last bars fade away, the work ends in despair, recalling the last movement of Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*, which similarly dissolves in tragedy.



Figure 2 Paul Ben-Haim (Frankenburger) in Germany. Courtesy of the Paul Ben-Haim Archive, The National Library of Israel, Mus55, M

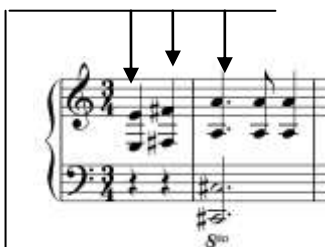
Musical Elements of Ben-Haim's Oratorio: The Psalmody Motif

Ben-Haim's ideological preferences are evident not only in his narrative choices in the libretto, but also in his musical choices in the oratorio, to which we now turn. The first part of the oratorio opens with an unusual motif: E-F#-A-A-A (see Example 2)—a curious choice, based apparently not on musical considerations alone, but on a desire for an extramusical statement. Hirshberg calls it the “psalmody motif,” for the simple fact that it is derived from the Gregorian intonation of the biblical psalms.⁵¹ The motif also bears an uncanny resemblance to the primary motif from Ernest Bloch's *Sacred Service*, written around the same time (1930-33) and also modeled on the Gregorian intonation of Psalms (see Example 3). In both cases, the motif opens with the interval of a major

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 93.

second and a minor third, just like the original intervals of the psalmody. The motifs are similar also in terms of rhythmic commensuration: short-short-long. In *Joram*, the opening bars consist of two equal quarters and a dotted A quarter, repeating the A; that is, they consist of three quarters—the dotted A, and the repeat on A, representing the tone of recitation. Identical rhythmic values, only in augmentation, appear in Bloch's *Sacred Service*.

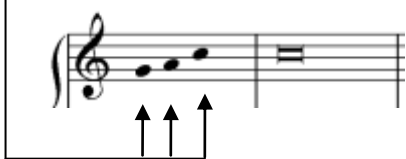
Example 2 Paul Ben-Haim, *The Joram Oratorio*, Vorspiel (Bar 1)



Example 3 Ernest Bloch, *The Sacred Service*, First Movement (Bars 1-3)



Example 4 The Psalmody Motif⁵²



Bloch was very much aware of the Gregorian origins of his motif; he believed, however, that the origins of the Gregorian chants themselves lay in “whatever seeds survive of the songs of the [Second] Temple.” He therefore attributed the motif to the music that could be found in Jerusalem’s synagogues.⁵³

Naturally, Ben-Haim could not have known Bloch’s *Sacred Service* at the time he was composing *Joram*. He, too, believed, however, that a tightly knit thread ran from Gregorian psalmody back to the music of the Second-Temple Levites. In one of his lectures he wrote:

⁵² Thomas H. Connolly, “Psalms,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 15, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 325.

⁵³ Móricz, *Jewish Identities*, above, n. 11, p. 178.

A composer seeking to penetrate the depths of the musical folklore of the Near East returns at the same time—paradoxical as this may seem—to the roots and origins of European music. The unaccompanied tunes of the Orient resemble the Gregorian choral, the early unison [monophonic] chants of Catholic liturgy from early Christian centuries. At the same time, they have influenced the first folk singers of Europe, the troubadours and the *Minnesänger* of the Middle Ages. The Israeli composer is confronted here with musical material that hasn't suffered the loss of its basic melodic and rhythmic force over the centuries. The resurrection of Western art music by these elements of Oriental tradition is a great mission, one of which Western composers from Debussy's time down to the present have dreamt.⁵⁴

As these remarks indicate, Ben-Haim found close affinities between ancient Gregorian chants and Jewish-Israeli music, a view that inclined him strongly toward musical archaism. Accordingly, he believed the resurrection of Eastern and "Oriental" roots in the writing techniques of modern Western composers such as Debussy could and should be used as a source of inspiration for modern Israeli composers. These aesthetic affinities are manifest throughout the oratorio and form its concept.

The claim that the roots of Gregorian music, which gave birth to the entire Western musical tradition, can be traced back to the music of the Levites in the days of the Second Temple is no longer accepted in our time. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, it was central to the beliefs of many scholars and musicians. It is found, among other sources, in Idelsohn's books, which Ben-Haim, by his own testimony, studied closely from the early 1920s.⁵⁵ Reflecting on the influence of ancient traditions, in particular Greek culture, Idelsohn wrote: "it is a known fact that from the very beginning, the melodies of Greek culture found their way to those of the Jewish people."⁵⁶ "The biblical cantillations," he writes further, "are very similar to Greek [music]; it is difficult to say with certainty who took what from whom."⁵⁷ Other, similar claims were made by the composer and scholar Lazar Saminsky in various articles and books published from 1915 onward.⁵⁸

We can thus assign a twofold meaning to the psalmody motif in Ben-Haim's and Bloch's respective works. On the one hand, it is an expression of their Jewish heritage and identity; on the other, it represents their desire to associate themselves with Western European culture—in Ben-Haim's case, with German culture, precisely on the eve of its destruction of the Jews.

⁵⁴ Paul Ben-Haim, written lecture (1961), The National Library, Jerusalem (Mus. 55, D 12). Translated with the kind assistance of Marie Lawrence Meiom of the Goethe Institute. The original passage reads as follows: "Ein Komponist, der so tief in die musikalische Folklore des vorderen Orients eindringt, kehrt gleichsam – so paradox das klingen mag – zu den (der) Wurzeln und Urgründen der Europäischen Musik zurück. Die unbegleiteten Melodien des Orients gleichen dem Gregorianischen Choral, den frühen einstimmigen Gesängen der Katholischen Liturgie aus den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten; die weltlichen, orientalischen Tanzmelodien hingegen haben die ersten Volkssänger in Europa beeinflusst, die Troubadours und Minnesänger des Mittelalters. Der Israelische Komponist steht hier vor einem Material, das nichts von seiner elementaren melodischen und rhythmischen Kraft im Lauf der Jahrhunderte eingebüsst hat; die Verjüngung westlicher Kunstmusik durch diese Elemente der orientalischen Tradition ist eine grosse Aufgabe, von der auch die Komponisten des Westen seit der Zeit Debussy's bis zum heutigen Tage träumen."

⁵⁵ Ben-Haim, "So as not to damage," in *Ofek le-sifrut, hagut ve-bikoret 2* (1972): 194.

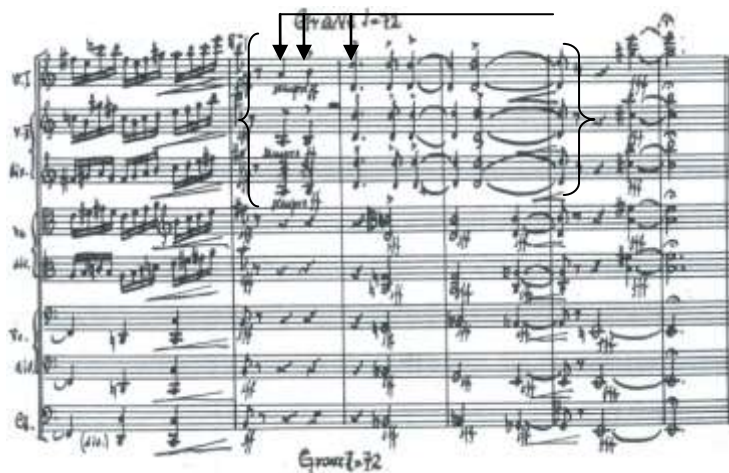
⁵⁶ Zvi Idelsohn, *A History of Hebrew Playing: Its Essence, Foundations, and Development*, Vol. 1 [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1924), 58.

⁵⁷ Idelsohn, *ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁸ Lazar Saminsky, *The Music of the Ghetto and the Bible* (New York: Bloch, 1934).

According to Michael Wolpe, the psalmody motif (in its different guises), appears often in Ben-Haim's work, to such an extent that Wolpe calls it "the Ben-Haim motif."⁵⁹ Examples of this could be found in the *Concerto for Strings* (1947; see Example 5) and *Symphony No. 1* (1940).

Example 5 Paul Ben-Haim, *Concerto for Strings*, First Movement (Coda)



The Augmented Second and the Reform Synagogue

Another example of *Joram*'s close affinity with its composer's Jewish identity is found in one of the work's central scenes, the "Return Home" (*Heimkehr*). The scene opens with muted strings evoking a mysterious mood. These are soon followed, however, by the melodic phrase played by the contrabass, revealing the intervals of the augmented second in the context of the Phrygian scale, which is of course one of the older church modes. Ben-Haim uses this interval to depict Joram resting near a well in the proximity of his old home in Israel, to which he has returned after many years in captivity. According to Hirshberg, Ben-Haim's use of the augmented second already in his earlier works from 1928-29 may have been inspired by the Jewish cantorial mode *Ahava Rabbah*,⁶⁰ which is quite similar to the Phrygian mode. Ben-Haim's inclusion of these elements clearly expresses his aspiration to integrate in his work the music of the East.

In a personal communication, Dr. David Muallem has stated that the scene exhibits Eastern musical influence on an even deeper, structural level. The scene, he notes, opens with a pair of augmented seconds that clearly sketch an Eastern scale named the *hijaz kar*. It includes four minor seconds, two augmented seconds, and a major second. The major second (of a whole tone) divides two identical tetrachords of minor second/augmented second/minor second, also called *hijaz*. In Dr. Muallem's view, though the precise musical influence is hard to establish—it is possible that Ben-Haim was influenced here by various Arabic or Eastern Jewish traditions, possibly the religious music of Iraqi Jews—the segment is no doubt influenced by the music of the East.⁶¹ Interestingly, Idelsohn, who published his research in Germany in 1922, studied the

⁵⁹ Michael Wolpe, "The Orchestral Music of Paul Ben-Haim," *IMI News* 1 (2002): 18-26.

⁶⁰ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 61.

⁶¹ Dr. David Muallem, Email addressed to the author, 4 September 2011.

music of Iraqi (or “Babylonian”) Jews.⁶² It is safe to assume that Ben-Haim was acquainted with this research. At any rate, Dr. Muallem’s remarks attest to the deep assimilation of Eastern music in the oratorio.

Example 6 Ben-Haim, *Joram*, augmented second in the Vorspiel to Act II (Bars 1-13)

The image displays a musical score for the piano accompaniment of the oratorio *Joram*. The score is for the first system, labeled "PIANO (Orch.)". It begins with the tempo marking "LANGSAM, frei im Tempo (♩ = ca 48)" and "Lento, Tempo libero". The music features a melodic line with an augmented second interval, marked with "molto espr. e rubato". The dynamic markings include "ppp" and "sempre ppp". The score is written in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The second system continues the melodic line, marked with "un poco accelerando" and "a tempo (molto espr.)". The dynamic markings include "p" and "pp". The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. The second system includes a "Pedal" marking and a "V" marking at the end.

Yet another Jewish musical element in the oratorio is found in the scene entitled “Joram’s First Reproach” (*Die erste Anklage des Jorams*). The scene opens with a recitative for the Tenor, the Evangelist (Testo). The Baritone, Joram, appears immediately afterwards, accompanied by the church organ. The unique duo of baritone and organ was typical of the Reform synagogues in Europe, particularly in Germany. The scene’s musical content is a near direct quote of the Jewish motif, indeed of the entire musical phrase that appeared in the Vorspiel to Act II, discussed earlier. The augmented second is now incorporated into Joram’s part.

⁶² Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Gesänge der Babylonischen Juden*, Vol. 2 (Berlin-Vienna-Jerusalem: Benjamin Herz Verlag [Hebraische-Orientalischen Melodienschatz], 1922).

Example 7 Paul Ben-Haim: “Joram’s First Reproach,” *Joram*, Act III (Bars 6-14)

The image shows a musical score for the scene "Joram's First Reproach" from Act III of the oratorio *Joram*. The score is in 3/4 time and features a vocal line for Joram and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "LANGSAM, frei" (slow, ad libitum). The lyrics are in German: "MAH-A-WO-NEU-WAKACHA TE TI, MAH und Wel-ches ist mei-ne U-ber-tre-tung, CHA-TE-TI KI PA-KA-DE-TA-A-LA'I, was mein Ver-ge-hen, dass Du mich heim-ge-lichst hast." The piano part includes dynamics like "Sempre PP" and "mpfforzitrend".

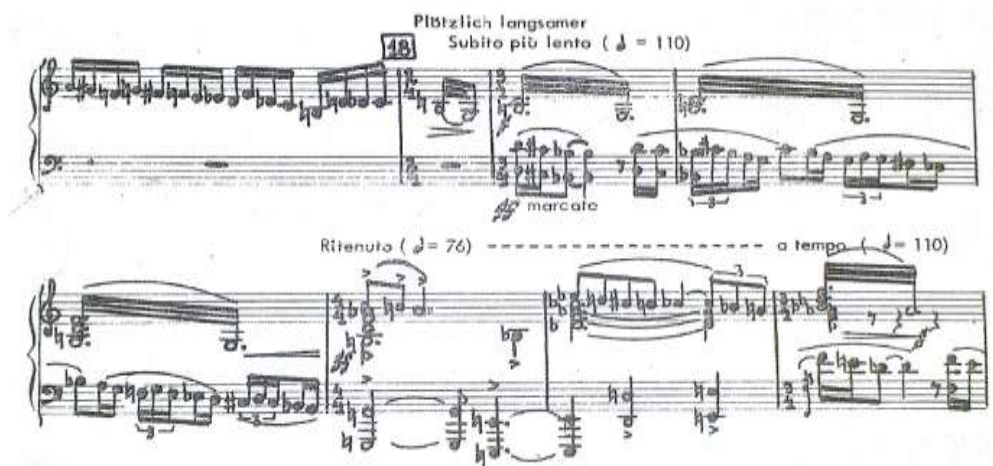
According to Hirshberg, the appearance of the augmented second in the two different scenes carries a twofold meaning. When it first appears, in the earlier exotic-erotic scene, it represents Jezebel’s moral degradation (much like it does Salome’s, Herod’s daughter, in Richard Strauss’s opera). In its second appearance, it represents lamentation and pain

Still later in the piece, in the scene where Joram discovers the bitter truth of Jezebel’s moral decline, Ben-Haim integrates a musical intermezzo (*Zwischenspiel*) which depicts Joram’s distraught response. This scene is based on a slight rhythmical modification of the augmented second and the Phrygian scale used earlier. In its present recurrence the motif is slightly more melismatic in character, though once again it is played by the bass section (contrabass and cello, later doubled by woodwinds).

I would argue, however, that the augmented second functions here, in many ways, as Joram’s leitmotif, in a loose sense of the term. This motif is tied directly to the Jewish music with which Ben-Haim was closely acquainted. By assigning the augmented second to Joram’s character, Ben-Haim clearly emphasizes Joram’s relationship to Judaism and Jewish culture. By so doing, he elevates the scene above its exotic-Oriental trappings, strengthening his own personal statement in the piece.⁶³

⁶³ Also see the discussion of exoticism toward the end of the present paper.

Example 8 The third appearance of Joram's motif: The augmented second and the Phrygian mode (Act II, Rehearsal bar 18).



The image shows a musical score for piano and voice. The piano part is in the upper system, and the vocal part is in the lower system. The score is in 2/4 time. The tempo markings are: "Plötzlich langsamer Subito più lento (♩ = 110)" at the beginning, "Ritenuato (♩ = 76)" in the middle, and "a tempo (♩ = 110)" at the end. There are also markings for "marcato" and "3" (triplets).

Modal Devices: The Use of the Parallel Organum

One central aspect of the oratorio that is closely related to Ben-Haim's Jewish identity is the use of parallel fourths and fifths. This, of course, is the technique of the organum that so greatly enriched Gregorian music in the Middle Ages. Hirshberg terms Ben-Haim's use of this technique "archaic."⁶⁴ A good example of this technique is found in the section entitled "The Angel's Second Appearance" (*die zweite Engelserscheinung*) in Act II of the oratorio.

Example 9 Paul Ben-Haim: "The Angel's Second Appearance," *Joram*, Act II (Rehearsal measure 12)



The image shows a musical score for piano, illustrating the technique of parallel organum. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of music. The upper system is in treble clef and the lower system is in bass clef. The music features parallel fourths and fifths between the two systems.

Ben-Haim's use of the parallel organum can thus be explained by his wish to express his Jewish heritage and by his belief in a thread running from Gregorian music back to the Jewish liturgical music of the Second Temple.

The Use of Fourths and Fifths in the Vorspiel

One of the oratorio's most important elements is its frequent use of the interval of the fourth (*Quarta*). As we have seen, Ben-Haim repeatedly pointed out the interval's obvious connection to Gregorian music and its alleged affinity with the musical heritage of the Jewish people. More generally, Ben-Haim viewed the interval as non-Western in character. In a short article on his own *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra* (1960), he

⁶⁴ Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, above, n. 2, p. 92.

wrote: “The interval of the fourth (descending and sometimes ascending) is typical of many Spanish and Arabic tunes and bears a special significance.”⁶⁵ The fourth, much like the fifth (*Quinta*) is well known in the context of Semitic folk melodies. Ben-Haim’s overt use of musical elements derived from Arabic and Spanish music thus reflects his desire to get closer to what he saw as the music of the Jewish people and to distance himself from what he viewed as Western music.⁶⁶

A closer look at the orchestral introduction (*Vorspiel*) to the oratorio underscores the tight connection between, and severe application of, these compositional elements. Immediately after the appearance of the psalmody motif, Ben-Haim initiates a melismatic phrase that mainly consists of fourths, forming the melodic and harmonic core of the entire introduction. The opening gesture of bars 1-4 begins directly after the anacrusis to the first bar, where the bassoon and the contrabassoon double the woodwinds on C# in the lower register. Despite its long twists and turns, the musical phrase is constructed on natural fourths: C#, F#, B, and E (see Example 10). Immediately afterwards, bar 6 (cello and bass) repeats the same musical phrase of fourths in retrograde inversion: E, B, F#, and C#. Bar 8 incorporates similar relations: the fourth in relation to the opening C#, ascending by a fourth to F#, then ascending by a seventh (*Septima*) to G#—a fourth below the original C#.

The next bars include many different applications of the fourth. In bars 16-18 and 22-23 we encounter similar thematic material that is of importance, including the reliance on ascending parallel fifths (triadic chords in “closed” positions), which move within the range or the cell of a fourth. Examples include the C# at the beginning of bar 22; the F# in the second eighth of the second quarter of bar 22; the B in bar 23; and the E in the second eighth of the second quarter, which is also the highest point in this phrase. Later on, Ben-Haim applies parallel movement in fourths, clearly as part of the melodic contour (see, for example, the relation between the first and the second flutes in bars 41-46, or between the oboe and the bassoon in bars 52-54). This extensive use of fourths and fifths again reflects Ben-Haim's attempt to get closer to Middle Eastern music. His aesthetic choices here clearly stem from his desire, kindled already in Munich, to convey his Jewish identity and heritage.

⁶⁵ Paul Ben-Haim, “Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra” [Hebrew], *Bat-Kol* 2 (1960): 10-12.

⁶⁶ The influence of these intervals on Semitic music is perhaps derived from the biblical cantillation, where the outer notes are constructed on the interval of the fourth. On this issue see Leora Bressler, “The Mediterranean Style in Israeli Music,” MA thesis (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1983), 94. Another possible influence are the basic intervals of the *shofar*, constructed on fourths and fifths. See Idelsohn, *A History of Hebrew Playing*, above, n. 55, p. 9.

Example 10 Paul Ben-Haim, *Joram*, Vorspiel (Bars 1-26)

The image shows a musical score for the piano introduction of the Oratorio *Joram*, bars 1-26. The score is written for piano and is marked "PIANO (=Orchester, nur zum Einstudieren)". The tempo is "Fließend, doch mit Grösse" and the metronome marking is "♩ = 120". The score is divided into two parts, labeled "I. TEIL" and "II. TEIL". The first part (bars 1-12) is marked "No. 1 : Vorspiel" and the second part (bars 13-26) is marked "No. 2 : Vorspiel". The score features a complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth and sixteenth notes. There are several annotations: a bracket labeled "1" under the first part, a bracket labeled "2" under the second part, and arrows pointing to specific notes. The score is in 3/4 time and has a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Example 11 Paul Ben-Haim, *Joram*, Vorspiel (Oboe and Bassoon, Bars 52-54)

The image shows a musical score for the oboe and bassoon parts of the piano introduction of the Oratorio *Joram*, bars 52-54. The score is written for oboe and bassoon. The oboe part is in the upper staff and the bassoon part is in the lower staff. The score features a complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth and sixteenth notes. There are several annotations: a bracket labeled "1" under the first part, a bracket labeled "2" under the second part, and arrows pointing to specific notes. The score is in 3/4 time and has a key signature of one sharp (F#).

The Links between *Joram* and *Symphony No. 1*

The first act of the oratorio ends with unique writing for the choir. After a moving orchestral passage, the choir joins in, in a scene describing Joram's return to his old home after years of enslavement. Interestingly, the same thematic material, Joram's return home,⁶⁷ is quoted in full in the third movement of *Symphony No. 1* (immediately after rehearsal measure 43), a work composed in Tel Aviv in 1939-41 and regarded as the first "Israeli" symphony.



Figure 3 Paul Ben-Haim (Frankenburger) in Palestine/Israel, c. 1933. Courtesy of the Paul Ben-Haim Archive, The National Library of Israel, Mus55, M

Ben-Haim's decision to quote the *Joram* melody in the later symphony, written seven years after the oratorio, no doubt reflects its unique symbolic importance for the composer, representing as it does one of his most important real-life decisions: to leave Germany and emigrate to his old national home, Israel. In fact, the same theme appears at the beginning of the movement, in rehearsal measure 30, in rhythmic augmentation, and again in rehearsal measure 32, this time in rhythmic diminution. Far from being

⁶⁷ Ben-Haim uses the title "the Return Home" (*Heimkehr*) only in the next scene that opens Act II, in which Joram is described standing in front of his old home. It follows that the final scene of Act I portrays Joram's journey back to his home.

incidental, the decision to quote from the oratorio thus seems to represent a musical statement, one that may be crucial to a full understanding of the symphony.

Example 12 Paul Ben-Haim: “The Journey Back Home,” *Joram*, Act I (Schlusschor, Bars 1-10)

No. 11 . . . Schlusschor des Ersten Teiles

The image displays a musical score for a piano and orchestra. It consists of five systems of notation. The first system is labeled 'PIANO (Orch.)' and 'in langsam gehenden Zeitmaß'. The second system has an arrow pointing to a specific measure. The fourth system is marked 'p espressivo'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 13 Paul Ben-Haim, *Symphony No. 1* (1941), Third Movement (eight bars after rehearsal measure 43)

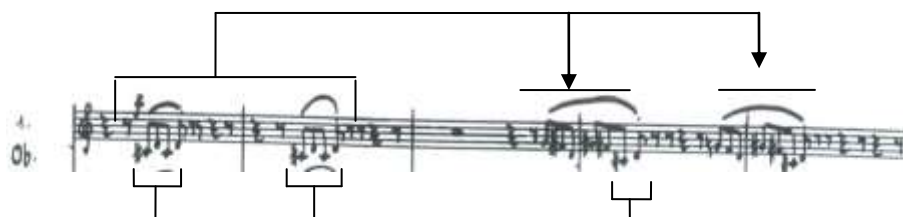


Example 14 Paul Ben-Haim, *Symphony No. 1*, Third Movement (rehearsal measure 32); “The Journey Back Home” in rhythmic diminution (first and second bassoon, doubled by cello and contrabass in pizzicato)



Already at the start of the third movement, Ben-Haim implies his intention of borrowing the melodic theme of *Joram*'s homebound journey by quoting the theme's accompaniment pattern (see Example 15).

Example 15 Paul Ben-Haim, *Symphony No. 1*, Third Movement (oboe, bars 33-35, rehearsal measure 28)



The common thread running through Ben-Haim's compositional technique, both in Germany and in Israel, is not limited to quotation and extends also to the use of fourths

and fifths, which represent a central aspect in Ben-Haim writing technique. Thus, as Michael Wolpe has observed, the psalmody motif in *Joram* may be also found in the first movement of *Symphony I*,⁶⁸ though in the later work the motif is inverted, with descending seconds and thirds (F-E-C). In the symphony, the motif is followed by an arpeggiated Ab-minor chord in closed triadic position, which then descends by half a tone to an arpeggiated G-minor chord in closed triadic position. Essentially, then, the harmonic procedure is constructed on parallel fifths.

A musical phrase of a somewhat aggressive nature, played by bowed instruments, appears immediately afterward, leading to the turbulent and excited return of the main motif, which seems to contain within it the full dramatic nature of the movement. A linear movement in parallel fifths appears shortly afterward (bars 4-5), this time on an arpeggiated A-minor chord in transposition, ascending by a whole tone to an arpeggiated B-minor chord.

The same musical phrase returns once more in bars 8-9, this time transposed to a triad on Cb-major (enharmonic to B-major), then descends to Db-major. Here, again, the movement is based on quintal harmony.

Bars 16-18 proceed in a similar fashion, with a linear parallel harmony on a Db-major chord descending to Db-minor. Already in bar 18 we encounter parallel fifths on arpeggiated C-major and Bb-minor chords. A similar gesture reappears in bar 18, this time on Ab-minor, then ends in bar 19.

One of the more unusual elements in *Symphony No. 1* is the contrast between the work's deceptively post-Romantic texture and orchestration and its compositional technique, which is based on quintal and quartal harmonies. As already noted, similar elements are featured also in the earlier *Joram*, where they are clearly meant to express what Ben-Haim saw as his Jewish musical heritage.

Some after thoughts and future considerations

The *Joram* oratorio clearly reflects Ben-Haim's desire to write "Jewish" music already in Germany, prior to his emigration to Israel. The unusual application of certain motifs and the unique compositional technique were clearly meant to tie the oratorio to Jewish music and culture as Ben-Haim perceived them at the time. My comparison between *Joram*, written in Germany, and *Symphony No. 1*, taken here as representative of works written later in Israel, supports Ben-Haim's own view of himself as a composer who did not break away from his own musical style on emigration.

The close affinities between the Jewish musical elements of Ben-Haim's work in Germany and the musical style he developed later in Israel have yet to be studied in detail and deserve further attention. My analysis of *Joram* and my comparison of that work with *Symphony No. 1* clearly show how musical techniques regarded as typically Israeli already were featured prominently in the work of a Jewish composer striving to create Jewish music in Europe.

Understanding Ben-Haim's German period is thus crucial to comprehending not only the individual development of a pivotal composer but the development of Israeli music in general.

⁶⁸ Wolpe, "The Orchestral Music," above, n. 58, p. 20