Hebrew Writing on National Music 1880–1930: An Anthology in Translation

ALON SCHAB

Introduction

Menashe Ravina's (1899–1968) bibliographical survey of Hebrew writings on music offers an overview of several major Hebrew-language publications on music theory produced between the 1880s and the 1930s.[1] Ravina's survey is remarkable not only because it identifies these works—published over the course of half a century and across three distinct geographical settings (Eastern Europe, Palestine, and Britain)—as constituting a single coherent intellectual phenomenon, but also because of its attention to their bibliographical history, publication, and dissemination.

At the outset of his survey, Ravina presents a paradox: "The number of [music-related] names and terms is very great, and the more people wrote about music and its creators, the more difficult it became to understand musical terminology. In time it became necessary to examine the various terms and decipher them."[2] On one level, this paradox is hardly unique to Hebrew. The development of musical theory in any language tends to generate an increasingly self-referential, meta-theoretical discourse. Although Heinrich Schenker, to take a telling example, based much of his thinking directly on musical notation, adding comparatively little explanatory prose, the gradual institutionalization of his analytical method transformed the method itself into an object of scholarly inquiry. As this secondary literature expanded, it drifted progressively further from the musical phenomena that had originally motivated the theory—a development that Schenker himself would almost certainly have regarded as a profound misunderstanding of his project.

Theoretical writing inevitably sacrifices some of music's universal qualities. As a result, theoretical discourse not only tends toward becoming a

I wish to acknowledge the kind help of Efrat Mor, Eitan Namir, Naomi Cohn-Zentner, Drora Bruck, Ayelet Even Ezra, Yoel Greenberg, Dvir Spiegel, and Amnon Seelig.

[1] Menashe Ravina, "Ha-sefer ha-'ivri bi-teḥum ha-musika" [The Hebrew book in the field of music], *Maḥanayim* 106 (July 1966 [5726]): 72–79.

[2] Ibid., 72.

self-contained meta-discourse but is also constrained by the linguistic and intellectual characteristics of the community that produces and consumes it. The nature of a language therefore shapes the discourse that develops within it. Is the language ancient or newly revived? How are technical terms adopted, translated, or newly coined? When musical discourse emerges in a language in which it previously did not exist, the very process of establishing a theoretical vocabulary may generate concepts and perspectives unique to that community. Conversely, if no such discourse takes root, even an intellectually ambitious or monumental text may ultimately prove to be a dead end, lacking continuity or influence.

The replacement of the Latin theoretical discourse that dominated Western music theory until the sixteenth century by vernacular traditions in Italian, German, English, Spanish, and French provides a useful parallel. Treatises such as Johann Joseph Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) became influential not *because* they were written in Latin but *despite* that fact: their ideas survived because they were continually reinterpreted and reintegrated into newly emerging vernacular theoretical communities. Within the Latin discourse that had produced it, *Gradus ad Parnassum* represented something of a dead end.

The Hebrew case, however, presented additional challenges. The revival of Hebrew created a powerful incentive to dissociate intellectual life from the existing scholarly literature written in other languages. Simply transferring theoretical discourse into Hebrew therefore became, in itself, an attempt to establish a dynamic scholarly discourse in the revived language. Creating such a discourse was far from straightforward. Unlike the vibrant musical cultures of eighteenth-century German-speaking Europe, France, or England, the Hebrew musical world that could sustain theoretical writing in Hebrew remained confined to highly specific spheres of activity, while Jewish musicians active within the broader musical world continued to participate primarily in scholarly and professional discussions conducted in other languages.

Although Ravina's bibliographical survey offers an exceptionally detailed discussion of aspects of Hebrew music publishing that had received little attention before—and have received surprisingly little attention since—it leaves largely unaddressed what was arguably the principal obstacle to the emergence of a sustained theoretical discourse: its readership. The Hebrew readership changed dramatically between the periods and locations considered in Ravina's (as well as the present) article and the demographic transformation brought about by the large-scale immigration from Central Europe into Palestine-Eretz-Israel beginning in the mid-1930s. Most of the books discussed by Ravina were, in effect, voices crying in the wilderness, written for a readership with only limited capacity to respond, debate, or extend the conversations they initiated. It is not difficult to imagine an intellectually ambitious Jewish musician

attempting to write a treatise on counterpoint in Yiddish or Hebrew—or even to translate *Gradus ad Parnassum* into one of those languages—around 1860. It is considerably more difficult to imagine the readership such work would have found. Indeed, even today a critical Hebrew edition of, for example, Tinctoris's *De arte contrapuncti* might reasonably be regarded as an exercise in scholarly vanity. Although recent technological developments—including increasingly effective machine translation and the negligible costs of producing and distributing digital publications—may appear to justify projects that would previously have been unsustainable, the present study concerns a period in which publishing a theoretical treatise required substantial financial, intellectual, and institutional investment. The ambitions of these authors should therefore be understood within the historical realities of their own publishing environment.

Ravina discusses six publications in detail: Zvi (Hirsch) Nissan Golomb's *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot* (Conductor of music, Vilna, 1883) and *Zimrat Yah* (Song of God, 1885); A. B. Birnbaum's *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit* (General theory of music, 1902); Abraham Zvi Idelsohn's *Torat ha-neginah* (Theory of music, Jerusalem, 1910); A. L. Bisko's *Torat ha-musika* (Theory of music, London, 1924); and Menachem Osnas's *Yesodot torat ha-musika* (Fundamentals of music theory, Jerusalem, 1930).[3] The translations offered in the present collection focus on the works of Golomb, Birnbaum, Idelsohn, and Bisko. Osnas's work, an adaptation of Nikolay Kashkin's (1839–1920) *Ucebnik èlementarnoj teorii muzyki* (Treatise of elementary music theory), was practical and, unlike the other works discussed here, did not reveal any strong opinions about nation, history, and language. Osnas's contribution—not only as an author but, more importantly, as a teacher and performer—deserves a dedicated study beyond the scope of the present article.

* * *

Without in any way diminishing the achievements of the pioneers of musical life in Mandatory Palestine before the mid-1930s, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that the immigration of German-speaking Jews constituted a watershed in the emergence of a Hebrew musical readership.[4] A central figure in cultivating this audience was Peter Emanuel Gradenwitz (1910–2001). During the 1940s and 1950s, Gradenwitz succeeded in creating what may legitimately be described as a Hebrew musical bookshelf: a substantial body of literature for educated music lovers that included histories of music, books on

[3] Menachem Osnas, *Yesodot torat ha-musika* [Fundamentals of music theory] (Jerusalem: Beit ha-midrash li-neginah [The College of Music], 1930 [5690]).
[4] Philip V. Bohlman, *"The Land Where Two Streams Flow": Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 139–64.

music appreciation (among them a Hebrew adaptation of the German *Musikalische Novellen*), and other introductory texts.[5] These publications naturally complemented the establishment of new music libraries and orchestras during the first decade of the State of Israel.[6]

One challenge shared by the early authors surveyed by Ravina, by Gradenwitz and his contemporaries, and indeed by later generations of Hebrew music writers was the need to formulate a musical terminology capable of sustaining an active discourse on music. In at least one notable instance, that of the concept of "harmony," Idelsohn explicitly interprets the *absence* of a Hebrew equivalent for the Greek term as evidence that the concept itself postdated the formative period of the Hebrew language (see the conclusion of "Our National Music"). In the absence of an agreed-upon technical vocabulary—even for the most elementary concepts—authors were compelled either to coin Hebrew neologisms or to repurpose ancient terms. However bold these early lexical experiments may have been, they lacked the benefit of the sustained scholarly discourse—a discourse that emerged only after the establishment of the State of Israel. The practical viability of the terminology they proposed could therefore never be tested within a living intellectual community. The early Hebrew writers on music often held strong and sharply articulated opinions, and they occasionally engaged one another in direct polemic. Yet the Hebrew bibliography itself remained discontinuous, with few opportunities for cumulative development.

The most striking examples of this instability concern the names of musical instruments. Biblical and rabbinic Hebrew terms were repeatedly reassigned—sometimes several times over—to entirely different instruments. Thus, the organ is called *minnim* by Golomb,[7] *'ugav* by Birnbaum,[8] and *magrefah-organ* by Idelsohn.[9] The designation 'ugav, which ultimately became the standard modern Hebrew term for the church organ, had itself referred in medieval Hebrew musical literature to the viola da gamba.[10] Likewise, Golomb used the

---

[5] Peter Emanuel Gradenwitz, *Toldot ha-musika mi-yemot qedem 'ad yameinu 'elleh* [Music history from antiquity to the present day] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1939); *'Olam ha-simfoniah* [The world of the symphony] (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1945); *Ha-musika ha-qamerit* [Chamber music] (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1948); Leah Goldberg (trans.) and Peter Emanuel Gradenwitz (ed.), *Novelot musiqaliyot—qovetz* [Musical novellas: a selection] (Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1946).

[6] See Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, "The Central Library of Music in Tel Aviv, Israel," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 3, no. 2(1956): 184–85.

[7] Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 33.

[8] Abraham Ber Birnbaum, *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit* [General music theory] (1902 [5662]), 13.

[9] A. Z. Idelsohn, "Ḥayay" [My life], in *The Abraham Zvi Idelsohn Memorial Volume*, Yuval, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 17–20 [Hebrew pagination], 18–23 [Arabic pagination].

[10] Hanoch Loewenstein [Avenary], "Munaḥei ha-musika ba-sifrut ha-'ivrit shel yemei ha-beinayim"Musical terminology] of Hebrew medieval literature], *Leshonenu* 13 (1944 [5705 (sic)]): 140–49.

word ‘ugav to designate the flute. The Hebrew name for the flute also underwent several revisions before the biblical *ḥalil* became standard; among its earlier names was *abuv*,[11] now the accepted Hebrew term for the oboe. Golomb, for his part, did not overlook the biblical word ḥalil, but reassigned it to the clarinet. Similar variation characterized the violoncello, which appears as *kinnor shelema*,[12] *violontshelah* (or *nevel violontshelah*),[13] later as *kinnoran*,[14] and still later as *batnunit*,[15] before the simple borrowing *cello* eventually prevailed.[16]

Theoretical terminology was no less unstable. Golomb called the flat sign *meḥaser* (diminisher),[17] while Birnbaum preferred *mashpil* (lowerer). The Academy of the Hebrew Language’s 1944 terminology adopted the internationally accepted *bemol*,[18] and although its 1955 terminology proposed the Hebrew neologism *naḥet*,[19] the latter never gained currency. Today, bemol is the only term in common use. Concertgoers preserved the German nomenclature, for example *Es-dur*, into the 1960s. The major mode was variously described as *ma‘arakhah gedolah* (large system), *mazhar*, or *dur* by Golomb;[20] Birnbaum referred to it as *sullam ha-tonim ha-mesudar ha-qasheh* (the ordered hard-tone scale),[21] and elsewhere as *mazhur*;[22] the Academy’s 1955 dictionary proposed *sullam rabiv* (סֻלָּם רַבִּיב), a term that likewise failed to enter common usage.

Golomb thus appears to have made a conscious effort to create an indigenous Hebrew musical vocabulary, whereas Birnbaum retained a considerable number of Yiddish- and German-derived expressions. Only the establishment of systematic music-theoretical education in Israel created the institutional framework necessary for the emergence of a coherent and stable Hebrew theoretical discourse. Just as that discourse, during the state’s formative decades, reflected the influence of German-speaking immigration,

---

[11] See, for example, the advertisements for Yehuda Herison’s flute recitals: *Haaretz*, February 9, 1930, 4; *Doar Hayom*, October 6, 1930, 5; *Doar Hayom*, October 20, 1930, 2.
[12] Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 32–33.
[13] Birnbaum, *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit*, 20.
[14] “Munaḥei ha-kinnor” [Terminology of the violin], *Zikhronot va‘ad ha-lashon*, no. 6 [5688], 47–48.
[15] *Milon le-munaḥei ha-musika* [Dictionary of musical terms] (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1955 [5716]). Ravina himself took part in the first two years (of six) of work meetings on the dictionary in the Academy of the Hebrew Language, from December 1945 to February 1948.
[16] Some uncertainty remains regarding the grammatical behavior of borrowed instrumental names in Hebrew, including their plural and construct forms.
[17] Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 45.
[18] “Mi-pe‘ullot va‘ad ha-lashon: munaḥei musika (reshimah B)” [From the proceedings of the Language Society: musical terms (list B)], *Leshonenu* 13, no. 1 (1944 [5706 (sic)]): 62–64.
[19] *Milon le-munaḥei ha-musika*.
[20] Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 49, 52.
[21] Birnbaum, *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit*, 28.
[22] Ibid., 49.

contemporary Hebrew music-theoretical language increasingly follows American terminology.

Ironically, however, the radical instability of the terminology itself tends to obscure rather than illuminate the broader musical ideas articulated by these early writers. Precisely because the translations presented here move beyond the linguistic particularities of Hebrew in its formative stage of revival, they make possible a comparative reading of the conceptual frameworks developed by four authors, each of whom may justifiably be described as intellectually radical in his understanding of music's place within the cultural life of the emerging Jewish nation.

* * *

Ravina writes that Zvi [Hirsch] Nissan Golomb (1853–1934) was born in the Kovno Governorate, where he benefited from the rare combination of a traditional Jewish education and formal musical training. Early in his career he taught Hebrew and worked as a proofreader in a Hebrew printing house in Vilna.[23] Even Abraham Zvi Idelsohn grants him a place among the pioneers when surveying arrangements as examples of artistic endeavors in Jewish music.[24] Golomb's contribution to Hebrew musical bibliography must therefore be understood within the broader context of his activities as an educated author and publisher of exceptional intellectual range. *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot* and *Zimrat Yah* were only two of the seven instructional books that he authored, alongside twelve reading books (*leyze bikher* in Yiddish), 42 articles, and numerous additional unpublished manuscripts whose existence he advertised in print.[25] The relatively small portion of his oeuvre devoted specifically to music nevertheless reveals the portrait of a true connoisseur. He was capable, for example, of producing a remarkably sophisticated obituary for Salomon Sulzer, published in *Ha-tzefirah* only two weeks after Sulzer's death. Appearing in two installments in early February 1890, the obituary consistently refers to Sulzer as a "professor of singing," thereby emphasizing the secular dimension of his career while carefully avoiding the title *ḥazzan*. At the same time, Golomb balances his rather severe criticism of Sulzer's stylistic legacy—particularly as perpetuated by his followers—with unequivocal praise for his historical achievement:

> He labored tirelessly to draw melody from the very spirit of the liturgical rite, so that the melody would correspond to the liturgical text. He granted precedence in every

[23] Ravina, "Ha-sefer ha-'ivri bi-teḥum ha-musika," 72.
[24] A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1929), 462.
[25] *Katalog: Fartseykhenung fun ale bikher un artiklen in tsaytungen un zhurnaln fun dem ferfaser Tsvi Nisan Golomb* (Vilna: Rosenthal, 1917–18).

> prayer to the melody that could truly be said to accord with the spirit of Israel's song from ancient times, transmitted in holiness and purity from the Maharil, whose ancient melodies remained manifest—in prayers such as *Kol Nidrei*, *Ne'ilah*, *Tal*, and *Geshem*—and he spread rejoicing throughout the camp of Israel by means of a choir arranged in pleasing harmony. He also preserved the proper accentuation (*mil'el* and *milra'*) and the distinction between vocal and silent *shewa*, lest their function be altered.[26]

The letters of endorsement printed in the opening pages of *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot* likewise illuminate the book's intellectual agenda. The "enlightened musical scholars and accomplished musicians of renown in the city of Vilna" whom Golomb enlisted were the composers Vasily Eban and Jozef Grimm.[27] Golomb explicitly stresses that both were non-Jews and notes that the letters, reproduced in German transliterated into Hebrew characters, had originally been written in the Latin alphabet (he reused both endorsements in the second volume, reproducing Grimm's letter there in its original Latin script). Whereas Grimm makes no claim to have done more than read through the notated musical examples, Eban remarks that "it would be desirable for this little work to influence the feelings and emotions of the Jewish people." Ravina uses precisely this circumstance—that the authorities upon whom Golomb relied could not actually engage with the Hebrew text in detail—to mitigate Golomb's responsibility for the numerous technical inaccuracies that Ravina identifies, foremost among them his idiosyncratic nomenclature for musical instruments. Ravina concludes charitably that "it is no simple matter to compose a book on music theory when one must create terminology ex nihilo, when one's musical knowledge is drawn from obscure sources, and when the author allows his imagination free rein to extract all manner of curious proposals from the literature available to him."[28]

The excerpt included in the present anthology is no less idiosyncratic than Golomb's treatment of instrumental terminology, yet its engagement with the Hebrew musical tradition extends far beyond questions of etymology. Whereas *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot* presents a transcription of *Kol Nidrei*, *Zimrat Yah* offers what Golomb calls a *higgayon*—an interpretative program—for the melody. As noted above, his obituary of Sulzer likewise singles out *Kol Nidrei* as a melody whose antiquity is immediately apparent to the ear.

The word higgayon itself is multivalent, and Golomb also adopted it as his Hebrew designation for the piano. His detailed justification for this choice demonstrates the extraordinary care with which he considered every lexical decision. The higgayon opens with the claim that the melody originated during

---

[26] Zvi [Hirsch] Nissan Golomb, "Misped be-mishpat" [Eulogy in letters], *Ha-tzefirah*, February 3, 1890, 3–4; February 4, 1890, 3–4.
[27] Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 8.
[28] Ravina, "Ha-sefer ha-'ivri bi-teḥum ha-musika," 75.

the persecution of the Jews of Spain. Idelsohn would later refute this assumption on grounds of both style and transmission.[29] However, Golomb, for his part, vividly recounts the secret worship of the *conversos*, their discovery by the Inquisition, their arrest, trial, and execution, the refusal of a certain Don de Seville to embrace Christianity despite the pleas of his children, and his death at the stake. He then asserts that one of the witnesses to these events composed the melody, encoding the narrative within it so that each successive musical phrase represents a different stage of the drama. In effect, Golomb argues that the melody functions as a symphony, offering what amounts to a programmatic reading of the liturgical chant. Although I have translated higgayon rather awkwardly as "An Interpretative Program," it is tempting to speculate that both this conception and Golomb's repeated invocation of the term "symphony" (especially as he defines it) were inspired by Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. However eccentric Golomb may appear, the privileged status that he accords to *Kol Nidrei*, his reference to the legend linking the melody with the persecution of Spanish Jewry, and even the notion of a programmatic symphony built upon it all find striking echoes in Idelsohn's later writings. Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* also seems likely to have been on the intellectual horizon of the next author represented in the present anthology, Abraham Ber Birnbaum.

Since Golomb almost certainly expected the readers of *Zimrat Yah* either to have *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, published two years earlier, open alongside it or to know the particular version of *Kol Nidrei* familiar to him well enough to follow his interpretative program while referring mentally to the melody, we have reproduced here a transcription of the musical passages from the earlier publication to which Golomb refers within the body of the later text.

Unlike Golomb, Abraham Ber Birnbaum (1864–1922) devoted his life entirely to musical activity, both as a cantor and as a composer. Throughout his relatively short life he sought recognition as a professional musician in the hope of relinquishing his responsibilities as a *shoḥet*.[30] His critical assessment of musical practice within the Jewish communities of Poland rested upon a considerably deeper command of music theory, and the authorities to whom he appealed carried correspondingly greater professional weight. Whereas Golomb secured endorsements from respected Vilna composers, Birnbaum's cantorial publications prominently displayed testimonials from two internationally renowned composers and pedagogues: Professor Salomon Jadassohn of the

[29] A. Z. Idelsohn, "The Kol Nidre Tune," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8/9 (1931–32): 493–509, at 493, 496.
[30] Ofer Ronen, "Abraham Ber Birnbaum," Jewish Music Research Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/en/content/abraham-ber-birnbaum (accessed July 5, 2026).

Leipzig Conservatory and Professor Emil Breslaur of the Berlin Conservatory.[31] The wording of Jadassohn's endorsement of *Hallel W'Simrah*, while ostensibly a generic recommendation, in fact touches upon one of the most heated controversies in the cantorial world of the period. It is not implausible that Birnbaum deliberately guided Jadassohn's formulation so that it would be understood that the addition of the organ—which undoubtedly facilitated the reception of these works in German-speaking congregations—was, at most, optional. Jadassohn's endorsement thus became a rhetorical instrument through which Birnbaum could demonstrate the artistic effectiveness of his compositions even within the more conservative circles of traditional cantorial practice.[32]

Birnbaum's *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit* (General theory of music) is fascinating above all for its linguistic attempt to formulate elementary music theory simultaneously in Hebrew and Yiddish, presented in parallel columns. Although Birnbaum held strong views on Jewish and national music, *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit* is noteworthy precisely *because* it largely brackets these ideological concerns, describing music in its most universal dimensions through explanations of acoustical phenomena. Birnbaum's ability to separate, at least ostensibly, a conception of music theory as a universal discipline from the enlistment of musical practice in national and religious agendas appears to have been a defining feature of his intellectual outlook.

The distinctly Jewish elements that enter this theoretical treatise are found primarily in Birnbaum's literary style. For example, when discussing the augmented interval, he writes that "if the upper tone of a major interval is raised by a semitone, it is called (*'azay . . . shemo niqra*) *'odef al ha-middah* ('exceeding the measure')," thereby alluding to the wording of the liturgical poem *Adon Olam*. Birnbaum also occasionally employs Aramaic expressions from rabbinic literature, such as *ve-'agav gerara* (incidentally).[33] Another way in which Hebrew shapes his conceptualization of theoretical ideas is through the language's inherently gendered nouns. Thus, Birnbaum consistently refers to major and relative minor keys as masculine and feminine, respectively, and invokes the biblical phrase *'ezer kenegdo* (a helpmate corresponding to him; Gen. 2:18)—the very expression that underlies the biblical distinction between male and female—to characterize the relationship between major and minor.[34]

---

[31] Toward the end of his career Jadassohn also became the mentor of the young Idelsohn. Idelsohn, "Ḥayay," 18–23 [Arabic pagination].

[32] Jadassohn's words, dated March 7, 1897: "Die Gesänge werden ohne Orgelbegleitung, die übrigens verständig bearbeitet ist, noch wirkensvoller sein als mit derselben." A. B. Birnbaum, *Hallel W'Simrah: Vierstimmige Chöre und Soli für den israelitischen Gottesdienst* (Czenstochau, 1897), 3.

[33] Birnbaum, *Torat ha-zimrah ha-kelalit*, 42.

[34] Ibid., 50–51, 35.

Because the present anthology is concerned primarily with the religious and national dimensions of Hebrew musical writing, the selections included here are drawn not from Birnbaum's theoretical manual but from a sharply critical review that he published in the summer of 1904 on the contents of the songbook *Ha-zamir*, issued earlier that year.[35] Across the five installments of the review, published in the weekend supplements of *Ha-tzefirah* between late July and late October, Birnbaum offers detailed critiques of individual songs while simultaneously outlining his broader philosophy of Jewish musical education. As the two excerpts reproduced here demonstrate, he argues that before young people are introduced to the highest forms of musical art, they should first encounter the folk songs of their own people, through which they absorb—precisely because of the receptivity characteristic of youth—the deepest foundations of their national identity. Birnbaum further contends that these underlying strata of folk song possess a remarkable permanence. Just as, in his view, an autobiographical composition such as Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* engages listeners with a transient and contingent aspect of the composer's personality, so too attempts to impose superficial stylistic changes upon Jewish music—he appears to have Russian, Polish, and German influences particularly in mind—remain external to the enduring foundations of authentic folk music.

Even in this critical essay, Birnbaum continues to combine the tone of a broadly educated intellectual with a prose style deeply rooted in Jewish literary culture. Thus, in the opening of the article he writes that "through the melody . . . the author conveyed his *regashot* ('feelings') and *hitpa'alut nafsho* ('the stirring of his soul')," thereby distinguishing between ordinary emotions and *hitpa'alut ha-nefesh*, a term far more familiar from the vocabulary of Jewish mysticism. Birnbaum also appears to draw philosophically upon Felix Mendelssohn, in part because Mendelssohn's Jewish ancestry was well known, while the equally undeniable fact that he had been a devout Lutheran since childhood tended to be overlooked by Jews and Christians alike. Biographical considerations likewise shape Birnbaum's treatment of Hector Berlioz. It is easy for him to present the Catholic Berlioz as a negative example, especially once he claims that the source of the composer's inspiration was Jewish. Since Birnbaum could hardly "convert" Berlioz himself into a Jewish figure, he instead "Jewifies" the composer's muse—without making clear on what historical evidence such a claim rests.

Of all the authors represented in the present anthology, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn is unquestionably the most influential. Indeed, his ideas—especially those articulated in *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development*—continue to

[35] Abraham Ber Birnbaum, "Shirei 'am" [Folk songs], *Ha-tzefirah*, July 22, 1904, 421–22; August 12, 1904, 454–55; August 19, 1904, 466–67; September 9, 1904, 506–07; October 28, 1904, 577.

shape not only the way Jewish music is understood but even the very conception of Jewish music as a phenomenon possessing distinct historical roots. The ideas formulated in Idelsohn's mature and influential writings developed only gradually. His article "Neginatenu ha-le'ummit" (Our national music, *Ha-shiloaḥ* 21, November 1909) and his book *Torat ha-neginah* (Theory of music, 1910) reflect his earliest formulations on the subject (Idelsohn had begun publishing scholarly articles only in 1908) and may be said to preserve ideas whose ideological fervor had not yet been tempered by the more detached scholarly voice that characterizes his later, iconic monograph. Both "Our National Music" and the chapter "The National Music" conclude with an impassioned plea for the renewal of Jewish music.

In "Our National Music," Idelsohn examines the historical development of Jewish music—and, more broadly, of folk music—through the prism of musical modes. Idelsohn argues that the oldest stratum of Jewish musical tradition survives not in composed melodies but in the modal chant formulas of biblical cantillation and prayer, preserved throughout the Jewish Diaspora. Despite regional variation, these traditions preserve common modal structures and a shared aesthetic rooted in ancient Temple practice. Idelsohn identifies the defining characteristics of this primordial "Semitic" music as modal organization, flexible rhythm, recitative declamation, and the absence of formal structure and harmony, contrasting it sharply with European music, which he characterizes as governed by regular meter, fixed forms, harmonic development, and rational design. From this premise he constructs a developmental history of Jewish music, tracing how successive encounters with surrounding cultures reshaped the original tradition. He distinguishes between Eastern (Yemenite, Persian, and Sephardi) and Western (Ashkenazi, Polish, and Hasidic) branches, arguing that Yemenite Jews preserved the oldest and purest layer, while Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Polish, and Hasidic repertoires progressively absorbed Turkish, Arab, Catholic, Protestant, Gypsy, Slavic, and other musical influences. Throughout, he evaluates each tradition according to its proximity to what he perceived as the ancient Hebrew original, praising those elements that retained modal and stylistic continuity while criticizing the wholesale adoption of European musical idioms.

Aharon Leib Bisko (1859–1929) remains an enigmatic figure whose writings reflect both his eccentric personality and his remarkable intellectual charisma. In general, his *Torat ha-musika* (Theory of music) should be understood as part of the broader effort, shared by all the authors discussed thus far, to develop a modern Hebrew musical terminology. This project was closely

connected to his broader activities as a Hebrew educator, [36]as well as to his work in lexicography and his efforts to broaden the scope of Hebrew scholarly literature into subjects such as physiognomy.

It was, however, the introductory chapter that Bisko appended to *Torat ha-musika* that attracted most of Ravina's attention and that is of greatest relevance to the present anthology. In this brief manifesto, Bisko argues that the Jewish people, like every other nation, possess an authentic musical tradition. From this premise he develops a highly unconventional thesis: although the physical laws governing sound are universal, the design of certain musical instruments and even the conventions of musical notation have been shaped by specifically Christian cultural assumptions. These conventions, he contends, have gradually alienated Jewish musicians from their own musical heritage. The chapter culminates in a striking program of reform that calls for the "Judaization" of musical instruments.

Although Bisko acknowledges that the construction of wind instruments is fundamentally correct, since their design cannot violate the basic physics of sound production, he argues that the layout of the piano keyboard and the stringing of the violin family are determined by the left-to-right directionality of Latin-script writing. In his view, this orientation runs contrary to the more natural and proper order embodied in Hebrew, whose script proceeds from right to left.

If Birnbaum demonstrated that it was possible to separate the promotion of a national artistic agenda from the discussion of the universal foundations of music, Bisko sought to rethink the very conceptualization of music theory and the manifestation of those concepts in the most fundamental aspects of instrument design. His proposals—especially those concerning the development of a specifically Jewish piano—can at times sound unsettling, insofar as they inadvertently echo antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish financial power. Having first asserted that "money can purchase everything," Bisko observes that "Piano production is at present almost entirely in German hands," before concluding that, under his proposed reforms, "it would henceforth pass entirely into Jewish hands."

Bisko's eccentricity is equally apparent in other areas of his writing. His earlier political work, *Divine Correspondence*, presents a sweeping indictment of antisemitism, tracing an imagined continuity from the ancient hatred embodied by the Egyptian god Apis to the antisemitism of contemporary Russia, represented by the "Apis of Russia." Along the way, Bisko discusses recent events such as the Dreyfus Affair and the Russo-Japanese War, settles

[36] See, for example, his pedagogical *Pirkei Talmud* [Chapters of Talmud] (Warsaw: Halter and Co., 1905), which introduces students to Talmudic literature through the gradual expansion of vocabulary.

scores with several European nations, and advances what he presents as the inevitable conclusion: that "when the Jews will be established as an independent nation," the ancient antisemitic deities will cease to exist.[37] Ultimately, Bisko's significance lies less in the originality of his musical theories than in the way his writings on music were integrated into broader programs of Hebrew national revival, demonstrating how musical discourse could serve as a vehicle for wider ideological aspirations.

* * *

The texts presented in English translation in this anthology offer a window onto a unique moment in the history of the Hebrew Enlightenment. Once again, comparison with Hebrew writing on music after the immigration from Central Europe helps sharpen our understanding of just how revolutionary and surprising the earlier period was. Gradenwitz and his contemporaries sought to give Hebrew writing—and even the most overtly Zionist of it—the appearance of professional scholarship, modeled on the various genres of German writing about music. By contrast, the writings of Golomb, Birnbaum, Idelsohn, and Bisko were far less constrained by German models, and their ideological fervor, less territorial and more ethnic in character, permeated their terminology, their literary forms, and their choice of subjects. A closer familiarity with the early Hebrew writing on music demonstrates the extent to which the momentum gained by musical life in Palestine with the arrival of the Fifth Aliyah was less a matter of creating something new than of "taming" tendencies that had been stirring in the minds of the finest Hebrew writers some half-century earlier.

[37] Aharon Leib Bisko, *Divine Correspondence* (London?, ca. 1905), 32.

Zvi (Hirsch) Nissan Golomb, "An Interpretative Program upon the Melody *Kol Nidrei*" Being Sung in All Diasporas of Israel in the Night of Yom Kippur, as Notated in No. 18 in the "Melodies" Section

Text source: Zvi (Hirsch) Nissan Golomb, *Zimrat Yah* (Vilna, 1885), 80–84; music examples: Zvi (Hirsch) Nissan Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot* (Vilna, 1883), 74–76.

Many skilled and learned musicians, even among foreign nations, ask one another: Who composed that sublime melody of *Kol Nidrei*? Every discerning ear perceives that beneath its sheltering wings lie hidden the sighing of the soul, anguish and trembling, the terror of annihilation, cries of despair, and violent outbursts of grief. And it is as though spirits speak to one another.

This melody had its origin among the Jews of Spain, and its very substance is imbued with a grim and tragic vision, fashioned by an enlightened son of Israel who beheld with his own eyes the sufferings of his people, like the works of the great composers of our own age, who possess the wondrous gift of creating melodies that speak to one another as though in the language of birds, unfolding a story after the manner of an opera; and first I shall recount the sorrowful story that befell our forefathers in Spain some four hundred years ago (as the poet Zunser has so sweetly rendered it in our own people's tongue);[1] then we shall behold, as though before our eyes, all those dreadful scenes reflected alike in the divisions of the verse and in the strains of the melody sung during the prayer of *Kol Nidrei*:

The history of the Jews of Spain in the days of the Inquisition is inscribed in tears and in blood upon the heart of our people. It is known throughout the world and among all nations as a lasting disgrace to humankind, when thousands of innocent men and women—upright in conduct and steadfast in spirit—were consigned to the flames, and many were therefore compelled to embrace another faith, while in secret they continued to honor the faith of their fathers.

And it came to pass that, on the eve of Kol Nidrei, the *conversos* of Segovia gathered in one of their secret hiding places to offer the sacred prayers of that solemn night. Among them were officers of the royal court and wise counselors of the realm. As they poured out their supplications to the God of all spirits with bitter tears, a band of the arrogant ruffians of the Inquisition suddenly burst into the cavern in a frenzy of wrath. There arose a scene of unspeakable confusion and terror. Like ravening wolves they fell upon the worshipers, bound them with

[1] Editor's note: The text of Eliakum Zunser's "The Rose" is included in *Zimrat Yah*, 77–78. Like the melody of *Kol Nidrei*, the melody of Zunser's song is included in Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*, 72–73.

cords, and cast them to the ground, where they lay helpless—like oxen led to the slaughter—mute, broken, and bereft of all hope of life!

On the following day Queen Isabella looked forth from the window of her palace, and behold, the Lord High Treasurer, Don de Seville—one of the surviving scions of the house of Abravanel, a shoot from the stock of Jesse—was being led away to the Calle Salidada, that dreadful place which had been prepared since the previous day for trials, executions, and the burning of the condemned.[2] The queen was seized with horror. Swift as a startled hind she hastened to the Grand Inquisitor to plead for his deliverance, saying that this man had rendered great services to the Spanish nation and that much yet remained for him to accomplish. But she could not rescue him from their hands, for the authority of the Inquisition rested upon the Pope and his clergy. The priests consented to spare his life, only on condition that Don de Seville swear faithful allegiance to their religion. Filled with joy, the queen hastened to the place of execution to announce that he had been delivered from the fires of the Faith, provided only that he sincerely and wholeheartedly embrace their creed. But Don de Seville answered: "How can I sever the silver chain and become the final link in that succession of generations which has endured from the very beginning of Israel's faith?" Then the queen, in her wisdom, caused his children to be brought before him. They wept and implored him to grant the priests' demand, lest they remain fatherless orphans. The unhappy father's heart melted at the sight of these beloved children. Within him there raged a fierce struggle with the longing for life. Yet when he remembered that by yielding he would sever the cord of Jacob's inheritance, he called to mind the Law of Moses and surrendered his life for the sanctification of the Divine Name. And crying aloud with a mighty voice, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One!" he leapt into the flames (*the auto-da-fé*). The fire consumed him, and the sound of his cry was swallowed up. A wise and gifted Jewish musician who witnessed these events with his own eyes pondered them deeply and fashioned this melody, in which every part of the story is vividly portrayed in clear [musical] language.[3] Such a form of composition is called in Italian a *Simponie*, that is, a

---

[2] Editor's note: While the story clearly takes its inspiration from that of Dom Isaac Abravanel, treasurer to Ferdinand and Isabella, the dramatic martyrdom is a romanticized retelling of Abravanel's diplomatic efforts to prevent the expulsion of Jews from Spain. It is therefore hard to relate the place of the "Calle Salidada" (Soledad?), where the story takes place, to specific places around the main square of Segovia. Abravanel died in Venice in 1508.
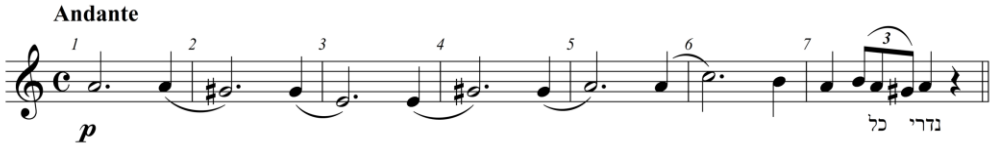
[3] In the days when the children of Israel were firmly established in Spain, they devoted themselves to every branch of learning. Among them were men wise and discerning, instructed in knowledge, and worthy to stand in the courts of kings. As the illustrious scholar Ribal Z"L wrote in his book *Yalqut Ribal* (p. 125 [*sic*; *recte* 152]): "It is well known in Judea that our Spanish brethren were, from ancient times, a guiding light to all the Diaspora scattered throughout the ends of the earth—in Torah, in wisdom, and in every good and beneficial pursuit—and were always regarded as our teachers." [Editor's note: the quote from Ribal (Isaac Baer Levinsohn, 1788–1860) is taken from the essay "Ulam Hamishpat" and is quoted from the

series of orchestral scenes. He adapted it for performance in the House of God during the Kol Nidrei service, so that the memory of those long forgotten might once more be brought before us—the memory of those who were slain and burned for the sanctification of the great and awe-inspiring Name of Heaven—and that it might bring consolation to their descendants after them. Accordingly, the melody unfolds in strict accordance with the narrative, progressing through two visions, each divided into three successive scenes.

Vision 1

Scene 1

The melody sung by the cantor until he utters the words "Kol Nidrei" vividly portrays before us the opening scene: a congregation standing in prayer, their souls sighing forth in holy awe. It is the very sound that the composer of the melody heard among his brethren when they gathered in the hidden cavern on the eve of the Day of Atonement and began their worship, giving voice to the sacred emotions that filled their hearts on that great and holy night.
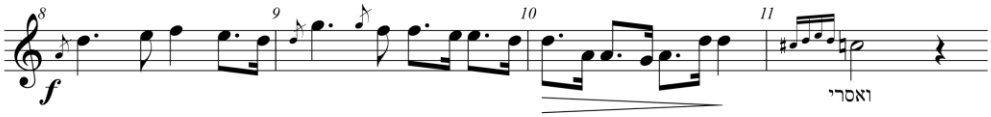


Example 1 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 1–7, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Scene 2

The melody sung by the cantor at the words "veesarei," which suddenly breaks forth in a cry of despair, with the dreadful tumult of an anguished "Oy! Oy!," as though startled by some unexpected terror, depicts the panic that erupted in

posthumous anthology *Yalqut Ribal* (Warsaw, 1878). The essay first appeared as an appendix to the second edition of the same author's *Beith Yehuda* (Vilnius, 1857), p. 171.]
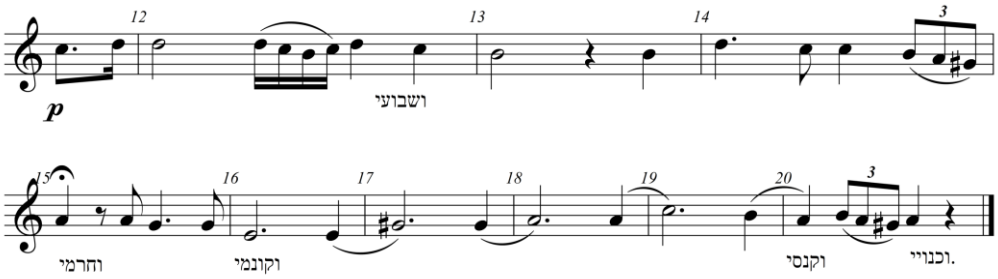
their humble sanctuary when the destroyers of the Inquisition burst suddenly into their midst.



Example 2 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 8–11, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Scene 3

The melody to which the cantor returns, calling forth tears with bowed head and utter hopelessness as he sings the words "ushevu'ei, vaḥaramei, vekonamei, vekinnusei, vekinnuyei," is the voice of mourners pouring out their souls as they lie upon the ground like sheep led to the slaughter. They recall their faith and the bitter, cruel fate that has befallen them. Amid streams of tears they bid farewell to their humble sanctuary, which had been their sole comfort through all their toil and affliction whenever they gathered there to worship the Lord—for they know that henceforth they shall behold the Lord no more in the land of the living.
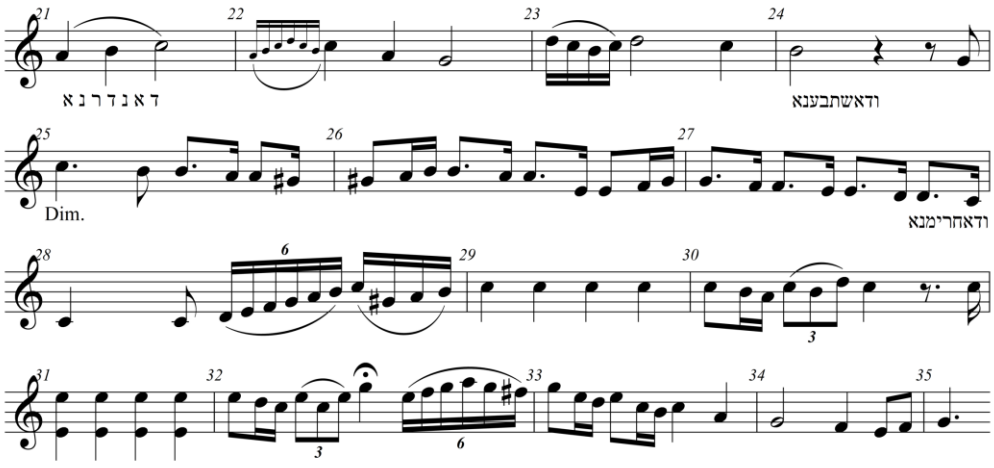


Example 3 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 12–20, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Vision 2

Scene 1

The melody undergoes a striking transformation at the words "de'andarna, de'ishtabba'na, de'aḥarimna." At first it rings out with the accents of hope, deliverance, and consolation; but almost immediately its brightness fades, as though it recoiled from uttering so bitter a message. At last it sinks into bitter weeping, accompanied by mournful inclinations of the head, and thus relates,
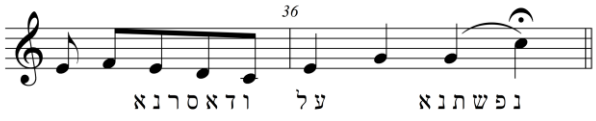
with hesitant uncertainty, the coming of the queen, bearing tidings that his life might yet be spared—if only he would submit to the demands of the priests of the Inquisition. Should he refuse, he must perish before his time, for even she has no power to rescue him from hands mightier than her own.



Example 4 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 21–35, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Scene 2

The melody that the cantor now sings in a lofty and resonant voice, as though recalling some priceless treasure whose worth reaches even unto the throne of God, at the words "de-amarna," gives voice to the martyr's reply. How could he bring to an end the chain of generations? It is the faith of Israel, whose name and remembrance have been exalted and made holy from time immemorial. How could he commit such a deed and so sin against God?
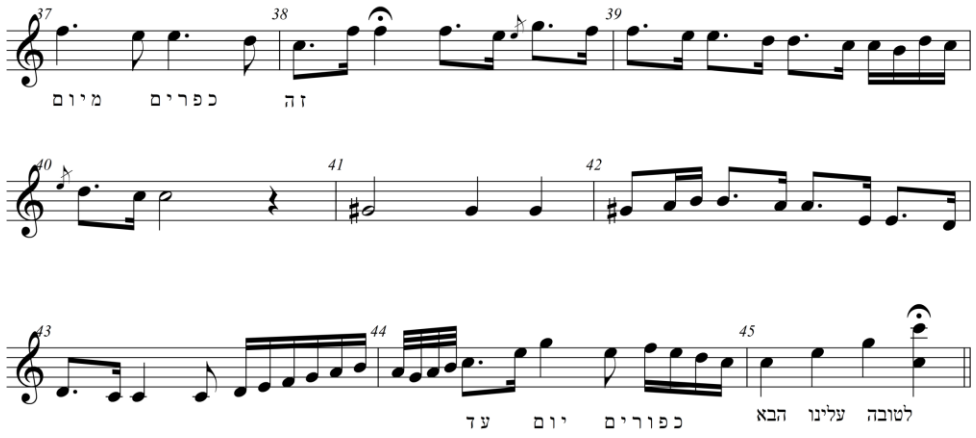


Example 5 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 35–36, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Scene 3

The [part of the] melody "From this Day of Atonement until the next Day of Atonement," which begins with a voice of weeping, supplication, dread, and entreaty, is the voice of the four children. They weep, wail, and plead "Our

father! Our shepherd! Do not abandon us like forsaken lambs!" Then, suddenly, the cantor raises his voice with strength as he sings: "May that which comes upon us be for good!" The voice grows ever more powerful, until every heart melts and every spirit is subdued. It rises higher and higher, reaching the very limits of its strength, soaring toward the heavens. It is the voice of the unhappy father, gathering courage within himself, as his compassion for his children struggles against his desire to preserve his own life for the sake of sanctifying the name of God. And suddenly from his lips bursts forth a mighty and thunderous cry: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One!" The voice disappears together with him, swallowed up in the flame of the Lord that rises above the altar, as he leaps suddenly into the consuming fire. And he is gone.
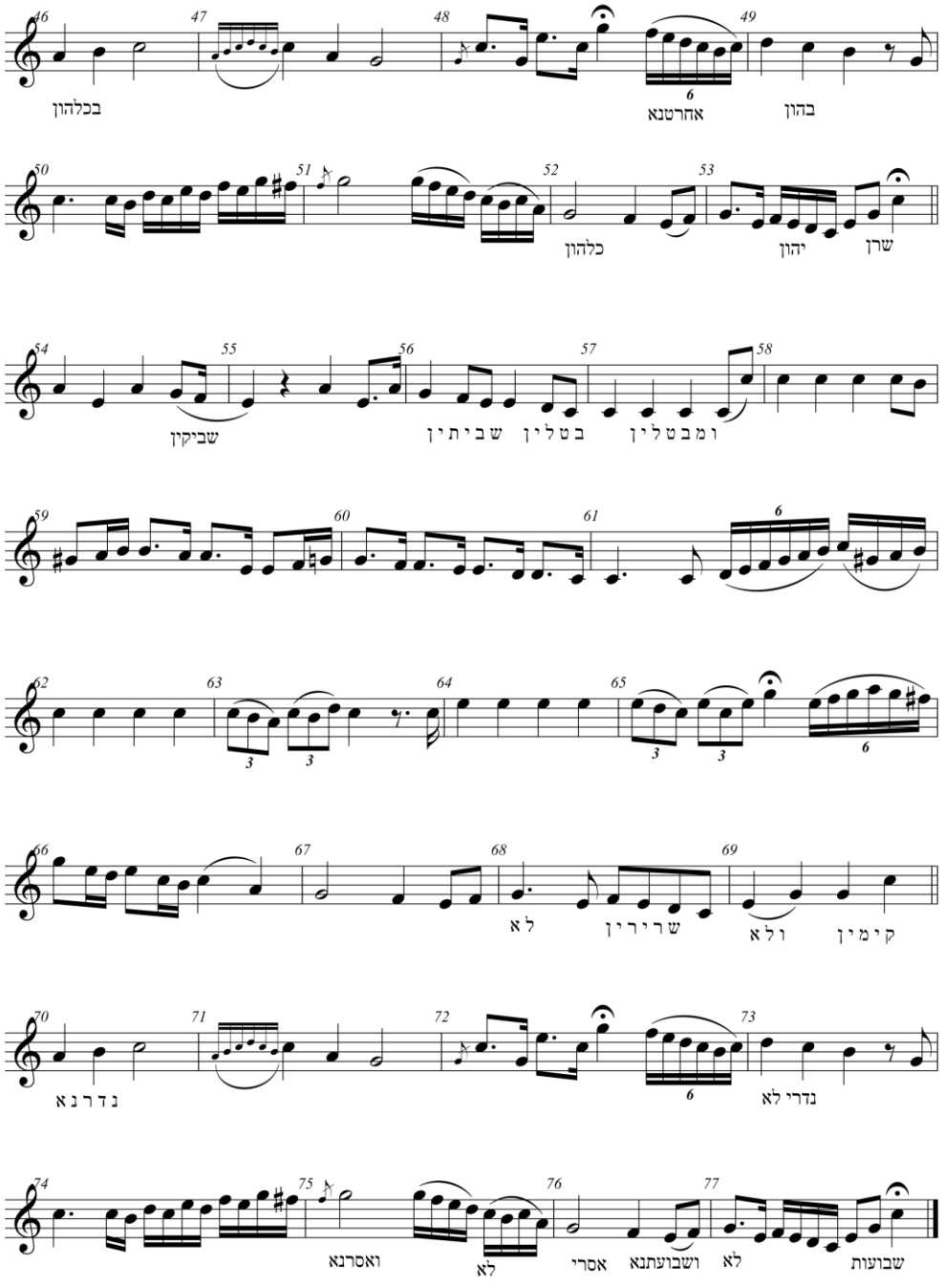


Example 6 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 37–45, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

The Reiteration of the Vision (Encore)

At the words "bekhullhon aḥartan behon," and continuing thereafter, the melody returns in the second scene, repeating itself in the manner of all great dramas, where the spectators refuse to allow the principal performer [in the original: director or conductor] to cease, even though their eyes overflow with tears and their hearts pour forth sighs at the sight of the dreadful and terrible spectacle. For the artist has possessed the rare wisdom to summon forth from the abyss of the past souls that had long since departed. Behold, the cruel tormentors and the tormented—those who suffered in the narrow confines of Sheol at the hands of their oppressors—stand before us once more in their full human form. They move with the strength of their spirits, awakening in the souls of those who behold the scene terror and compassion, anger and forgiveness alike. It is difficult for the spectators to part from them, and they applaud as a sign that the

scene should be repeated. And in order to satisfy their longing, the principal performer returns once more to the stage of the drama.



Example 7 *Kol Nidrei*, mm. 46–77, from Golomb, *Menatzeaḥ bi-neginot*.

Abraham Ber Birnbaum, "Folk Songs"

Source: Abraham Ber Birnbaum, "Shirei 'am" [review of the songbook *Ha-zamir*], part 1, *Ha-tzefirah*, July 22, 1904, 421–22; part 4, September 9, 1904, 506–07.

The singing of children has been made a compulsory part of education in the schools of all enlightened nations, for those nations recognize the pedagogical value of musical instruction for children. Indeed, there can be no doubt that singing exerts a profound influence upon the education and formation of the young. The nature of this influence may be explained in the simplest terms. Through melody—whether it be the work of an accomplished composer or a folk tune—the creator gives expression to his emotions and to the stirrings of his spirit. Music is therefore the most immediate medium for the expression of inward feeling. It follows naturally that through the very medium by which the composer pours forth his emotions, the listener—or, still more, the performer—absorbs them, each according to the disposition and temperament of his own soul. For that which proceeds from the soul inevitably acts upon the soul. If this is true of adults, how much more powerful must the influence of song be upon children. They absorb through melody, with far greater intensity, those emotions and spiritual impulses that words alone can scarcely express for lack of adequate language. And even where the poet succeeds in finding fitting words, the language of speech has not yet fully developed in the child. The language of song, which is the language of the soul, is therefore more readily understood by children than the language of words.

Concerning the relationship between melody and words, Mendelssohn Bartholdy dwells at length in his reply to one who had asked him to explain the meaning he intended to convey in one of the "Songs without Words" that he had composed. His observations on this subject are of such value that we consider it appropriate to reproduce them here: [4]

> There is so much talk about music, and yet so little really said. For my part I believe that words do not suffice for such a purpose, and if I found they did suffice, then I certainly would compose no more music. People often complain that music is so ambiguous, that what they are to think about it always seems so doubtful, whereas every one understands words; with me it is exactly the reverse; not merely with regard to entire sentences, but also to individual words; these, too, seem to me so

[4] *Mendelssohns Briefe bis 1840*, Leipzig. [Editor's note: It is uncertain to which edition Birnbaum refers, especially since the letter was written after 1840. This famous text is taken from Mendelssohn's letter to Marc André Souchay (reference number fmb-1842-10-15-04; the German original is accessible at https://www.felix-mendelssohn-bartholdy.org/brief/fmb-1842-10-15-04). Birnbaum's quote is an abbreviation of an already abbreviated version that appeared both in contemporary editions and in translations. The version presented here is based on the contemporary translation in Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Carl Mendelssohn Bartholdy (eds.), *Mendelssohn's Letters from 1833 to 1847*, trans. Lady [Grace Jane] Wallace (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1885), 276–77.]

> ambiguous, so vague, so unintelligible when compared with genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words. What any music I love expresses to me, is not thought too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary, too definite. I therefore find, in all these attempts to express such thoughts, something commendable, but still there is something unsatisfactory too in them all, and so it is with yours also. This, however, is not your fault, but that of the words, which do not enable you to do better. If you ask me what my idea was, I say—just the song as it stands; and if I had in my mind a definite term or terms with regard to one or more of these songs, I should not like to disclose them to any one, because the words of one person assume a totally different meaning in the mind of another person, because the music of the song alone can awaken the same ideas and the same feelings in one mind as in another—a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words. The praise of God, a hunting-song[5]—one person does not form the same conception from these that another does. To any man who is by nature a very keen sportsman, a hunting-song and the praise of God would come pretty much to the same thing, and to such a one the sound of the hunting-horn would really and truly be the praise of God, whereas we hear nothing in it but a mere hunting-song; and if we were to discuss it ever so often with him, we should get no further. Words have many meanings, and yet music we could both understand correctly. Will you allow this to serve as an answer to your question? At all events, it is the only one I can give—although these too are nothing, after all, but ambiguous words.

If, then, song exerts a beneficial influence upon the soul, and if its effect is especially powerful in the education of children, we need not hesitate for a single moment in affirming the necessity of musical instruction in the elementary schools. The benefits of singing for children are manifold, some spiritual and others physical. Among the former are the cultivation of the memory through words and melodies; the development of the voice and the refinement of pronunciation by means of song; the enrichment of the intellect and the imagination; the formation of the child's sense of beauty; and the training of the mind in rhythm and order. Among the physical benefits are the child's enjoyment and recreation, a wholesome exercise that strengthens the body, and, in later years, preparation for participation in social gatherings and national festivals. Above all, however, stands its educational purpose, which embraces all the particulars enumerated above.

The national aspect of singing in the schools we have not listed among these advantages, for it follows so naturally that there is scarcely any need to mention it. The matter is self-evident. A child's first instruction in music ought necessarily to begin with the songs of his own people, and his earliest melodies ought to be the folk melodies of his own nation. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of any other course, just as it is impossible to imagine a mother soothing her infant at her breast in a language foreign to her own people, or to imagine

---

[5] Here, Birnbaum omits two other examples given by Mendelssohn, namely "resignation" and "melancholy."

teaching a child the language of another nation before he has even heard his mother tongue. Our first duty is to teach our pupils the language of their mothers; the words of our prophets; the wisdom of our sages; their discourse and conversation; their gestures, their accents, and their melodies—so simple a truth that it scarcely requires further explanation.

Let us take, for example, the many songbooks used in the vernacular schools. In them one does not find elaborate artistic compositions, but only brief, modest, simple melodies, consisting of no more than one or two musical phrases. The older the nation, the simpler are the musical substance and artistic pretensions of these melodies. For children's songbooks do not aspire to the realm of art. Apart from the fact that one cannot demand artistic perfection from young children, it would be wholly inappropriate to make artistic greatness their primary concern. The purpose of children's songs is educational. Through them the children become acquainted with the simple and innocent thoughts of their fathers and mothers, with their sounds and melodies, and even with their playful prattle—and all of it in the ancient language of their own people. If folk song exists, above all, to nourish each generation with the fruits of its national heritage, to strengthen the bonds of the people and preserve its traditions, and to awaken within it the memory of its forefathers, together with their feelings and their thoughts, then children's song constitutes the first spiritual nourishment required for the upbringing of the nation's young saplings, that they may grow into faithful descendants of their race and loyal guardians of its tradition. The first requirement of children's melodies, therefore, is that they spring from the wellspring of the nation itself. Nor is it sufficient that they be newly composed by "various composers," however faithfully they may imitate the spirit and style of the people. Rather, they ought to be drawn from the treasury of the nation's ancient melodies—the very melodies that children once absorbed together with their mother's milk. Such has indeed been the practice in the compilation of children's songbooks. Accordingly, the first compiler of a children's songbook for a nation that has not yet fully established its own cultural household should concern himself, before all else, with the fading blossoms that flourished in the nation's venerable past and now stand in danger of perishing through forgetfulness. He should rescue them from oblivion, gather them one by one, and teach them anew to the children. So it is among all nations.

The German songbooks are devoted entirely to the German people; not a single foreign melody is to be found in them. The history of the German nation lives within its songbook, whose collection of songs is, as it were, an illustrated chronicle of the people. The Poles first took care to gather into their "Litaniae" every melody that had sprung from the bosom of the Polish people. Nothing was omitted. Only after they had discharged this duty to their own nation—and because they could not fail to admire the rich treasures of German music—did

they proceed to translate and collect the finest German melodies as well. The Russians followed the same course. This borrowing, however, was confined to songbooks intended for adults, for there the subject was artistic music. Quite otherwise did they proceed in their children's songbooks. They regarded it as their foremost task to supply the needs of children's music exclusively from the sounds and melodies of their own people. Such a songbook lays no claim to artistic ambition or even to musical distinction. Its value is educational—and therefore, by its very nature, national. The Russian children's songbook, like the Polish one, is entirely free of foreign melodies. The tunes are handed down to children exactly as they were first created, exactly as they are sung by the country folk, without addition or subtraction. It is only in artistic composition, intended for mature audiences beyond the confines of locality or nationality, that composers refine and perfect these national musical materials.

[. . .]

Even the most original poet does not make his poetry a private lament over his own misfortunes and failures, nor does he express his personal happiness in music whenever fortune smiles upon him. Many true composers wrote their most joyous works while they themselves were hungry for bread; some were even persecuted and driven into exile, as was Mozart, yet neither exile nor material hardship left any discernible mark upon their music. It is time and place, nature and climate, that breathe the spirit of poetry into the poet, not the passing condition of his private emotions. The individual—or the nation—that makes poetry merely the servant of personal moods, rather than drawing its share from the universal poetry of nature, the poet who sings only when fortune favors him and laments only when adversity overtakes him, is unworthy of the name of poet. History will not forgive Chopin, who, after the woman whom he loved escaped him, lost heart and wandered thereafter like a shadow. From that time onward, he cast drops of bitterness into all his melodies and poured his grief into them, although those compositions, taken in themselves, are admirable works and highly original. The critics, he maintains, were justified in reckoning this among Chopin's failings. Every healthy soul seeks delight in universal poetry—in the song of the world itself. What concern have we with the private affairs of the poet? Though he may, indeed must, give us something that is uniquely his own, we ought not to confuse a poet's originality with his passing state of mind. Humanity is under no obligation to exhaust its sympathies upon the poet's personal sorrows. The poet is merely the instrument capable of receiving the influence of that ever-renewed spirit of poetry which descends upon him. When that natural poetic spirit rests upon him, then he sings. Thus, if one may put it so, even the originality we seek in the poet is not truly his own possession, but something entrusted to him.

Of Hector Berlioz it is said that his *Symphonie fantastique*, remarkable for the richness of its orchestral coloring, was the fruit of his passionate love for the Jewish actress Sarah Smithson. Into this symphony the composer poured the very best of his powers. Writers on music have described it as a faithful reflection of his love for Smithson, from the moment he first beheld her until the end of his lifelong devotion. True enough, this symphony secured Berlioz's immortality. It revealed the extraordinary power of his musical imagination, and we cannot but marvel at his mastery in combining instrumental colors and at the astonishing palette of sonorities that lay in his hands like clay in the hands of the potter. Yet the symphony lacks the higher substance that we demand of the true poet. In this deficiency, Berlioz is more lacking than his contemporaries among the classics. Berlioz was an incomparable painter of sound, but not a creator. He knew how to employ his colors for every purpose, yet his creative power—that capacity to draw originality and genuine novelty from the deepest source of music itself—was not inexhaustible. The *Symphonie fantastique* succeeded especially well because in it Berlioz portrayed the events of his own life—and who could know them more intimately than he? But those events already belonged to the past. As a master of musical depiction, he may serve as an exemplar; as a creator of genuinely new worlds, less so. The true poet distinguishes himself through an original art of universal significance, not by the narration of his own private history.

If this is true of the poetry of the individual, how much more is it true of the song of an entire people. It cannot be maintained that a nation's musical style is merely an expression of its sufferings. For this reason, the advocates of our national revival, who pride themselves on being thoroughly European in taste, are mistaken when they urge us to discard our ancient melodies on account of their gentleness. They err in supposing that the tenderness of our music is merely a relic of exile and an expression of sorrow. Apart from the fact that the greater part of our national melodies are cast in the minor mode, I find in them nothing that could justify a European editor in casting them aside like a despised branch, excluding them from the schools, and condemning them to oblivion. And even were it true that our afflictions and persecutions had indeed drawn these minor melodies from the depths of our hearts, they would remain dear to us together with the sufferings from which they sprang. We shall not deny the rock from which they were hewn, nor despise their courage, if only for the sake of those who were slain throughout Europe. We might have remained silent had our old melodies first been faithfully gathered together, and had the leaders of our national revival then judged them insufficient for all the new songs that required music. In that case they might justly have sought new melodies, and perhaps we should not have insisted that these new compositions be fashioned precisely according to the traditional Jewish spirit and style.

A. Z. Idelsohn, "Our National Music"

Source: "Neginatenu ha-le'ummit," *Ha-shiloaḥ* 21, no. 125 (November 1909 [5669–70]): 446–65; copy consulted in the National Library of Israel, Abraham Zwi Idelsohn archive, series D, item 43, https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH997008712869505171/

"Does Israel Possess a National Music or Does it Not?"—To this question, the majority of those regarded as authorities on music reply in the negative, while only a minority answer in the affirmative. Those who deny its existence include, besides the assimilationists, for the most part also the scholars of antiquity; among them is even one Jewish scholar of antiquity, the learned Saalschütz. [6]

Yet the deniers and the affirmers alike share one fundamental assumption: both take as their point of departure not the living Hebrew people of the present, but the people of antiquity and the literature of its ancient past.[7] For them, the people of Israel exists only up to the destruction of the Second Temple. Thereafter there are merely "Jews," whose life and activity no longer fall within the sphere of a national existence. Consequently, their living musical tradition is deemed unworthy of consideration; inquiry is directed solely toward the ancient remnants that have survived from the music of the biblical and Mishnaic periods. Since these remnants are exceedingly scant, there is, from this perspective, ample ground for answering the question of our national music in the negative.

We, however, for whom the people of Israel constitutes an unbroken national whole, who refuse to divide the history of Israel into two separate epochs but regard the Israelite nation, from its earliest beginnings to the present day, as one continuous people, cannot entertain the slightest doubt that there likewise exists a distinctively Israelite national music.

Music is the voice of the human heart, and national music is the voice of the heart of a people. Through it, the individual expresses those emotions most cherished and most deeply concealed within him; through it he reveals the innermost recesses of his soul. So it is with a nation. It is well known that every people cherishes its own national music above the whole of classical music, and to this day the Slavs and the Gypsies have never relinquished their native musical traditions. True, a nation may at times adopt a foreign music; yet in

---

[6] See his book *Hebräische Archäologi*e (Königsberg, 1855), vol. 1, 272. [Editor's note: Idelsohn gives the incorrect title. Joseph Levin Saalschütz's (1801–63) book is titled *Archäologie der Hebräer* and, indeed, chapter 27 of that book deals with Jewish music (pp. 272–96). Confusingly, Immanuel Benzinger's book entitled *Hebräische Archäologie* (Freiburg und Leipzig, 1894), also deals with Jewish music in roughly the same page range (271–78). Traces of both studies are evident in Idelsohn's work, although neither deals directly with the sheer existence of Jewish national music.]

[7] See, for example, *Shiltei ha-gibborim*, pp. B ff., the introduction to the commentary on the Psalms etc.

moments of national awakening it casts off the foreign music, and its own national music once more asserts its supremacy. A few decades ago, Italian music held sway throughout Europe, to the extent that a German or English musician, for example, was obliged to perform before his own countrymen, in his own land—in the Italian manner! Yet this state of affairs did not endure for long. National music underwent precisely the same development as the national language. Little more than a century ago, Germans and Russians alike wrote and conversed in French; but such a condition could persist only during the ebb of national consciousness. Once that consciousness rose again and gathered strength, it cast off the yoke of this cultural alienation. The history of national music among all peoples followed the very same course.

It goes without saying that the people of Israel are no exception in this respect. On the contrary, precisely because they wandered from land to land for two millennia, it was inevitable that, at certain periods, they should absorb the foreign music of the peoples among whom they dwelt, thereby allowing their own national music to fade, to a greater or lesser degree, from active memory. Yet neither the will nor the capacity to abolish it altogether or consign it to complete oblivion ever existed.

A national music, therefore, cannot possibly be absent from Israel; and the question posed at the head of this essay—"Does Israel Possess a National Music or Does it Not"—ought properly to be replaced by another: "Is there, indeed, but a single music common to all the divisions of the nation?" That is to say: if the various branches of the people of Israel, separated from one another for the length of the Exile, and perhaps even for longer periods, and dwelling in different regions of the world under the influence of different peoples, did not forget their own music and did not exchange it for the music of the nations that apprehended them; if, moreover, whatever alterations they made to their national musical inheritance were merely external and not essential—is this truly the case? Or, perhaps, do the various sections of the nation possess musics entirely distinct from one another: musics that came from without, from the surrounding peoples with their differing musical traditions, in whose lands these communities dwelt, while whatever they once possessed of Israel's own national music has been utterly forgotten? This is the grave question which we shall endeavor to answer in the present essay.

But first and foremost, it is fitting to preface our discussion with a few remarks concerning music in general and its essential nature.

* * *

Music rests upon four fundamental elements, namely: the scale, the melody, rhythm, and harmony.

(a) The Scale. Music possesses an alphabet, just as language does; and this musical alphabet is called *scala* among the Romance peoples and *Tonleiter* among the Germanic peoples—both terms meaning "scale." It is called the ladder of sounds because this musical alphabet is constructed in successive degrees: that is, in notes[8] which rise one above another by measured steps and at carefully determined intervals. In the same manner, they descend and are lowered.

There are seven such degrees in every scale, while the number of sounds is eight, because the first sound is not counted as a degree in its own right but stands outside the scale.

And the scales themselves are not all alike, as their degrees are arranged differently, so that the intervals between successive degrees are not invariably the same. There are two kinds of interval, known respectively as the semitone and the whole tone; at times the interval between two degrees is a whole tone, and at others only a semitone. Thus, there is one scale whose degrees are arranged as follows: between the first and second degrees, a whole tone; between the second and third, a whole tone; between the third and fourth, a semitone; between the fourth and fifth, a whole tone; between the fifth and sixth, a whole tone; between the sixth and seventh, a whole tone; and between the seventh and eighth, a semitone. This is called the hard scale (*Dur*, or the major scale). There is another scale whose arrangement differs: between the first and second degrees, a whole tone; between the second and third, a semitone; between the third and fourth, a whole tone; between the fourth and fifth, a whole tone; between the fifth and sixth, a semitone; between the sixth and seventh, an interval of a tone and a half; and between the seventh and eighth, a semitone. This is known as the minor [Heb. *rakh*] scale (Moll, or the minor scale). These two are the European scales, for all the peoples of Europe make use of them, and the whole edifice of European music is founded upon them. The peoples of the East, by contrast, possess other scales. The first is arranged thus: from the first degree to the second, a whole tone; from the second to the third, a semitone; from the third to the fourth, a whole tone; from the fourth to the fifth, a whole tone; from the fifth to the sixth, a semitone; from the sixth to the seventh, a whole tone; and from the seventh to the eighth, a whole tone. This is the best-known scale throughout the East and among all the Semitic peoples. The second is arranged as follows: from the first degree to the second, a semitone; from the second to the third, an interval of a tone and a half; from the

[8] It is a clear lacuna in Hebrew that it lacks a specific word for the term *Ton* and we are therefore forced to use, for that purpose, the word *Kol*. [Editor's note: *Kol*, now usually translated as either "voice" or "part," is translated in the present anthology as "note." The extensive technical descriptions of modes below contain many occurrences of *kol* and *revaḥ shalem* (the interval of a whole tone) and so I differentiate between them by using the terms "note" and "tone" respectively.]

third to the fourth, a semitone; from the fourth to the fifth, a whole tone; from the fifth to the sixth, a semitone; from the sixth to the seventh, an interval of a tone and a half; and from the seventh to the eighth, a semitone. This scale is especially familiar to and beloved by the Gypsies, the Turks, the Greeks, and, to a lesser extent, the Jews of Poland, Volhynia, and the Balkan Peninsula. From this it is evident that the distinction between the music of the West and that of the East is rooted already in their respective scales. The difference, therefore, is fundamental. We need not be surprised if the Westerner scoffs at Eastern music, declaring it devoid of all charm, while the Easterner dismisses the music of Europe as nothing more than a deafening and intolerable clamor. Such judgments arise from differences of temperament and from the differing climates of East and West, and they will remain so long as the sun continues to warm the East more intensely than it does the West.

The scale, like music itself—and indeed like human culture as a whole—has developed and been refined in the course of the ages until it attained its present form. The ancient Greeks possessed only a scale of four notes, the tetrachord; accordingly, the *lyre* likewise had but four strings. Tradition relates that the musician Terpander (ca. 680 BCE) increased the number of strings from four to seven, and that after him Pythagoras extended the compass of the lyre to eight notes.

These original four notes were arranged according to the following intervals: from the first to the second, a whole tone; from the second to the third, another whole tone; and from the third to the fourth, a semitone. This tetrachord, however, was not built exclusively. That is to say, the Greeks could construct a scale beginning from any one of the degrees defined by these three intervals. Thus, if they began with the first note, they obtained the sequence already described: two whole tones followed by a semitone. If they began with the second note, the resulting scale had as its first interval a whole tone, as its second a semitone, and as its third a whole tone. If they began with the third note, the sequence became: first a semitone, then two whole tones. In other words, they varied the order of the intervals according to the point from which they began. The first ordering—two whole tones followed by a semitone—was known among them as the scale of joy and merriment. The second—whole tone, semitone, whole tone—was called the scale of emotional effusion and exaltation; this was the Asian scale, for tradition held that it had come to them from Asia. The third arrangement—semitone followed by two whole tones—was designated the sacred scale, since it was employed exclusively for sacred purposes, serving to elevate the spirit and raise it into the realm of the sublime.

Thus, until the time of Pythagoras—that is, approximately the close of the First Temple period—the Greek scale comprised no more than four notes. This compels us to conclude that the peoples of Asia likewise possessed no more

highly developed scale; for had such a scale existed, the Greeks would surely have borrowed it from the nations of Asia, just as they adopted from the Semitic peoples numerous other inventions, including, as most historians of music agree, the very principles of their musical practice. Further support for this conclusion may be drawn from the fact that, even to this day, many Jewish melodies remain confined to a scale of only four notes—for example, the chant of the *te'amim* and some of the most ancient liturgical melodies, such as those for the *Shma*. Nor does the existence of instruments with numerous strings prove that their scales comprised a correspondingly large number of notes. The Hebrew ten-stringed *nevel* ('asor), or the great Egyptian harp, which possessed more than 20 strings, did not provide a separate degree of the scale for every string; rather, the notes themselves were duplicated several times in order to increase the sonority of the instrument. Above all, the Greeks themselves designated one of these three scales the Asian scale—that is, the scale received from the peoples of Asia, whether from the Phoenicians (the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon), with whom the Greeks maintained close intercourse, or from the Assyrians, who had waged war against the Greek islands from very early times. The close relationship of these peoples to the Israelites is, of course, well known. Moreover, as we have already observed, this very scale continues to be employed by the peoples of Asia to the present day, and it is likewise the scale common to all branches of the Jewish people, as we shall demonstrate more fully below. All these considerations oblige us to conclude that the scale of ancient Israelite music likewise consisted of four notes. Consequently, the "Sweet Singer of Israel," together with the 4,000 Levites who, according to the Book of Chronicles, sang and played upon instruments, performed, at the very least during the Second Temple period, within the compass of a four-note scale; and it is highly probable that the same was already true in the days of the First Temple.

All this, however, rests upon inference and reasoned judgment, supported by the scant evidence afforded by ancient history and by Scripture, both of which point toward such a conclusion. Yet it is impossible to establish the matter by incontrovertible proof. We are dealing with events that took place more than 3,000 years ago, from which only the barest remnants have survived in our literature; and even these—for example, the superscriptions to the Psalms—are exceedingly difficult to interpret with precision. Accordingly, the question must remain unresolved until systematic excavations have been carried out on Mount Moriah and Mount Zion, and until ancient instruments and inscriptions left by the Levites and priests are discovered that speak more explicitly on the matter. This uncertainty, however, in no way prevents us from apprehending the essential character of Hebrew national music. It is not our purpose here to write a history of music or to trace its historical development,

but rather to elucidate the present condition of Israel's music: its mode of expression and distinctive qualities, its foundations, and the manner of its development. For our concern is with something living, not with something dead. Our aim is to revive our national music, not to embalm it.

The manner in which the scale itself developed can be known only by conjecture. One fact alone is certain: by the time of the earliest Greek philosophers—that is, from the period of the Babylonian Exile onward—the Greeks already possessed a scale of seven degrees. Opinions differ as to the course of its development, yet one conclusion seems unavoidable. If the Greeks had learned to construct a distinct scale beginning on each note, then the notes that had formerly remained outside the original tetrachord must necessarily have been incorporated into the newly formed scales.

Thus, if they began on the second note and constructed a scale consisting of a whole tone, a semitone, and another whole tone, they would naturally, in the course of time, have added the preceding note as well, thereby obtaining a fifth (*quinta*). Likewise, if they began on the third note and formed a succession of a semitone followed by two whole tones, then, by adding the preceding notes, they would have obtained a major sixth (*sexta*). In this light, the ancient tradition cited above—that Terpander expanded the scale to a seventh—becomes entirely plausible. In other words, he began constructing yet another scale from the fourth note, once again following the pattern of two whole tones and a semitone, thereby producing a combination of two tetrachords amounting to a scale of seven notes. Finally, it was observed that the pure octave (*reine Octave*) sounded in perfect consonance with the first note. It was therefore Pythagoras, according to tradition, who completed the scale by establishing it upon eight notes. Thereafter the scale continued to develop. Musicians no longer confined themselves to constructing scales from the first note—our C—which they called the Ionian (*Ionisch*), corresponding to the major (*Dur*) scale. They also began from the second note, constructing according to the same intervallic pattern an eight-note scale known as the Dorian (*Dorisch*), which in essence was merely a duplication of the ancient four-note tetrachord in the following order: D 1 E ½ F 1 G 1 A 1 B ½ C 1 D. The third scale, the Phrygian (*Phrygisch*), began on the third note, that is, E ½ F 1 G 1 A 1 B ½ C 1 D 1 E. We see, then, that the eight-note scale is nothing other than a doubling of the ancient four-note tetrachord. Indeed, it appears to have been the inevitable outcome of musical development. The four-note compass no longer satisfied musicians; they therefore devised means of extending it to eight notes. Their melodies would first unfold within the original tetrachord and then be repeated in the upper tetrachord, thereby increasing their force and heightening their emotional effect upon the listener. From there they continued to superimpose one scale upon another, extending the compass as far as the human voice could conveniently reach—

approximately 14 notes in all. Their musical instruments, accordingly, were constructed to correspond to this expanded range, as we have already noted above.[9]

It may therefore be concluded with almost complete certainty that Jewish music, too, developed along this same path, and that it likewise possessed scales of this kind. The conclusion, reached by the majority of scholars, that the Israelites borrowed their music from the Egyptians, is a superficial one. A people may indeed learn from its neighbors inventions such as the use of steam power and electricity in our own age, or shipbuilding and the arts of warfare in antiquity, and even the written alphabet; but it cannot learn its music from another people. For music is a matter belonging to the emotions and to the spirit of a nation, something that is wholly its own, and something that exists in a form analogous among all peoples and among all human beings. It is therefore impossible to adopt an entire musical language from another nation. On the other hand, it is entirely possible for one people to assimilate certain individual characteristics from the spirit of another. We have already seen that the Greeks adopted from the Semitic peoples certain aspects of their manner of music-making; and it is likewise possible that the Israelites, too, learned certain elements of music from the peoples among whom they lived. But they did not learn their entire musical system from them.

The scales of Israel's music in the present age are arranged as follows. (a) The interval of the first degree is whole, the second—half, the third—whole, the fourth—whole, the fifth—half, the sixth—whole, and the seventh—whole. This scale is common to the entire Israelite people. The Sephardim and Yemenites sing all their songs in it, and the Ashkenazim use it for the ancient melodies ("the traditional melodies"), while the Polish Jews employ it for the majority of their songs. This is the same scale as the minor scale of the peoples of the East, which is essentially composed of the ancient four-note scale that the Greeks called "Asian," together with the Greek scale, namely the scale beginning with a half-step and two whole steps. We cannot know how these two scales were combined unless we accept the hypothesis which I proposed above. Now, although this scale has remained in its purity among Eastern Jews, and also among Western Jews in their sacred melodies, the Polish Jews (particularly during the last few centuries) began to alter it and to transform it into the Western—or, more accurately, the Slavic—minor scale. The alteration consists in the sixth and seventh degrees: the sixth was made into an interval of one and a half steps, and the seventh into a half-step. It appears that this form is a combination of the Asian minor scale with the gypsy-Turkish scale, under whose influence the Slavs remained for a considerable period. This was not the

[9] Those who want to acquaint themselves better with this issue may pursue the books of [August Wilhelm] Ambros, [Johann Nikolaus] Forkel, [Ludwig] Nohl, and their fellows.

case among the Ashkenazim, however, among whom the scale remained unchanged from the form in which it had existed when it was received by the German people from the Jewish-Christian Church. This church, as all scholars rightly conclude, absorbed essentially all the melodies of the Jews from the period before and after the destruction of the Second Temple; and these melodies remained almost entirely pure until the generation of Luther's Reformation. Afterwards, the Christians gradually altered the scale according to the spirit of Germany and according to the demands of harmony, creating two kinds of scales. One was called the "harmonic" scale, as described above; the other was called the "melodic" scale, consisting of a raised fifth, sixth, and seventh in ascent, and a lowered fifth, with a whole sixth and seventh, in descent. Yet apparently this artificial scale had little influence upon the Jews. (b) Another scale, however, developed during that period and eventually subdued all the others, becoming the sole ruler of Europe. This was the Ionian scale: the strong scale (*Dur*, major), which developed among the Protestants struggling against the old church. It suited their passionate and turbulent spirit, for it contains strength and heroic force, power and vigor. It is no longer employed merely for laughter and frivolity; rather, it is now used for martial triumph. It is what "animates" the hearts of soldiers, stirring them to march joyfully and triumphantly toward death. This scale was adopted also by Ashkenazi Jews. Its earliest influence may be discerned in the melody of *Ma'oz Tzur*, which is based primarily upon a sixteenth-century German hymn beginning "Nun freut euch, ihr lieben Christen." Yet this scale did not develop greatly among the Jews because of the persecutions that befell them from the sixteenth century until the previous century. Only in the last century, through the process of assimilation among German Jews, did Ashkenazi Jews adopt this scale and expel the Asian scale from their synagogues. They went even further: they took the sacred and traditional melodies and rebuilt and adapted them specifically according to the new scale. It is self-evident that these melodies suffered a kind of dismemberment and distortion as a result. The Eastern and Polish Jews are accustomed to call the music of Western European Jews "chorale music," meaning something foreign to their spirit and close to the music of Western Christians. One of the reasons that led to this designation is precisely that Western Jews adopted the new scale and perform their music according to it.

For the only strong scale whose use among other peoples is unknown to us is the following: the interval of the first degree is whole, that of the second—whole, the third—half, the fourth—whole, the fifth—whole, the sixth—half, and the seventh—whole. That is: C 1 D 1 E ½ F 1 G 1 A 1 B♭ ½ C. Apparently, this scale is composed of the ancient strong scale, which consists of two whole steps and a half-step, together with the ancient Asian scale, which consists of a

whole step, a half-step, and a whole step. This scale is evidently very ancient and traditional within [our] nation, for the *te'amim* and the ancient prayers are built upon it, as mentioned above. It possesses strength and vigor, and at the same time contains poetry and the Eastern imagination.

The Eastern Jews, however, do not make much use of this scale, except in the ancient prayers which we have mentioned. In its place, they adopted the Eastern minor scale, because it is common to all the peoples of the East, and especially to the Arabs, among whom the Jews have lived for many generations. Yet this assimilation is an assimilation of like with like, for this Eastern scale is itself the general Asian scale, in which the ancient Jews too had their share. This is quite different from the musical assimilation of the Ashkenazi Jews, which is an assimilation of unlike with unlike; and experience has already shown that this assimilation has not succeeded at all. The same is partially true with regard to the Jews of Poland and their Slavic scale.

It remains, therefore, to speak of the third scale in Jewish music: the Gypsy scale.

Now, although it may be stated with some confidence that this scale belongs to the Gypsies, the Turks, or the Tatars, it is equally possible to suppose that it is a development of the ancient Greek scale, in which only the second degree was altered—that is, the first remained a semitone, the second became an interval of one and a half steps, and the third remained a semitone. Yet, after all, this is no more than a hypothesis. In any event, even if we assume that this third scale is the property of the Tatars or the Gypsies, one fact remains beyond dispute: the Jews employ it in a distinctive manner. Whereas among the Gypsies and the other peoples akin to them this scale is combined with one of its own kind, the Jews combine it with something altogether different—that is, they combine the Gypsy scale with the ancient Greek scale. According to the hypothesis advanced above, the Greek Phrygian mode remained essentially as it had been, while only the second degree was altered in accordance with the Turkish-Gypsy pattern.

This scale, which is now especially widespread and beloved among the Jews of Poland—perhaps because of the melancholy and suppressed sorrow that they find in it, so congenial to their temperament and condition—is called the "Turkish" scale by the Sephardim. They employ it only in the *Musaf* service for the Sabbath, beginning with the *Kedushah*. The Yemenite Jews, on the other hand, do not use it at all in matters pertaining to the sacred. Nor is it known among the Jews of southern Germany—the cradle of the ancient ghettos—who instead refer to it simply as the "Polish" scale. It is precisely this unfamiliarity with the scale that distinguishes their traditional melodies from those of the Jews of northern Germany. Yet this so-called "Polish" scale is none other than the Gypsy scale.

From all that has been said, we may conclude that Israel possesses two common scales: the Eastern minor scale and the composite major scale; and three additional scales that were adopted during the centuries of exile, namely: (a) the Gypsy scale in its Jewish adaptation; (b) the Slavic scale; and (c) the German scale. There remains one further scale among the Jews—the one which the Greeks called the Dorian—a combination of two ancient Asian tetrachords, each consisting of two whole steps followed by a half-step. Yet, despite its beauty and pleasant character, the Jews make relatively little use of this scale.

Besides these, there are many other scales that possess no fixed form but vary according to the judgment and inclination of the performer, as the musician P. Minkowsky explained in his article *"*Folk Songs."[10] If we accept the hypothesis that scales were originally constructed from tetrachords—that is, from the ancient four-note scales—and that performers were free to combine one scale with another, whether of the same type or of a different one, according to their own taste, then it is easy to understand why this practice has survived among the Jews, who are reluctant to abandon anything sanctioned by tradition. Thus, to this very day, the ḥazzan modifies these ancient scales according to his own artistic impulse, even though fixed composite scales already exist. For example, in the *Mi she-Berakh* prayer the cantor may begin in the minor scale, combine it in the ascending phrases with another minor scale of the same type, and in the descending phrases combine it with the Ionian scale, the Jewish major scale, or the Jewish-Gypsy scale, and so forth.

(b) and (c) Melody and Rhythm.[11] Melody is born from the raising and lowering of the human voice in accordance with the emotions one wishes to express. The scale is the alphabet of music, whereas melody is its words, formed by combining the syllables and letters of that alphabet. In melody we hear the stirrings of the human heart and perceive the emotions of sorrow and joy, the love of life and despair of it, exaltation, supplication, and entreaty. It is in melody that the distinctive character of both the individual and the nation reveals itself. For melody is the mirror of the innermost heart of man. Consequently, if we wish to understand a nation's music, we must become acquainted not only with its characteristic scales but also with its characteristic melodies.

There are melodies belonging to different peoples which, although built upon the same scale, nevertheless differ entirely in character. Thus, for example, the melodies of the Slavs are constructed upon the minor scale combined with

[10] See *Ha-shiloaḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 10–20, 105–14, 205–16.

[11] In our new literature, the Talmudic word *ne'ima* commonly signifies melody. The Yemenites, however, use the word *niggun* or *kol* and the Sephardim—*laḥan* or *kol*. And the word *mishkal* I use to signify tactus, for middah (*Zeitmass*) shall signify rhythmus. The Yemenites also clap their hands or hit the drums to indicate the *mishkal* during the performance of their dance songs; they use, then, the word *mishkal* to signify tactus.

the Ionian or the Gypsy mode, just like Jewish melodies. Yet we immediately recognize that they do not spring from the same source as the latter. This distinction cannot be explained by logical rules, for its root lies in feeling. In general, however, one may say that every people possesses its own distinctive qualities, temperament, and inclinations, and these are expressed with particular clarity in its music. The Germans are distinguished by strength, sanguine vitality, and composure; accordingly, their music is vigorous, exultant, and restrained. That is to say, it seems to proceed almost more from the intellect than from the heart. The Romance peoples are distinguished by warmth, passion, and tenderness; consequently, their music is likewise gentle, full of feeling, love, and ardor. The Slavs are marked by melancholy—a lament over their destiny—which reaches the point of extremity; and this very extremity also carries them to its opposite, to an unbridled gaiety that knows no bounds. Hence their music is either lamentation and complaint or a Kozachok. The Jews, for their part, are distinguished by modesty, by a love of noble living and spiritual elevation, by mourning over their unhappy fate, and by hope for a better future—and all these qualities find expression in their music. A nation's melodies also reveal the level of its cultural development. The richer a melody is in notes, intervals, and rhythmic patterns, the more highly developed the people who created it may be considered. Thus, among the tribes of Africa, one finds no more than two notes, repeated monotonously without end. Among the Arab peasantry there are already melodies of four and five notes. Likewise, the greater part of the melodies of the Jews of Yemen, Babylonia, and Persia revolves around four and five notes, although among them one also finds melodies extending to seven and eight notes. The same holds true of the melodies of the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim, and the Jews of Poland. It should also be observed that, in general, folk music—even the popular music of the most cultivated nations—contains melodies of no more than eight notes, whereas only art music (*Kunstmusik*) extends beyond this limit, employing well over 100 notes. The upper classes among the Arabs likewise possess an art music of which the common people have no conception.

But let us now turn to our own national music.

The music of Israel may be divided into two principal periods: (a) the music of the period when Israel dwelt in its own land; and (b) the music of the period of the Exile.

(a) The Period of Israel in Its Own Land

The historians of music (Ambros, Nohl, and others) maintain that the music of antiquity consisted essentially of intoned speech (recitative): singing was performed, or songs were recited, by giving each movement and syllable its proper inflection according to a fixed rhythm, a fixed scale, and an established

style. In precisely this manner the Jews still chant various ancient prayers and "recite" the Psalms. If we listen attentively to the melodies employed for these psalms and prayers, we shall discover that they possess no fixed melody as such, but rather a fixed chanting formula [Heb. *nusaḥ*] based upon a fixed scale. What is particularly striking is that the chant traditions of the Ashkenazim are here essentially identical with those of the Sephardim, the Yemenites, and the Persian Jews. That is to say, they all share the same scales and the same rhythmic patterns; indeed, in its essentials, the chant itself is common to them all. The chant for the reading of the Torah is likewise fundamentally shared by all Jewish communities. Yet, because of its exceptional importance, each branch of the Jewish people embellished it in its own manner, so that it might appeal more strongly to the congregation and draw their hearts toward the sacred text. The differences in Torah cantillation are therefore nothing more than devices intended to endear the Torah to the people; the essential chant nevertheless remains based upon the same common scale. Thus there is, in substance, no real difference between the Torah reading of the Sephardim and that of the Ashkenazim. Indeed, the Persian chant for the Torah is virtually identical with the Ashkenazi chant for the Song of Songs; the latter likewise resembles the Torah cantillation in its essentials, differing only in its accentuation. The same is true of the chant for the Prophets, which is set in the minor scale, whereas the chant for the Torah is based upon the Eastern major scale. Likewise, the chants for the prayers—the *Amidah* for the Sabbath and the Three Festivals, and above all those for the High Holy Days—are built upon the Eastern minor, the Dorian, and the Eastern major scales. An exception is the Sabbath *Musaf* prayer *Tikkanta Shabbat*, whose melody both Ashkenazim and Sephardim altered, assigning to it a Turkish-Gypsy melody. The same applies, for example, to the prayer *Yakum Purkan*, and to several others. The general principle is this: all chants that are based upon these three scales—the Eastern minor, the Eastern major, and the Dorian—and that possess no fixed melody but only a distinctive style of performance, are survivals of the music of Israel from the period when the nation still dwelt in its own land. In them one may still discern something of the spirit of holiness that once filled the Temple. We ought therefore to cherish them above all others, for together with the Hebrew language they are among the few remnants that have been preserved to us. Naturally, in the days of the Temple this music must have possessed a far greater splendor and exerted a far more powerful effect. For there is an immeasurable difference between hearing these chants in a foreign land, amid enemies seeking one's destruction, within the darkness of the ghetto, under the constant fear of death, when the worshipers might at any moment be led to the stake or perish beneath the executioner's ax; and hearing the same music in complete freedom, in the broad spaces of the Land of Israel, accompanied by the voices of thousands upon

thousands and by musical instruments, performed by the finest members of the nation in a spirit of courage, with pure faith and steadfast hope.

Melodies of this kind, because they are extremely simple, are held in contempt by many musicians; and almost all *ḥazzanim* have now begun to cut away at them and to eradicate them. Yet it is precisely for this reason that the people have risen up against the new cantors, and the familiar saying among them is: "One ba'al tefillah is better than ten ḥazzanim." That is to say: the people cherish a ba'al tefillah who does not alter the traditional pattern of the melody, even by a hair's breadth, more than those cantors who sing according to their own fancy. Not only do the latter destroy the ancient melodies, but they also introduce foreign worship—namely, European music—into the sanctuary. The ancient and simple melodies are precious to us for two reasons: first, as a surviving remnant [Heb. *she'erit peletah*], they are valuable in themselves; and second, they enable us to study and understand the music of the Second Temple period, and to some extent also that of the First Temple period. From them we may likewise recognize the development of Jewish music during the second period, the period of the Exile, and determine what elements of that later development we ought to preserve and what we ought to reject.

The music of the ancient period was by no means highly developed, if we compare it with the music of today. The ancient Hebrews had no conception of those components of musical form that developed only at a later period, and their music was, as I have said, merely intoned speech. Indeed, to this very day one may hear the Arab masses sing and play simultaneously. The singer renders the song by intoning its syllables, each syllable rising and falling upon a fixed scale; or else he delivers an entire verse in a single breath, embellishing the final syllable of that verse with various notes, and then pauses. Thereupon the instrumentalist begins his own part; that is, he too passes through the notes of the same scale, endeavoring to imitate the singer in his rhythm. Then the singer begins again, the player responds after him, and so they continue in alternation without end. Or the two sing and play together, in which case the instrumentalist likewise strives to imitate the singer, or else ascends and descends over only four degrees, while the singer, although he ornaments his melody upon higher degrees, never rises beyond the octave but immediately descends again; thus the essence of the entire music is a style based upon four notes, both ascending and descending. To the European such music appears exceedingly strange. In the first place, he can scarcely imagine so monotonous a form of music; and secondly, he cannot conceive of accompaniment without harmony. Yet herein lies the difference between the peoples of the East and those of the West: the former possess neither form nor harmony in their music. For among the Semitic peoples music is free fantasy, whatever arises spontaneously in the spirit at the moment of emotional excitement. Among the peoples of Europe, by contrast,

both speech and music are governed by the measure of reason and by precise form, from which no departure is permitted, just as, in general, one may not deviate from the laws established by the great masters of music. In this respect the music of Israel from the first period remained Semitic; and despite the efforts of our musicians to introduce into it the refinements of European music, they have not succeeded. On the contrary, they have impaired the essential character of Jewish music.

Almost all scholars[12] have thus arrived at the conclusion that the peoples of Europe received their music from the Semitic peoples; that is, that Semitic music left its imprint upon European music already in antiquity. According to the testimony of Pythagoras, the Greeks were profoundly influenced by the Egyptians, and they were likewise influenced by the Tyrians and Sidonians. The principal influence, however, came through the Jewish Christians, who introduced the sacred music of the Temple into the Christian Church together with the Psalms. If we judge from what has survived, the music of the early Christian Church was likewise nothing more than intoned speech, measured and accented in the same manner as the music of Israel, and it was constructed upon the very same scales on which our own music was built. In my opinion, therefore, these scales are mistakenly called the church modes (*Kirchen-Tonarten*); it would be more accurate to call them the Temple modes. The Christians, however, gave these scales Greek names—Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, Lydian, and Mixolydian—while the Hebrew names gradually fell into oblivion after the Destruction. Indeed, who can say whether the terms preserved in the superscriptions to the Psalms, which designate their manner of performance—such as "upon the eighth" (*al ha-sheminith*), "upon alamoth," and the like—are not in fact the original Hebrew names of these modes? I do not, however, wish to indulge in such far-reaching conjectures. Every scholar has wrestled with this question, yet all have achieved but little,[13] nor is there any hope of recovering the true meaning of the musical directions attached to the Psalms, since they are supported neither by eyewitness testimony nor by any secure tradition.[14] One proposition may nevertheless be regarded as almost an established fact and supported by strong evidence: namely, that what has been preserved in the Christian Church—especially in the Catholic Church—of its ancient chant is an ancient survival of the old melodies of the Jews. Here, as there, we find nothing but intoned speech; here, as there, that speech proceeds according to a fixed rhythmic pattern; and just as Jewish chant

[12] See Saalschütz, *Hebräische Archäologie*, B, I; Lube, *Katechismus der Musik-Geschichte* etc.
[13] See Graetz, *Commentar zu den Psalme* (Breslau, 1882), introduction, 68 ff.; Winter and Wünsche, *Die jüdische Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1892), vol. 1, 479; and also P. Minkowsky, "Kelei ha-zemer be-Yisrael," *Ha-shiloaḥ* 6, pp. 207–14, 329–36, 421–27, 531–37.
[14] See Benzinger, *Hebräische Archäologie*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1907), 246.

is founded upon the Eastern minor, the Dorian, and the Eastern major scales, so too is the ancient chant of the church. The church, however, also possesses additional modes, which, as already noted, were adopted from the Greeks and which, according to Catholic tradition, were established in the school of Pope *Gregory the Great*. Such modes are absent from the system of Jewish traditional melodies.

Although the peoples of Europe received much from the peoples of the East in matters of music, their music assumed an altogether different form because it continued to develop among them, leading to the invention of harmony, to classical art music, and finally to modern music. Today it stands before us in all its beauty and splendor, alongside the entire artistic civilization of Europe. Its source, by contrast—Eastern music—has remained essentially in the condition in which it existed in ancient times, without deviating from it by so much as a hair's breadth. Although a new and vigorous current was added to it in the form of Turkish music and the Turkish scale, it nevertheless retained its original form—or, more accurately, its *lack of form*. This difference, however, depends upon the very nature of the two races—the Semitic and the Aryan—as well as upon the character of their respective lands: the nature of the East, which saps human energy and lulls man into a state of reverie and dream, and the nature of Europe, which stimulates man and compels him to act and to overcome the obstacles of nature, thereby making him vigorous, active, and possessed of clear consciousness. Accordingly, Eastern music, the offspring of fervent imagination and ecstatic vision, has remained as dreamy and impassioned as the peoples of the East themselves; whereas European music has developed together with the civilization that bore it and has acquired a fixed form through laws founded more upon reason than upon imagination and feeling. Yet, after all this, let us imagine thousands upon thousands of singers and thousands upon thousands of instrumentalists standing together with their countless instruments, performing those simple melodies—or, more accurately, that ancient chant formula which the Polish Jew calls a "steiger" and the Sephardi and Yemenite Jew call "kabbalah." Would not such music, however simple—consisting of only four or five notes, and even if performed entirely in unison—possess the power to awaken within us the loftiest emotions and to inspire us beyond measure? Have not the great authorities on music themselves declared that the surest means of producing the deepest emotional effect through music and song is *for the entire choir to answer with a single voice*, as the Levites did in their day? Indeed, it is enough to witness the fervor of the Yemenite Jews when they sing the Psalms in one voice and in one rhythm. Never has a Yemenite Jew said, "The singing and the prayers weary me," although their services continue for four or even five hours.

This period of simple music—or, more properly, of Semitic music—continued for as long as the prayers themselves remained in the simple form in which the nation had received them from the Scribes [Heb. *Sofrim*] and the *Tannaim*, and had carried them into exile. Even when the *Amoraim* and the *Geonim* later composed new prayers and sent them to the scattered communities of the Diaspora, the emissaries of the Exilarch and the academies would recite these prayers before the Ark in the Eastern chant exactly as they had heard them in Babylonia, and the congregations received the prayers *together with their melodies*. In this way the Eastern chant remained inseparably attached to the prayers. From the time, however, when the *paytanim* arose and began composing *piyyutim* according to meter and rhyme—both of which were foreign to the spirit of ancient Hebrew poetry and had been borrowed by these poets from their neighbors—the ancient tradition gradually lost its influence. For the composers of these liturgical poems were themselves children of the Diaspora: Italians, Sephardim, and Ashkenazim; and most of them served as permanent or occasional cantors. Having composed a *piyyut*, whether skillfully or otherwise, they naturally wished it to be accepted by the congregation. This could only be achieved by means of an attractive melody, and thus the melody became subordinate to the poem, serving merely as a means of endearing it to the people. Naturally, the paytanim took whatever melodies came to hand. They neither considered it necessary—or perhaps lacked the musical competence—to examine the true nature of the melodies they adopted. From this arose a serious misfortune. They borrowed European melodies from the non-Jewish cultures surrounding them: the Italian paytanim adopted Italian tunes, the Sephardim Spanish ones, and the Ashkenazim German ones. These melodies had by no means all originated in sacred contexts. More than once the rabbis, who in general were opponents of the piyyut, sought to place the foreign melodies under ban, and still more so the liturgical poems that introduced alien song into the sanctuary.[15] Yet the decrees of the rabbis proved ineffective. The common people, always eager for that which appealed to the emotions, willingly accepted both the melodies and the piyyutim together. From that time onward, the cantors increasingly regarded the original Hebrew musical tradition as something secondary to their own musical creations. Thus began the second period in the history of Jewish music.

(b) The Period of Exile

It is impossible to determine precisely when the period of exile of Jewish music began, just as it is impossible to determine exactly when the practice of piyyutim first commenced. One may only say that with the rise of liturgical poetry the

[15] See "Haggahot Maimuniyyot" in "Yad ha-ḥazaqah," Hilkhot tefillah, 6, 3, etc.

original period of Hebrew music came to an end. One curious fact deserves particular notice. Such liturgically insignificant poems as "Af B'ri" or "Be-da'ato Abbi'ah Ḥidot" (for the prayers for dew and rain) by [Eleazar] Qallir possess beautiful melodies. So too does "Yatziv Pitgam" (for Shavuot) by Riba"m [Rabbi Isaac ben Meir], although it contains neither true poetry nor logical coherence. Likewise, *Kol Nidrei*, despite containing not the slightest trace of poetic artistry, has a magnificent melody. The same is true of the piyyutim for the morning service of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur according to the Ashkenazic rite, whose contents are almost devoid of poetry—for example, "Yareti Bi-Fetzoti Siaḥ" by Rabbi Yekutiel ben Moses; "Efḥad" and "Eten le-Po'alei Ẓedek" by Simeon ben Isaac; "Omnam Ken," "Adir Yekar," and "Adabberah Taḥanunim" by Rabbi Kalonymus; "Essa De'i le-Meraḥok" by Qallir; and others—all of which possess beautiful melodies. Conversely, the poems of Judah Halevi either have no melodies at all or only insignificant ones. Thus "Zion ha-lo Tish'ali" has no traditional melody, whereas "Eli Zion" possesses a truly magnificent one. Similarly, while most of the poems of the eminent Yemenite poet Shlomo ElShabazi [Shalom Shabazi]—of whom we shall speak below—either have no melodies or only melodies of little worth, other Yemenite songs, scarcely deserving the name of "poems" and amounting to little more than idle verses, are furnished with beautiful tunes. Likewise, whereas the poems of Shlomo ibn Gabirol and Moshe ibn Ezra possess no notable melodies, and the Sephardim themselves know almost nothing of them, comparatively insignificant songs such as "Bar Yoḥai," "Aḥot Ketanah," and the poems of Israel Najara—even those that never gained popularity—are associated with remarkably beautiful melodies. All this compels us to conclude that the authors of these poems took pains to ensure that their works would find a place in the synagogue service. Whenever they sensed that their verses lacked sufficient appeal, they either composed attractive melodies for them or fitted them to melodies already capable of winning the hearts of the congregation. For this reason both the poems and their melodies have survived. The truly great poets, by contrast—those of the highest genius—composed only when the spirit moved them, without giving the slightest thought to the subsequent fate of their creations, whether in terms of popularity or of performance in the synagogue. Their poems have therefore remained unknown to the masses down to the present day, and only a discerning few continue to delight in them.

When discussing our music in the first period, we were able to treat Hebrew music as a single creation as its origin was one, because the people who created it were themselves still one people. Consequently, although even this original and unified musical tradition gradually underwent change and acquired distinctive local characteristics in the various lands of the Diaspora, these differences amounted to little more than ornamentation—alterations brought

about by the passage of time. Its essential character nevertheless remained the same. The second period, however, presents an altogether different picture. Here one must recognize in Jewish music not merely different forms but, at times, different musical substance as well. Accordingly, we are compelled to divide this period into two principal branches, which in turn are subdivided into six historical divisions. The two principal branches are the Eastern and the Western, or, in other words, the Semitic and the European. The former—the Eastern or Semitic branch—is itself divided into three subdivisions: the Yemenite, the Persian, and the Sephardic. The latter—the Western or European branch—is likewise divided into three subdivisions: the Ashkenazic, the Polish, and the Ḥasidic traditions.

Before proceeding further, however, we must first explain the distinction between these two principal branches. We need not dwell upon it at length, since we have already emphasized it in our earlier discussion.

The *Eastern* branch differs from the *Western* branch in a number of fundamental respects. Apart from the general distinctions already noted above between Western and Eastern music, the following more specific differences may also be observed: (a) Western music almost invariably begins with the tonic and likewise concludes upon it. Eastern music, by contrast, most often begins on the fifth or the third note, and sometimes even on the sixth or the seventh, and commonly ends on the fifth or the third. One scarcely encounters an Eastern melody that concludes upon the tonic. It has therefore been suggested that such interruptions occur merely because the performer has run out of breath or has become fatigued, and that the cadence is in reality only a temporary pause, intended to be followed by a continuation of the melody. (b) Western music possesses a precise and regular meter, which is maintained in a single time signature throughout the entire composition, so that one can readily identify the kind of meter in which the melody proceeds. Eastern music, on the other hand, generally has no meter at all, consisting instead of intoned speech. Even where Eastern music does possess meter, it differs from that of Western music in that the rhythmic pattern is not sustained consistently throughout the melody but depends entirely upon the performer's discretion. At first one may imagine that the melody proceeds in a fixed meter, but suddenly the performer prolongs a single note as long as he pleases, or inserts a lengthy pause, and the meter disappears. Indeed, even when the melody itself follows a definite meter, the pauses are not measured: the performer simply rests whenever necessary until he has recovered his breath. (c) Western music possesses a well-defined formal structure governed by fixed principles,[16] which Eastern music has not; even

[16] See the discussion of meter above.

when it contains a motif, it lacks the remaining structural elements that constitute musical form.

We now turn to the three historical branches of *Eastern music*: the Yemenite, Persian, and Sephardic traditions.

(1) Of all the branches of the people of Israel, *the Jews of Yemen* remained in their places of settlement for many centuries without altering their way of life. They had virtually no contact with the wider world, nor did any element of general civilization penetrate their communities. Although they were at first in communication with the Jews of the Land of Israel, Babylonia, and Egypt, this connection appears to have ceased after the death of Maimonides, and they remained, isolated both from their Jewish brethren and, to their disadvantage, from their neighbors, in circumstances even more deprived than those of their brethren in Europe. Until scarcely a generation ago we knew almost nothing about them. [Leopold] Zunz, for example, records nothing in his writings concerning either the order of their prayers or their hymns, and the latter, even today, remain largely unknown to the wider public.[17] There can therefore be no suspicion that the Yemenite Jews underwent cultural assimilation—at least in so far as their music is concerned. Several of them have assured me personally that they had never even heard the music of their Arab neighbors, for they were forbidden to associate with them, and Jews were not permitted to leave their homes during Muslim festivals. Their musical tradition thus possesses exceptional importance for our present inquiry.

In their music they distinguish between two "periods." The first is common to the entire community and is exceedingly simple, consisting of only four or five notes and providing merely a single chant formula (*Weise*) for all the prayers. The second "period" begins with rhymed songs composed according to regular poetic meters. It is richer in notes and is based upon the Eastern major, the Dorian, and the Eastern minor scales. The melodies belonging to this second "period" possess fixed motifs and an Eastern meter, and are sung at weddings, circumcisions, Sabbaths, and festivals, to the accompaniment of dancing. The meter of these songs is precise, and the greater part of their melodies is known throughout the Yemenite Jewish community. Although these Jews live widely scattered from one another, and communication between them is extremely difficult because the country is mountainous, lacks proper roads, and travel from place to place is rendered hazardous by brigands, nevertheless all Yemenite

[17] Recently the Yemenite *Maḥzor* has been printed under the title *Tikhlāl*, and the publication of their songs has also begun, although for various reasons the printing was discontinued before completion. For further details, see my article "The Yemenite Jews and Their Songs," in *Luaḥ Eretz Israel* for the year 5669 [1908–09], ed. A. M. Luncz (Jerusalem, 1908), 101–51, where I have also included a selection of their songs for the Sabbath, weddings, and other occasions, together with a "table of melodies" (ibid., pp. i–viii) for the chanting of the Torah and the Scrolls, as well as for the songs mentioned above.

Jews know these melodies. This demonstrates that they are both ancient and genuinely popular. Music occupies a central place in Yemenite life. Whoever has not witnessed a Yemenite wedding has never seen true rejoicing. The celebrations begin some four days and nights before the wedding ceremony itself, with songs and dances performed by the men, and continue for seven days afterward. The same is true of circumcision ceremonies. The Yemenite Jews possess some 600 songs composed by Yemenite poets for these occasions, in addition to other songs received from the Jews of Spain, including poems by Judah Halevi and others. The greatest of their poets was Shalom Shabazi, a poet of true genius, and it is greatly to be regretted that his poems have not yet been published in print. He was also a physician and, in later generations, came to be venerated as a saint. He appears to have lived about 400 years ago.[18] One cannot but marvel at the music of the Yemenite Jews, for it is filled with strength, vigor, joy, and a delight in life, despite the fact that their material circumstances were exceedingly harsh and bitter. Most of their songs are devoted to love and consist of dialogues between lover and beloved. They are written in a language more vivid and concrete than that employed in the love poetry of modern European poets, yet at the same time they breathe the sweet fragrance of the Song of Songs. Their melodies closely resemble those of the Ashkenazim, just as, in many other respects, the Yemenite Jews resemble the Ashkenazim, as I have demonstrated elsewhere.[19]

(2) *The Persian Jews*, from whose ranks the Exilarchs emerged for some 600 years, and whose land served as the center of Jewish life, from which Torah and learning radiated to all the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, have now declined greatly, and with them their music has likewise declined. Whereas their chant for the reading of the Torah is exceptionally beautiful and is based on the Eastern major scale, all their other melodies—or, more precisely, their chanting styles—are built upon the Eastern minor scale and possess no regular meter. Among the Jews of Yemen, dancing contributed greatly to the establishment of a precise rhythmic structure; among the Jews of Persia, who do not dance while singing, meter never developed, with the result that their music has remained at the stage of intoned speech, and is pervaded by a spirit of melancholy. Yet European culture has likewise left them untouched, and their musical tradition has preserved its originality in many respects.

(3) *Among the Sephardic Jews*, who trace their lineage to the House of David and to the aristocracy of Jerusalem, and who indeed attained a remarkably high level of culture in medieval Spain, music likewise underwent considerable

[18] See the chapter "Rooms of Yemen," in Rabbi Yaakov Sapir, *Even Sapir* [Lyck (Ełk), 1866]; and David Yelin, "The Treasures of Yemen," *Ha-shiloaḥ* 2, 147–61 [May 1897].
[19] See "The Yemenite Jews and Their Songs," cited in note 17.

development and reached a high degree of refinement. Yet in this musical tradition one can already discern the influence of medieval European music.

In Sephardic music, three distinct periods may be distinguished. The first period was dominated by the simple chant of the ancient prayers, a musical tradition common to the entire Jewish people. Since the Sephardim are, in part, European in character, European influence also left its mark upon this ancient chant, which resembles the Ashkenazic tradition of the earliest period so closely that, when heard, it might almost be mistaken for Ashkenazic chant. It is based on the Eastern major scale, the Dorian mode, and the Eastern minor scale, and employs an Eastern type of meter—that is, a syllabic rhythm (*syllabisch*), in which the entire congregation prays together, articulating the words in a common rhythmic pattern, as among the Yemenite and Persian Jews. The *Kabbalat Shabbat* service, together with the entire *Ma'ariv* and *Shaḥarit* for the Sabbath, is chanted in the Eastern minor scale; the liturgies for the Three Pilgrimage Festivals and the High Holy Days employ the Dorian and the Eastern minor modes; the Torah reading is chanted in the Eastern major scale, and the prophetic readings in the Eastern minor. The second period begins with the rise of the piyyut. Here one already perceives a transformation of the music, which, through the influence of meter and rhyme, acquired a more fixed form. These melodies are no longer merely chanting styles but genuine melodies consisting of measured notes, and among them are some that exhibit a distinctly European form, revealing the assimilation of Eastern musical traditions to Western ones. Of the three characteristics previously identified as distinguishing Eastern from Western music, the first remains, together with something of the second, whereas the third—the formal structure—has disappeared; even in the first two respects much of their original Eastern character has been lost. These melodies are settings for piyyutim and songs, and are generally in the Eastern minor mode, with a few in the Dorian; there is not a single one in the Eastern major mode, for the Sephardim favor gentleness and emotional expression. Consequently, the music of this second period is suffused with tenderness and delicacy, sentiment, yearning, and quiet melancholy. It lacks the strength, vigor, joyful resonance, and delight in life and love that characterize the music of the Yemenite Jews. From this period there also survive songs in Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), consisting chiefly of popular love songs. I am doubtful, however, whether their melodies are of Jewish origin. They appear rather to have been borrowed by the Sephardic Jews from their Christian neighbors in Spain, for they are European in every sense. One may suppose that the melodies for the Hebrew songs date from the period of Arab-Moorish rule, whereas the melodies for the Spanish-language songs belong to a later age, after the Christians had prevailed over the Arabs. The third period begins with the Expulsion from Spain and may appropriately be termed the Turkish period, for its music is in fact little

more than an imitation of Turkish music, among whom the exiles from Spain came to dwell. In *Zemirot Yisrael* by Rabbi Israel Najara, every song is marked *laḥan Turki* (Turkish melody) or *laḥan Aravi* (Arabic melody), and in most cases Najara even identifies the particular Arabic song to whose tune the Hebrew text is to be sung.[20] This musical style spread throughout the Sephardic communities. It is employed for the *Musaf* service on the Sabbath and for all the songs composed after the Expulsion and sung on festive occasions, such as the Zemirot of Rabbi Israel Najara and the songs contained in the *Sefer shirim*, a large anthology of poems by various sages compiled down to about a generation ago.[21] This style provides cantors with ample opportunity to display their virtuosity and elaborate vocal ornamentation, for melismatic embellishment (*silsul*) is one of the principal features of Turkish music.[22] Thus, in Sephardic synagogues one may hear *Ha-Yom Harat Olam* performed with lengthy ornamental passages, and the congregation delights in the cantor's supple voice and extraordinary breath control. This style of music possesses neither a clearly defined beginning nor an end, neither regular meter nor formal structure; it lacks even a recognizable melodic motif. It consists only of a continuous flow of notes, expressing emotional excitement, imagination, and ecstatic reverie. In its entirety it is no more than a chanting style, which the singer prolongs according to his feelings and vocal capacity.

In recent years, the Sephardim, too, have begun to adopt European music. It is now possible to hear, in a Sephardic synagogue, a passage from a march used for *Ein Keloheinu*, *Yigdal*, and the like. The Sephardim have also begun to study European music systematically, and have achieved considerable success in it. There are likewise some Persian Jews who have acquired a knowledge of music theory and instrumental performance; only the Yemenite Jews have not yet followed this path. More generally, European music is steadily gaining an increasingly important place throughout the East, especially in Egypt and Jerusalem, through the various European schools established both by B'nai B'rith and by others.

---

[20] We have already alluded to the difference between Turkish music and Hebrew music in our earlier discussion of the musical scale, and here it need only be added that the two traditions have by now become so thoroughly assimilated to one another that they can scarcely be distinguished. Turkish music is now commonly called Arabic, and Arabic music Turkish; Rabbi Israel Najara likewise used these designations interchangeably. Arabic music has preserved its original character only among the fellahin, who have had little contact with the Turks; such is the case in the Land of Israel and throughout the southern regions of the Ottoman Empire.

[21] Printed in Jerusalem, 5631 (1870–71) and 5664 (1903–04).

[22] The melismatic embellishment (*silsul*) cannot be identified with the European *coloratura*, as the latter is composed of proper notes, which cannot be said of the embellishment, which is none but the trembling (tremolo) of the voice.

We now turn to *Western music*, which likewise divides into three principal branches: the music of the Ashkenazic Jews, the music of the Polish Jews, and the music of the Hasidim.

(4) *Ashkenazic Music*. The term *Ashkenazim* should properly be applied to the Jews who lived in the German lands during the Middle Ages, from the Danube to the Rhine, who shared a common historical destiny and a unified communal life from the time of their settlement in Germany until the Age of Enlightenment. They must therefore be distinguished from the Jews of Poland, whose circumstances of life and external influences were altogether different. Although the external conditions of Ashkenazic Jewish life did not begin to change until the beginning of the eighteenth century, transformations in their inner life had already commenced in the age of Luther and the Christian Reformation. These changes multiplied progressively, continuing through the Jewish "Reformation," from Mendelssohn to Geiger and finally to the *Germans of the Mosaic faith*. These same three periods may also be discerned in their musical tradition.

During the first, Semitic period, the prevailing style was the simple chant common to the whole nation: intoned speech articulated according to the rhythmic accentuation of the syllables, much like the chant of the Sephardim and the Yemenites. This music likewise consisted of a single chant formula[23] and employed the Eastern major scale, the Dorian mode, and the Eastern minor scale. The Torah was chanted in the Eastern major mode; the Prophets in the Eastern minor; the Song of Songs, Ruth, and Ecclesiastes in the Eastern major; Lamentations in the Eastern minor; *Kabbalat Shabbat* in the Eastern minor; likewise the Sabbath *Shaḥarit* and *Minḥah*; the Sabbath *Musaf* in the Dorian mode; the liturgies of the Three Festivals in the Dorian; the prayers of the High Holy Days in the Dorian, and at times in the Eastern minor; and the *qinot* in the Eastern minor. The entire congregation participated in the chanting until the rise of the piyyut, when new melodies began to appear, modeled either upon contemporary European music or upon what was then known as Gregorian chant. In the melodies of this second period, one already encounters the three characteristics discussed above, and, even where they are not yet fully developed, at least their beginnings are clearly visible. Thus there are melodies that do not begin on the tonic but nevertheless conclude upon it; others that still lack a regular meter; and still others that have not yet acquired a fixed formal structure. Yet in all of them one may observe these characteristics gradually evolving and approaching completion. Take, for example, the melody of the hymn *Ein Arokh Elekha*. It lacks the first of these characteristics but possesses the second, together with a clearly defined form. The setting of *Adonai, Adonai*

[23] Editor's note: Idelsohn uses the word *signon* with quotation marks, which he uses as a translation of the German *Weise*. "Single chant formula" is the translation used here.

has no regular meter, yet it begins and ends on the tonic and has a fixed form; the same is true of *Zekhor Berit*. The melody of *Avotai Ki Vatḥu* possesses both a regular meter and a fixed form, although it does not begin on the tonic, only ending there. The melody of *Sha'ah Ne'esar*, by contrast, exhibits all three characteristics in full measure, as do *Ani Hu ha-Sho'el*, *Ki Hine Ka-Ḥomer*, *Be-Moẓa'ei Yom Menuḥah*, *Shokhnei Batei Ḥomer*, and many others.

The development thus proceeds from the recitative and the syllabic accentuation of the Yom Kippur piyyutim, such as *Mi Lo Yira'ekha* and *Adonai Malakh*, to the melodies mentioned above, all of which bear the unmistakable stamp of the Catholic Church with respect to meter and formal organization, and whose musical character is strikingly reminiscent of the chorale tradition.[24] From there the tradition advances to the great settings of the Kaddish for the High Holy Days, the prayers for *Tal* and *Geshem*, and the *Avot*, *Aleinu*, and *Ve-ha-Kohanim*. These works bear the imprint of the Italian Renaissance and of the Minnesänger. They are no longer popular and simple melodies but artistic compositions, originating in the sixteenth century and further developed by the "wandering cantors" of that period, who imitated the itinerant Italian and German singers and musicians traveling from town to town to perform their music. These wandering cantors were, for the most part, gifted musicians blessed with fine voices. Finding little opportunity for virtuoso display either in the ancient Semitic chants or in the established melodies of the piyyutim, they introduced elaborate introductions and preludes, of the kind represented by the Kaddish, the *Avot*, and *Barekhu*. The body of the prayer itself could not be altered, lest this be regarded as an interruption of the liturgy or a distraction from devotion. *Ve-ha-Kohanim* and *Aleinu* constitute exceptions. These settings found favor with the congregation because, through their music, the cantors evoked the blessed days of the Temple and gave musical expression to the emotions of the people and to their longing for the sacred joy that had prevailed when the High Priest emerged unharmed from the Holy of Holies.

This state of affairs, however, continued only so long as the Jews remained subject to the authority of the Catholic Church. Once Luther waged his great war on Rome, abolishing the Latin Catholic musical tradition and creating a new, distinctly German music based upon the European major scale, the music of the Ashkenazic Jews likewise began to change. At that time the Jews were encouraged by the hope that, with the decline of Catholic power, their own subjugation would likewise come to an end and that the Protestants would bring them freedom. Luther's favorable attitude toward the Jews during the early years of the Reformation served only to strengthen these expectations. The Jews therefore also embraced Protestant music, and a reminder of this mistaken hope

[24] See the book *Ba'al tefillah* by the cantor [Abraham] Baer [Frankfurt, 1883]. There all the various melodies of the *Ashkenazim* are collected.

survives in the melody of *Ma'oz Tzur*, which, as we have already noted, [25]is derived in its principal outline from the chorale "Nun freut euch, ihr lieben Christen." In the same way, Luther's musical style and the European major scale exerted their influence upon the melody of *Aleinu*, whose original form was based on the Eastern major mode; upon the Passover setting of *Mi Khamokha*, likewise originally composed in the Eastern major mode; upon the Kaddish for *Ne'ilah*; and upon many other chants. Thus began the third period, which has continued ever since.

Whereas in the second, Catholic period the melodies were still built upon the original modes, with only their *manner and formal organization* bearing the imprint of European music, in the third period even this last remnant disappeared. All the new melodies composed during the past three centuries are nothing more than imitations of European music and acts of submission to it. Their melodies are constructed upon the two European scales, the major and the minor, and conform to European principles of meter and musical form. Nor is this all: our cantors also adopted the melodies of *German folk songs* and attached them to the prayers of the synagogue. More than that, they introduced harmony—the musical element most alien to the Semitic spirit—into the sanctuary itself.[26] But what cause is there for astonishment? Those who introduced these foreign melodies sought nothing less than assimilation and aspired to become "Germans of the Mosaic faith."

Here it is appropriate to mention the great composer who arose in Mantua, Italy, Rabbi Solomon de Rossi (Shlomo min ha-Adumim), who lived between 1550 and 1630 and left behind a substantial collection of settings for the Jewish liturgy and for the Psalms, written for three, four, five, six, seven, and eight voices. These compositions lay hidden in libraries until the cantor Naumbourg brought them to publication. Yet it should not surprise us that they remained virtually unknown among the Jewish public: they bear not the stamp of the Hebrew tradition, but the Italian one, and are essentially imitations of the music of Palestrina. Who can say whether, after another 100 years, the "reformed" prayer books of the Western cantors will not meet the same fate as the

---

[25] See above, in our discussion of scale. See also Gebhardi's book *Taschen-Choralbuch* (Leipzig, 1882), no. 225. [Editor's note: The theory advanced here by Idelsohn appears to rest upon that of Eduard Birnbaum. By the mid-twentieth century, however, Birnbaum's position had been challenged to some extent by hypotheses proposing Jewish antecedents for the Lutheran chorale. It is difficult to determine which edition of Gebhardi's collection Idelsohn refers to as the "1882" edition. In any case, in the 1879 edition the chorale melody in question appears as no. 308.]

[26] First among these was Israel Jacobson [(1768–1828)], who established a reformed house of prayer in Seesen and published a tune collection in 1832. [Editor's note: in view of Jacobson's year of death, Idelsohn may be referring to the earlier *Hebräische und deutsche Gesänge zur Andacht und Erbauung* (Kassel, 1810), to which he also refers in *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development, 235–42.]*

compositions of Rabbi Solomon de Rossi? From the outset they were alien offspring, and they never secured any real place within our national musical tradition.

What the Ashkenazim spoiled, however, the Polish Jews restored.

(5) *Polish [Jewish] music*. Polish Jews are those Jews who lived under the rule of Poland and under the dominion of the Tatars and Magyars, and who were influenced by the Turks, the Gypsies, the Cossacks, and the people of Little Russia. These were the Jews who inhabited the Balkan Peninsula, whose settlements extended as far as the Black Sea and the Dnieper, and whose origins and the date of whose arrival in those lands have not yet been established. There are, however, grounds for supposing that they came there from Khazaria, Persia, and Byzantium.[27] These communities remained comparatively unknown until the migration of Ashkenazi Jews from their original homelands, beginning in the fourteenth century, when large numbers of Ashkenazi Jews settled in Poland. Arriving as newcomers, they profoundly influenced the indigenous Jewish population, whose members eventually adopted the Ashkenazim's learning, outlook, and culture, and even their language.

Yet although the Jews of Poland adopted all these things from the Ashkenazim, they did not surrender their own musical tradition.[28] They accepted only part of the Ashkenazi repertoire, not all of it, just as they did not adopt all Ashkenazi customs or even the Ashkenazi nusaḥ (liturgical rite). Apart from the ancient prayers—which had undoubtedly been received at an earlier period—they adopted only some of the piyyutim. Even those piyyutim that they did accept were either adapted to new melodies according to their own taste or not adopted musically at all. For this reason there are considerable differences between the very same melodies in the Ashkenazi and Polish rites.[29] If we examine the nature of these differences, we find that they arose from several causes. First, the Jews of Poland adopted a different scale—the Turkish-Gypsy scale[30]—and with it they assimilated something of the musical style of the Turks and the Gypsies. Secondly, they had little contact with the Catholic musical tradition of Western Europe and were instead influenced by the Russians and the Cossacks, whose music employed the minor-Gypsy mode. Together, these influences transformed their musical tradition not merely in outward appearance but in its very substance, to the point that it is difficult to distinguish within

---

[27] Graetz-Shepher, *History of the Jews*, part 6, preface and chapter 9, 183–205. [Editor's note: Shepher is the acronym of Saul Pinchas Rabbinowicz (1845–1910), who translated Graetz's monumental history, *Geschichte der Juden*, into Hebrew. Idelsohn refers to the volume and page numbers in that Hebrew translation.]

[28] See Maharil's account of his arrival in the Regensburg community, where he prayed before the Ark and sang the Austrian melodies in use there—that is, the Polish melodies. The account is also cited in Winter and Wünsche's *Die jüdische Litteratur*, 515.

[29] See *Ba'al tefillah* [by Baer], where it is written "polnische Weise," "deutsche Weise."

[30] See above, in our discussion of the scale.

Polish Jewish music the earliest, simple stratum, since even that layer underwent fundamental changes. Because the music of this earliest period was originally common to the entire Jewish people and based upon shared modal foundations, Polish Jewry introduced an additional scale as one of the principal bases of its musical tradition—the Turkish-Gypsy scale—a mode of which the other branches of the Jewish nation possessed no knowledge whatsoever. The only major survivor in its original form was the music for *Kabbalat Shabbat*. The melodies for the Sabbath morning service and *Musaf*, however, were transformed according to the new scale, as were the settings for the Festivals, especially *u-Mippenei Ḥata'einu*, and for the High Holy Days, notably *Unetaneh Tokef*. The same process also affected many prayers that possessed no fixed melody, including *Av ha-Raḥamim*, *Yehi Raẓon*, *Hashkivenu*, and many others.[31]

The most distinctive characteristics of Polish Jewish music are these. First, it lacks both meter and the European chorale form. It is built upon the minor and the Gypsy modes and possesses neither strength nor vigor. Apart from the chanting of the Torah, which remains in the Eastern major mode, and the melodies for the *Song of Songs*, *Ruth*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Lekhah Dodi*—which were apparently borrowed from the Ashkenazim—the Polish Jews possess no chant in the major mode. Even the melodies for *Aleinu*, the Kaddish of *Ne'ilah*, and the Kaddishim of the High Holy Days, likewise borrowed from the Ashkenazim, were altered according to the modes customary among them, thereby losing much of their original force and majesty. Polish Jewish music is thus, on the one hand, foreign and alien, and, on the other, Eastern in character. It lacks, to be sure, the authentic source—the direct influence of ancient Hebrew music. For whereas the Jews of Spain and Ashkenaz maintained contact with the Jews of the Land of Israel throughout the period in which that land still served as one of the principal centers of Jewish life, no such connection existed between those centers and the Jews of Poland. The latter had not yet reached a comparable level of development,[32] and remained preoccupied with more immediate concerns. By the time they awakened to the study of Torah, the great academies of the Land of Israel and Babylonia had already declined. Consequently, the Polish Jews received their religious tradition only at second hand—from the Jews of Ashkenaz.[33] It follows that Hebrew music likewise did not reach them in its original purity. Yet, despite this, the Jews of Poland rendered a great service to our national music. Fortune spared them the overwhelming influence of Europe and brought them instead under the

---

[31] See Weintraub's *Schire Beth Adonai*, part 3.
[32] Graetz-Shepher, *History of the Jews*, part 6, 183–205.
[33] Ibid.; Zunz, *Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes* [Rites of synagogue liturgy] (Berlin, 1859), 73.

influence of the peoples of the East, whose music—even though they are not Semites—is nevertheless akin to Hebrew music. For, after all, the Turks and the Roma differ from the Semitic peoples chiefly in their modal system, not in the substance or form of their music. Thus, among the Polish Jews, the Eastern musical spirit and its characteristic forms were preserved in an alien vessel—the Gypsy mode. This also explains why these Jews did not favor the melodies of the Ashkenazi hymns and piyyutim, with their European form and meter, but instead devoted themselves to the cultivation of the nusaḥ, which they developed with genuine artistic talent. Even the Gypsy mode that they borrowed was transformed by combining it with the Eastern minor mode, producing a mode unique in its kind, whose melodies are marked by tenderness, profound emotion, and heartfelt sorrow. Whose heart has not been stirred by a beloved and celebrated cantor, endowed with a powerful, resonant voice and a style full of emotion and spiritual outpouring, singing in that mode? And what did he sing? Not fixed melodies, rigid as if nailed in place, but the nusaḥ—the traditional chant formula, shaped by the natural inflection of the words. Here the cantor's spirit is free: free to follow the inspiration of his imagination and the promptings of his heart.

One precious jewel has, however, survived from this period, though it is gradually disappearing as the influence of the Turks and the Roma over the Jews of Poland has waned and that of the Russians of the south—the people of Little Russia—has become predominant. It is a jewel whose radiance has delighted the entire world: the melody of *Kol Nidrei*. In this melody the *signs of the great European music* are already discernible. Chronologically, it is the latest of all the melodies that have been accepted by the Jewish people as though they were *mi-Sinai*. Yet, as the saying goes, the last is by no means the least.

A legend concerning the origin of this melody relates that it came from Spain and was created among the *conversos*, who sang it when they heard the priests of the Inquisition drawing near to seize them in the churches where they had outwardly professed Christianity, while inwardly facing death and martyrdom for the sanctification of God's name. Beautiful and poetic though this legend may be, it cannot be true. First, the Jews of Spain know nothing of this melody; indeed, they possess no distinctive melody for *Kol Nidrei* at all. They simply recite *Kol Nidrei* in a matter-of-fact manner, with no more musical expression than they would employ in *Pitron Ḥalom* or *Eizehu Mekoman*. Secondly, they possess no melody even remotely akin to it in spirit or construction. As we have already seen, all their melodies from the second period are comparatively simple and modest. Any musician who examines the structure and design of the *Kol Nidrei* melody will readily recognize its characteristic features. It opens in the Gypsy minor mode; this is followed by a middle section in the *European major* mode; the opening section then returns,

and the melody concludes with a cadence derived from the second section. We thus have a composite form arranged according to the pattern A–B–A′, a design that emerged in the schools of the great European composers during the *seventeenth century*. Judging *Kol Nidrei* by its unmistakably European musical construction, we are therefore led to conclude that it originated in Austria or Hungary, where it arose under the combined influence of Gypsy music on the one hand and European art music on the other.[34] Yet it was conceived with true genius. In his imagination, its composer depicted the inner world of the *conversos* as they risked their lives, gathering secretly in cellars and caves in order to proclaim the unity of God and sanctify His name. This vision he expressed in music, and he succeeded admirably. Had its composer lived in the nineteenth century, when Jewish musicians had begun to emerge as composers rather than merely cantors, he might well have transformed his melody into a symphony for orchestra. But in the age in which he lived, when the Jew was scarcely regarded as a human being, when he was still compelled to pay the "Christian church tax" and the humiliating "ass tax," and when Jewish spiritual life was confined almost entirely to the study hall and the synagogue, Jewish musicians likewise found no other arena for their art than the sanctuary itself, no other platform than the reader's desk, no other instruments than their own voices and those of their fellow singers, and no subject more fitting than prayer itself.

For political reasons, the influence of the Turks gradually declined and was replaced by that of the Russians. This new influence likewise left its mark upon Jewish music. The Jews began to listen to the music of Little Russia and of the Cossacks. Both traditions are based primarily upon the Eastern minor mode, though they occasionally substitute the Gypsy minor mode. They differ, however, in character: the music of southern Russia is gentle, wistful, and imbued with melancholy, whereas Cossack music is vigorous and exuberant, marked by a sharply defined rhythm and essentially dance-like in nature. The Jews adopted elements of both traditions, but impressed upon them their own distinctive stamp. These melodies scarcely penetrated the sacred repertoire—that is, the synagogue liturgy—except to a limited extent in Volhynia. They did, however, give rise to a new musical genre: the vernacular [Yiddish] folk music.

Secular folk music has always existed among the Jewish people, even in exile. The Jews of Yemen possess folk songs not only in the Holy Tongue (*lashon ha-qodesh*) but also in large numbers in Aramaic and Arabic. The Sephardim likewise have such songs in both Hebrew and Ladino. Several centuries ago, the Ashkenazim, too, possessed numerous folk songs in a corrupted form of German with many melodies. In the same way, a vernacular

[34] The Chief Cantor of the Vienna community, Mr. [Josef] Singer, has written perceptively on this subject in a number of articles.

folk music developed among the Jews of Poland in Yiddish. The principal reason why the folk music of virtually every branch of the Jewish people was composed predominantly in the vernacular rather than in Hebrew is that its chief bearers were women. It is well known that Jewish women were generally unfamiliar with the language of their people. Nearly all Yemenite Jewish men spoke and understood Hebrew, whereas their wives often understood not a single word of it. The same was true among the Jews of Persia and among the Sephardim. It had likewise been the case among the Ashkenazim, and, indeed, it remained so among the Jews of Poland down to the present day. Hebrew had become the Holy Tongue, reserved for use within the institutions of the Jewish "Temple in exile"—the synagogue and the house of study. Outside those settings, however, Jews spoke the vernaculars of the peoples among whom they lived. Women, who remained within the household and generally did not attend the *beit midrash*—for, according to traditional practice, women were not taught Torah—knew only the everyday spoken language, namely Yiddish. It was therefore for them that a secular folk poetry and a corresponding secular folk music arose in the language they understood.

Yiddish folk music is generally based on the minor mode, sometimes the Eastern minor and at other times the Gypsy minor. Its rhythmic character is Slavic, and its melodies begin on the tonic and return to it at their close. Only its substance is distinctly Jewish. From it one hears the gentle and pure Jewish soul, filled with longing and love. In this respect it resembles Sephardic music.

Modest, like the daughters of Israel themselves, this music is restrained, melancholy, and permeated with sorrow. It unfolds slowly, with an air of heartfelt emotional outpouring,[35] and may therefore aptly be called "women's music," in contrast to the "music of men," which arose during the same period and was (6) *Hasidic music*. In recent years much has been written about Hasidic music, and examples of it have been published in various periodicals.[36] It has even been extolled as the quintessential expression of Jewish national music. In reality, however, it is by no means as purely national in character as its admirers suppose. Let us therefore examine it more closely.

Most Hasidic melodies are in the Gypsy minor mode, while a smaller number are in the European major mode. They are distinguished by their precise meter and their European formal structure, yet they possess a distinctive character of their own: Hasidic music is without words—it is purely vocal expression, a melody for its own sake.[37]

---

[35] Thus far, only a very small number of these melodies have appeared in print. In reality, however, there are hundreds of them. I myself possess approximately 100 such melodies in manuscript.

[36] In *Ha-'olam*, years 1 and 2, as well as in the monthly *Ost und West*.

[37] It is a fundamental principle among the Hasidim that the finest music is that which is without words, for only then is the soul truly free, and only then can it rise above the material.

If we examine the essence of Hasidism, we shall better understand Hasidic music. The foundation of Hasidism is awakening, enthusiasm, and elevation above the material world into the world of *Atzilut* (the realm of divine emanation); it is the longing and yearning to draw near to the Infinite and to delight in its radiance. And the means by which all this may be attained is music.

A dispute arose between the followers of Chabad and the followers of the Baal Shem Tov (the disciples of the Besht). The latter maintain that joy is the essence of life, and that there is no true service of God except through joy and song, for only through worship performed with gladness can one draw near to the Creator. The followers of Chabad, by contrast, maintain that this world is lowly and deceptive, and that only through the negation of the material self can one approach the Infinite and ascend to the world of *Atzilut*. Accordingly, the music of the former is joyful and exuberant: they dance and leap in their celebrations. Its rhythms are lively and dance-like (*Tanzmusik*), and to a considerable extent it derives from Cossack music. Almost all Hasidic melodies built upon the major mode are to be traced to this source. The music of the latter, however, is marked by melancholy, emotional intensity, and the outpouring of the soul, by longing for their Father in Heaven. It proceeds slowly and gently, and is invariably built upon the Eastern minor mode. Only rarely do we encounter Hasidic melodies based upon the Gypsy minor mode. Yet, although Hasidic melodies employ Eastern modes, they possess a precise European meter and a complex European formal structure.

Hasidic melodies are numberless, for every *rebbe* composes new melodies of his own, or the Hasidic musicians in his court create new melodies in his spirit. Among the Hasidim, the melodies associated with this or that *rebbe* are well known and celebrated, and in most cases they are indeed beautiful. Hasidic melodies bear a considerable resemblance to Yemenite melodies, particularly those of the followers of the Baal Shem Tov. The one as well as the other were created for dancing; both possess a precise rhythm. Yet how great is the distance between them! Yemenite melodies are purely Semitic: their scales, rhythms, and forms all derive from the Jewish tradition itself. Hasidic melodies, by contrast, possess only a Semitic soul; their body and outward form have been borrowed from foreign sources. And how can our hearts not grieve when we see the finest of our songs and melodies stamped with the imprint of the songs of our tyrants—those who hate and revile us . . . ?

In recent times, when European enlightenment began to gain influence in the lives of Polish Jews, these Jews too began to abandon their distinctive music and content themselves with the works of foreigners. Yet what remains of Polish and Hasidic music may, at least, be regarded as a "new song." It is a wondrous

and unique growth. Indeed, I believe I would not be mistaken if I said that it is a "fruit of exile": it was conceived and born in a foreign land; it drew its nourishment from foreign sources; it grew upon the knees of the children of the Diaspora; and it was like a flower upon which neither rain had fallen nor sun had shone. Nevertheless, this exilic music is dearer and more precious to us than the "reformist" and ingenious music of German Jews, for in the music of the Poles there has remained the Semitic soft mode—the scale of outpouring of the soul—which is so beloved of the Semitic spirit and which marks it as Semitic; and as long as the soul endures, there is still hope.

* * *

We have not yet discussed the fourth condition of music—the

(d) *harmony*. The name itself proves that its subject is foreign: we have no Hebrew term for it, for it neither existed nor was conceived during the lifetime of the Hebrew language. Indeed, all scholars are unanimous that the peoples of antiquity had no harmony. And from what we have explained thus far, we could have concluded that it could not have been otherwise.

First, to this day there is no harmony in the music of the peoples of the East, because their music lacks the conditions necessary for harmony—the precise meter and the clear formal structure. For this reason, harmony was likewise absent among the Greeks and the Romans. For harmony is a new creation, which arose in the Middle Ages through the Catholic Church, and which Palestrina (1514–94) elevated to a high degree of perfection. It is a European creation, in which Asia had no share.[38] Thus, at first glance, there would seem to be no reason to discuss harmony in an essay on Jewish national music, since it developed among Jews only in the last century, when they began to study the art of European music. Yet we see that the Turks, Arabs, and Japanese too have begun to study harmony with enthusiasm, and even the Chinese and Africans are becoming proficient in it. From this we must conclude that harmony is not merely European, but universally human; every musician is capable of learning it, for its foundations are built upon the principles of natural science and the science of sound (acoustics). And just as human beings of every race have adopted the inventions and sciences of Europeans and made them their own, because they are founded upon human reason, so too have they adopted harmony from them. Therefore, we too, the children of Israel, shall accept from

[38] And in vain did the author of *Shiltei ha-gibborim*, in his essay on music among Israel (p. D), labor to twist and distort verses of the Bible and to build upon this matter whole mountains of interpretations, which have no foundation whatsoever. For the "eighth" (*sheminit*) is the "octave"—this is merely a conjecture of Ackermann, in the book by Winter and Wünsche [*Die jüdische Litteratur*] which I have mentioned several times in this essay.

our former pupils—who have now become our teachers—the art of musical harmony, just as our ancestors once transmitted the first foundations of music to the peoples of Europe.

For we have received this teaching from our fathers: "Who is wise? He who learns from every person."

But, while we receive from them, let us not forget our own essence, as our brothers and fellow Jews in Germany did. Let us learn from the Europeans the general laws of harmony and employ them according to our own way and spirit; for even if we bring our ancient national melodies into precise meter and give them an exact and clearly defined form, they will lose nothing of their content. On the contrary, we shall remove from them the Oriental dreaminess and, through this, accustom ourselves to a clearer sense of perception and to a mighty will—qualities so greatly needed by our people.

But let us hold fast to the essence—to the soul of our music, to its principal scales: the Oriental minor scale, the Oriental major scale, and the "Dorian" scale. And whoever says that it is impossible to create chordal combinations (chords) on the basis of these scales is simply mistaken. Let Hebrew musicians try their strength with them, and they will discover that not only is it possible, but that the melodies built upon these scales will be more beautiful and more suited to the spirit of Hebrew music than those built upon the European scales which our musicians have employed until now.

Then we shall have a Hebrew national music—an original and magnificent music:

Jerusalem.

A. Z. Idelsohn, "The National Music"

Source: *Torat ha-neginah* [Theory of music] (Jerusalem: Institute of Israeli Song, 1910 [5670]), chapter 24, 49–51, https://www.nli.org.il/he/books/NNL_ALEPH990011748570205171/

Just as every nation possesses its own distinctive character and peculiar spirit, so too does every nation and race possess its own characteristic music, the natural expression of its unique national soul.

And just as mankind is commonly divided into three principal races—the Caucasian or white, the Mongolian or yellow, and the Negro or black—so too music may be similarly classified, each race possessing its own characteristic musical language.

The music of the Negro has remained to this day in a primitive state, one that the members of the white race cannot readily appreciate. Likewise, the music of the yellow race makes little impression upon either European or Semitic ears. Naturally, the Negroes and the Mongolians cherish their own music above all others, and look with indifference upon musical traditions unlike their own. To the white race belong both Oriental and European music. As we have already seen, these two musical systems are closely related in their scales. They share a common foundation, yet they differ profoundly in spirit. The reason is that the white race itself is divided into two great branches: the Semitic and the Indo-Germanic. The former comprises the white peoples of the East—that is, of Western Asia—while the latter embraces the nations of Europe.

At times, however, prolonged coexistence has caused one people to adopt the music of another. Thus the Turks, though Mongolian in origin, adopted Oriental music while at the same time leaving upon it the imprint of their own musical traditions. Likewise, the Persians, whom the author regards as belonging to the Indo-Germanic race, adopted Oriental music. Similarly, the Hungarians, whom he classifies among the Mongolian peoples, embraced European music while contributing elements of their own. Yet in none of these cases did the original racial music disappear altogether, for the wellspring of music flows from the very soul of a nation; and the soul, being eternal, neither changes nor exchanges its essential nature.

As we observed in Chapter 20, Oriental music itself comprises numerous currents and a great variety of musical traditions, for the Semitic race is itself divided into tribes, families, and nations. Every tribe and every people lives its own distinct historical life, and in the course of time develops emotions and sensibilities peculiar to itself alone, in which strangers have no share. These feelings it expresses in its music in a manner uniquely its own. Thus, although the general foundation of its music is shared by the entire race, its details and outward form gradually acquire a distinctive character, and for this reason it is called national music. Consequently, Oriental music embraces many different

national traditions, each the product of a particular people dwelling beneath the broad mantle of Islam (see Chapters 20 and 21).

The same principle applies to Indo-Germanic—that is, European—music. This race is divided into three principal branches: the Romance, the Germanic, and the Slavic, each possessing its own musical character and distinctive taste. Among the Romance peoples are the Italians, Spaniards, and French. The foremost among them in musical achievement are the Italians. They developed both sacred and secular music, and until some two centuries ago Italy stood at the head of European music. Great musical geniuses arose there, foremost among them Palestrina (1514–94), who brought the arts of harmony and musical form to a remarkable degree of perfection. Among the Germanic peoples are the Germans, the Scandinavians, the Dutch, and the English. Their principal nation is Germany. The Germans inherited the European musical tradition from the Italians and, for the next two centuries, became its undisputed masters, producing composers whose achievements remain enduring models in the history of music.

The first to infuse music with the German spirit was Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). From his time until the present day, Germany has never ceased to produce musicians of genius, and in every generation new masters have arisen to open fresh paths and devise new forms within European music.

Among the Slavic peoples are the Russians, Poles, Bulgarians, Czechs, and Serbs. The leading nation of Slavic music is Russia, which only during the last two generations has begun to produce composers of genius. The greatest among them is Tchaikovsky (born 1840).[39] Slavic music, according to the author, is not purely European, for it contains many elements derived from Oriental and Mongolian traditions. Consequently, Tchaikovsky sought to give this Slavic musical material a fully European artistic form.

Unique among the musical traditions of the world is Hebrew—or Jewish—music. This music is a faithful mirror of the people who have borne it through the ages. Like that people, it is of immemorial antiquity. Its foundations were laid in the remotest past, and it absorbed influences from the ancient civilizations with which Israel came into contact.

From that time until the present, it has continually assimilated elements from the music of the various peoples among whom the Jews have lived in successive ages and with whom they have entered into cultural exchange: from the Babylonians and Assyrians of antiquity—and even earlier, from peoples now unknown to us, whose very names have vanished from history—as well as from the Egyptians and Arameans, and later from the Greeks and the Persians.

---

[39] Editor's note: It is unclear why Idelsohn does not mention 1893 as Tchaikovsky's year of death.

It would appear, however, that Hebrew music assumed a settled and enduring form during the period of the Second Temple, thanks to the Levitical singers and the platform [*dukhan*] they established. They guarded Hebrew music with religious and national zeal, lest it become contaminated by foreign influences even as the political greatness of the nation declined. From the melodies of the cantillation [*ta'amei ha-miqra*] used in the reading of the Torah and the Prophets—which have survived to our own day and remain common to all Jewish communities, preserving essentially the same tradition and melodic outline—we may form an approximate conception of the character of Hebrew music at the close of the Second Temple period. During the 2,000 years of exile, however, it absorbed many further influences. Within it one may discern traces of Russian and Slavic music, the influence of the Romance peoples—especially the Italians—elements of Gypsy and Turkish music, that is, Mongolian music, no less than the influence of the German musical tradition.

Hebrew music is, by and large, an Oriental music. This fundamental character has been preserved most faithfully among the Jews of the East. Although they have absorbed much from the contemporary Arabic and Turkish musical traditions, these too are Oriental in character and are therefore akin to Hebrew music both in spirit and in form. The situation has been otherwise among the Jews dispersed throughout Europe. So long as they remained confined within the boundaries of the ghetto, the flavor of Hebrew music did not disappear, for European influence upon them remained comparatively weak. But from the moment the Jews emerged into the wider world, mingled with the nations, and learned to sing the songs of Europe, Hebrew music gradually gave way before European music and little by little faded from the memory of European Jewry. This process was accelerated above all when the cantors arose, consecrated European music, and introduced it into the sanctuary itself, into the house of prayer.

The first to convert European music [into Judaism] and bring it into the sacred sphere was the cantor Salomon Sulzer (5564–50) [1804–90]. After him, all the "reformed" cantors followed in his footsteps, eagerly lopping off the living branches of our national musical tradition. Today, a cantor who truly knows [authentic, original] Hebrew music has become a rarity indeed.

Yet in recent times, as national consciousness has awakened among the Jews of Europe, there has likewise arisen a longing to revive the national Hebrew musical tradition.

Would that this aspiration might grow ever stronger! Would that those devoted admirers of our national music might succeed in bringing this ideal to fruition: to restore and revive Hebrew music, to cultivate and perfect it, and to give it a truly Hebrew form. Then it would once again quicken the Hebrew soul and breathe into the hearts of the Jewish people a fresh spirit—a spirit of song.

Aharon Leib Bisko, "The Renewal of Hebrew Music"

Source: *Torat ha-musika* [Theory of music] (London: Grodzetski, 1924 [5684]), 7–16.

A. The Originality of Hebrew Music

I entitled my book simply "The Theory of Music," withoutthe addition of any qualifying adjective, for music, in its plain and fundamental sense, is international. All nations partake of it, whether to a greater or lesser degree, just as they partake of the other fine arts. To the present essay, however [which serves as the introduction to the book], I have added the adjective "Hebrew." For although music, as has been said, is one in its essence among all peoples, each nation nevertheless impresses upon it its own distinctive stamp, according to its particular character and temperament, which differ from those of every other people. Thus the greatest experts, even without hearing or reading the words of a song, are often able to discern, between one melody or another, to which nation it belongs.

These few remarks, and much more besides, are well known to all specialists in this field, and I claim no originality in making them. I have touched upon the matter only in passing [lit. "with the tip of my pen"], and shall return to it briefly below, since I wished to explain the reason for adding the adjective "Hebrew" to the title of the present essay.

First of all, we must ask the following question: do we Jews truly possess a share in music at all? Our detractors and adversaries assert that the Jews are, in general, mere imitators—or even counterfeiters—of every form of art, and that in music as well they possess no original contribution of their own. The resolution of this question is a worthy aim in itself, for it constitutes the very foundation of the present essay.

Fortunately, although the revival of Hebrew music itself requires careful examination and clarification in all its particulars, the question of Jewish originality in music relieves me of the need to treat the matter at length. Early distinguished Jewish authorities have already preceded me in addressing this issue, and I shall therefore present their views here in brief.

The late Pinhas Minkowsky, the celebrated cantor, writes:

> That song and melody are of ancient standing among the Jews no one will doubt. The question, however, of whether the ancient Jews also possessed a system of musical notation, or whether they relied solely upon oral transmission, has long been a point of contention among scholars and has given rise to various, and at times mutually contradictory, answers (*Ha-tequfah*, book 2, Moscow, 1918).

And in *Ha-tzefirah* ([no. 110, May] 1904) he writes:

> All of them [the entire liturgical tradition and the concluding formulas of the blessings] are constructed upon the new and secular major scale. Whether the text be

> lamentation or rejoicing, prayer or praise, supplication or thanksgiving, redemption hymn or *kerovah*, it opens in the Dorian mode, in a scale of cheerfulness. The tradition of the "gusts" attached to every prayer, and the various "steigers" which once evoked in the listener, now an outpouring of the heart and soul, now joy and hope—who any longer distinguishes between them? In the whole of the Berlin liturgy there is not a single response that bears within its benediction any reminder of the Eastern, the Semitic, the Jewish, or the exilic spirit.

Thus did Minkowsky zealously defend our musical heritage against the influence of the celebrated Lewandowski, that Hebrew child carried off into captivity among idolaters, whose music was permeated with, and itself diffused, a Christian flavor.

The late A. B. Birnboim, another cantor, no less renowned than the former and perhaps even more so, declares: "Like all the peoples of the East, we are justified in calling our distinctive melodies Jewish melodies, by virtue of their originality and national character; at most, our task is to adapt and refine them, not to cast them aside" (*Ha-tzefirah*, no. 190 [*sic*; *recte* 199], 1904).

And finally, though not least, the distinguished musicologist Mr. A. Z. Idelsohn (may he be granted long life) writes in his essay "Semitic Music" (*Ha-shiloaḥ*, Elul, 1920):[40] "That there exist two types in the music of civilized mankind—the Eastern and the European—is beyond dispute etc. Yet neither the educated public nor even the musical public is aware of the existence of a distinctively Semitic music; indeed, even musicologists themselves have scarcely awakened to this fact." At the conclusion of his essay, after clearly expounding the differences between Eastern and European music, he arrives at the following conclusion:

> The Jewish branch did indeed absorb influences from other races—from those peoples among whom it dwelt already in the days of the Second Temple, the nations inhabiting the shores of the Mediterranean. All the more was it influenced by foreign elements during the Exile, when it was dispersed across diverse regions and subjected to different climates and environments. Some Jewish centers came under Mongolian influence, others under Slavic influence, others under Romanian influence, and others under German influence. Yet this influence, though it introduced foreign elements, was transformed once it had been assimilated into the Jewish spirit; it assumed a Semitic form and adapted itself thereto. Those foreign elements that could not be assimilated were rejected and disappeared without a trace. Thus Jewish music has remained, in its essence, Semitic.

It seems to me that these quotations, though they number only three, are sufficient to demonstrate that we Jews, too, possess a contribution of our own to the art of music, and that there is no need to burden the reader with further citations.

---

[40] Editor's note: *Ha-shiloaḥ* 37, no. 221 (August 1920): 492–503.

B. Musical Sounds

The musical notes, according to their degrees of height and depth, whether produced by the human voice or by instruments of every kind, are arranged one after another in a natural order, not in a mathematical order derived from some invention of arithmetic. The sequence of notes on all wind instruments—for example, the flute—begins with the lowest opening; and as the finger-holes ascend one above another, so do the pitches of the sounds produced through them rise correspondingly. The note emitted through the uppermost opening, nearest the mouth of the performer, is the highest. To reverse or alter this order is altogether impossible, for in order to produce a low or deep note, the player's breath must pass through the entire cavity of the instrument and drive before it the air enclosed within, which escapes through the lowest opening. When that opening is uncovered by lifting the finger from it, the escaping air produces its low note; and the same principle applies to the remaining openings. All perform according to the order established by nature itself, without alteration.

Not so, however, with stringed instruments. Of the piano—called by distinguished musicians "the citizen of the world"—we shall speak later, for we shall employ it in this book as a decisive proof that we have become guardians of foreign vineyards while neglecting our own. For the present, let us speak of the stringed instrument especially beloved by the Jews, namely the violin, concerning which even legend relates that "it hung above the bed of David, and when midnight arrived, a north wind would blow upon it and it would play of itself."[41]

Among all musical notes, three are especially distinguished, designated by the letters C, F, and G, and known respectively as the fundamental (tonic), the vice-governor (subdominant), and the governor (dominant). Music theorists explain the importance of these notes by their natural sonority, which surpasses that of the others when all are sounded according to their proper sequence. They explain the matter in a manner readily comprehensible to anyone possessed of a discerning ear. If, for example, we stretch a string or a fine cord from one end to the other and strike it at one extremity with a finger or some other object, it will sound the first note, the Fundamental. If, moving a distance of three finger-breadths from that point, we strike it again, it will sound the fourth note, the Subdominant. If we move but one finger-breadth further and strike it once more, it will sound the fifth note, the Dominant. And if we continue striking it at successive intervals until we reach the opposite end, we shall perceive that these three notes are the principal and foundational notes from which all the others derive.

[41] Editor's note: Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 3b.

The same principle governs the violin. Four strings are stretched across it, and beneath them, upon the breast of the instrument, stands a bridge (*Steg*), whose purpose is to maintain a space between the strings and the body of the violin; for strings pressed directly against a surface produce no musical note. There is but one proper and natural way for each of the four strings to yield its successive musical notes, namely by placing the fingers in order upon the string, beginning at the lower end of the neck and proceeding toward the bridge. When the bow is drawn across a string without the placement of a finger, the string produces its fundamental, natural note. When a finger is placed upon the string near the end of the neck, the effective length of the string is shortened according to the position of the finger, and the string produces a note slightly higher than the first. As one places the fingers successively further along the string, the vibrating length becomes progressively shorter, and the pitch rises step by step. The cause of the lowering or raising of a note lies in the vibration of the string itself. When the bow is drawn across a string without any finger upon it, the entire length vibrates from end to end; and this long vibration somewhat delays and lowers the note. But when the string is shortened by the fingers, its vibration likewise becomes shorter, and therefore it hastens to raise its voice.

Yet here, as the saying goes, "lies the buried dog"—the heart of the matter. In all wind instruments, without exception, the Christians have been powerless to introduce even the slightest alteration according to their own taste or spirit, for, as already stated, no human hand can change the pattern established by nature in the production of musical sounds. Nor have they been able to alter the body of the violin or its strings. Nevertheless, in the arrangement of the strings upon the instrument they have succeeded in imposing a Christian order. Like every object, the violin has a right side and a left side. When it is laid flat upon a table or some other level surface, it makes no difference whether the strings are arranged from right to left or from left to right, since musical notes depend not upon their position but upon the strings themselves. Yet just as Christians read and write from left to right—and indeed perform all manner of actions in that direction—so too they arrange the strings of the violin, albeit with a slight modification. On the left side they place the string that produces the highest and thinnest note, calling it the first (*prima*). Next comes the string that sounds lower, the second (*secunda*). The third string, lower still, is the third (*terza*), and the fourth string, the lowest of all, is called the fourth (*quarta*). But when one takes the violin in the left hand in order to play it, the fourth string—which is now situated on the player's left—becomes the first encountered; beside it stands the third string, which now becomes the second encountered, and so forth. This contradiction between the arrangement of the strings and the names assigned to them clearly demonstrates, in the author's view, the error of the Christian system. According to the Jewish method, however, it is not the

position of the strings that confers their rank, but rather the notes they produce. Therefore the order ought to have been reversed: the string called the fourth by the Christians should have been stretched first on the left side of the violin, followed by the third, and so on. Then, when taking the violin in the left hand to play it, one would perform according to the proper order—that is, from low to high—just as there exists only one natural order on wind instruments, irrespective of religion or race.

We should not underestimate changing the order of the violin's strings. Indeed, according to Krylov in his "The Quartet":

> It happened that a Nightingale their noise did reach;
> She flew to them: they asked her to decide,
> "Have patience here with us a space," they cried,
> "Set our quartett in order, that we may
> These notes and instruments correctly play;
> Above all show us how to sit!"[42]

Yet although the essence of the art of music, like that of all the other arts and sciences, lies in talent—in the ability to perform, sing, and create musical works that are in themselves independent of religion and race—nevertheless, as has been observed above, the stamp of religion and nationality impresses itself almost unconsciously upon every work worthy of the name. Even the arrangement of the violin strings according to the Christian method, though it is scarcely more than an indiscernible alteration and can hardly be called a creative act at all, has nevertheless caused a certain inconvenience, however slight, to us Jews. I shall demonstrate this shortly when I come to discuss the second musical instrument, one with which the hand of almost every person is acquainted.

The piano, which eminent musicians have called "the citizen of the world," because there is scarcely a household in which its voice is not heard, is *wholly* Christian in origin. Cristofori, the inventor of the pianoforte, was an Italian Christian, and the first accounts of his experiments with the instrument were published in the year 1709. The piano and the violin are alike in that both are stringed instruments, yet they differ in an important respect. The violin possesses only four strings, but each of these is capable of producing many different notes according to the placement of the player's fingers. The piano, by contrast, contains a great multitude of strings, each of which is capable of producing but a single note, since each is struck only once by a single key. The strings of the violin are made either of steel wire or of animal gut, whereas the strings of the piano are of steel wire alone. In the arrangement of the violin strings, there exists, as already noted, a minute and almost imperceptible Christian alteration. The arrangement of the piano strings, however, follows the

[42] I. Henry Harrison (trans.), *Kriloff's Original Fables* (London: Remington & Co., 1883), 26.

Christian system entirely, corresponding to the Christian habit of reading and writing from left to right. The first string, which produces the lowest note of all, is placed on the left side of the instrument, while the final string, producing the highest note, is placed on the right. This arrangement could readily be reversed according to the Jewish method, proceeding from right to left, for there exists no necessary relation between the body of the piano and the order of its strings, whether they be arranged according to one system or the other. Therefore, a sacred obligation rests upon us to Judaize the piano—to arrange its strings in accordance with our own Jewish method. For the present we shall not elaborate further upon this matter, for in the following chapter we shall explain this demand in greater detail.

C. One Wrong Leads to Another

Nor is this all. We have said that Christians are unable to alter even in the slightest degree the natural sonority of musical instruments; only the arrangement of the violin strings and the strings of the piano has been adapted to their spirit and taste. Yet even beyond this, the cultured nations of the West have impressed their national stamp upon the very nomenclature of music. They possess two systems for naming musical notes. The first is common to all without distinction: the designation of notes by the letters of the Latin alphabet, albeit with a slight modification, for the musical alphabet begins with the letter C rather than A. Since written and printed musical notation belongs to all civilized peoples alike, reason dictates that all should employ the same names for the notes, so that one nation may understand another. The second system consists of naming musical notes in the vernacular language and script of each country, for nations dwell in their own lands and speak their own tongues. Thus, for example, the first note is called Do in Italian and Ut in French. The ascending semitone (♯) is called sharp in English, *diesis* in Italian, and *dièse* in French. In our present work, *Theory of Music*, a complete table is provided showing the names of the notes among the various civilized nations; for our present purpose a single example will suffice. The conclusion is clear: wherever the hand of Christendom reaches, it seeks to imprint its distinctive character upon music. And what of us Jews?

First, we must establish a simple proposition—so exceedingly simple, indeed, that precisely because of its simplicity it has escaped the attention even of those who, like Mr. A. Z. Idelsohn, have come near to “the ways of faith” (Aramaic *orḥa d’meheimenuta*). Let us imagine that some linguistic genius were to propose to the Christian nations that they abandon the order of their alphabet and adopt instead the order of ours. Let us suppose further that he demanded not only a new order of letters, but also that the very shapes of their characters be replaced with Hebrew ones. Would the Christians listen to him?

Surely not. Whether devout believers or the freest of freethinkers, they would, if not condemn him to death, at least excommunicate him and drive him from their lands. For his proposal would entail nothing less than the destruction of their languages, their literatures, and their entire way of life. And what of us Jews?

In the first chapter we cited the complaint of the late Minkowsky against Lewandowski, whom he accused of corrupting our Hebrew music according to Christian taste. Yet the late Birnbaum (whom we likewise mentioned there) complained even of Minkowsky himself, maintaining—in the very same issue of *Ha-tzefirah* in which both men wrote during the same year—that Minkowsky's own compositions were not truly Hebrew. Then came Mr. A. Z. Idelsohn, the third authority whom we cited in the first chapter, who surpassed them both, for good and for ill. He recognized the corruption that had entered our music and, for example, in his *Book of Songs* [Berlin and Jerusalem: Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden, 1912] arranged the musical notation of every song from right to left, together with the Hebrew lyrics, naturally written in their proper direction. In his essay "National Motifs" (*Ha-ʿolam*, nos. 42–43, Cologne, 12 Heshvan, year 1848 of the Destruction [1917–18]), he pours forth his indignation against "the assimilation of the cantors," who had become little more than "singers of arias." His advice and plea were that members of our nation should publish "the melodies of the finest Russian and Galician cantors, a great collection containing abundant material." Nor was Mr. Idelsohn content merely to preach. He fulfilled the ancient saying: "He who reads the letter should also be its messenger" (Aramaic *karyana de-igarta ihu lehevei parvonka*). He published the monumental three-volume work entitled *Thesaurus of Oriental Hebrew Melodies*, containing the melodies of the Jews of Yemen, Babylonia, Persia, Bukhara, and Dagestan.[43] According to his own account, he began this laborious undertaking in 1907–08 and completed it in 1919–20. No words suffice to express our gratitude to this author for enriching us with an entirely new world, wholly Jewish and wholly good. Yet at the same time he deserves the severest reproach for having, in the author's view, defiled and profaned his own treasure in two respects: first, by arranging the musical notation from left to right; and second, by printing beneath it Latin letters rather than Hebrew ones.

Most especially does he merit rebuke because the creators of the Oriental and Semitic melodies contained in his collection had never seen nor heard

[43] Editor's note: Bisko refers here to what eventually became Idelsohn's ten-volume anthology, *Hebräisch-Orientalischer Melodienschatz*. The details given by Bisko hint that he either wrote the book before the publication of the fourth volume of the *Thesaurus* (1923) or was not aware of its publication. The three volumes to which Bisko refers are *Gesänge der jemenitischen Juden* (Leipzig, 1914), *Gesänge der babylonischen Juden* (Leipzig, 1922), and *Gesänge der persischen, bucharischen und daghestanischen Juden* (Leipzig, 1922).

Western music, whether written or performed. The composers of those Eastern melodies were authentic Jews, as Idelsohn himself testifies. How, then, could he bring himself to transmit their melodies to us in a Christian form?

We have spoken at length concerning Mr. Idelsohn and have judged him sternly, precisely because he is among the finest and noblest of our national cantorial scholars; and with the righteous one measures to the breadth of a hair. Let us now explain the source of the corruption in our music, and, once we have carefully investigated its causes, we may then proceed to its remedy.

Most of the great cantors of the older generation, and likewise the great violinists among them, knew little of the formal laws and technical details of musical theory. Yet they excelled in their art and won the affection of their listeners. The reason was simple: both performers and audiences alike were imbued with the spirit of authentic Jewish music. They knew no other music, certainly no Christian music—not merely because they were unfamiliar with written notation, but also because such music was regarded as forbidden. For this reason the piano was not found even in the homes of the wealthy and prosperous, much less among the middle classes. Modern enlightenment and culture, however, whether welcomed or resisted, brought with them both benefits and harms, and with them our musical world was transformed. Many cantors, eager to display their learning and accomplishment, began to make use of written and printed musical notation when officiating before the congregation. The public, though its Jewish taste had not yet fundamentally changed, took pride in cantors who could perform according to the written notes.

Yet this was only the beginning of the corruption. The true burden of the affliction came to us through the piano. In matters of fashion—and, some would say, in other cultural matters as well—we became like the Samaritans, observing the customs we adopted with even greater zeal than the Christians themselves. The piano ceased to be merely a useful instrument, employed when one wished to make music. It became an ornament, an article of household decoration, an object displayed for beauty's sake. The beginning of one's instruction upon it was through Christian method books; the end of one's musical education was likewise Christian. Upon it were performed the works of the celebrated Christian masters of music. True, those who played the piano were generally women. Yet as men became accustomed to listening to their performances, Christian spirit and Christian taste gradually penetrated, influenced, and corrupted the Jewish spirit and Jewish taste.

There exists another source of corruption in our music as well: attendance at the theater and the opera house, where the famous Christian singers of the city or country perform. Such visits accustom us to Christian song and to

Christian sensibilities.[44] Yet their influence is not nearly so harmful to our music as that exerted by the piano. For, first, our visits to such establishments are not daily occurrences; and second, we attend them only at fixed and appointed times. The piano, by contrast, stands continually within our homes, and may be played whenever the whim arises.

In light of all this, it is hardly surprising that most of our cantors, knowingly or unknowingly, sin against our musical heritage. They all strive to demonstrate that they are not old-fashioned, that the flavor of original Jewish music has faded and become obsolete, and that one must therefore move with the times rather than against them. Although our prayers are ancient and their authors never intended them to conform to any particular melody, these modern-minded cantors believe themselves obliged to dress them in contemporary garments, just as the philosophers of antiquity and the Middle Ages clothed our tradition in interpretations suited to the spirit of their own age. As for those who play the piano, women and men alike, they have from the outset placed themselves into the hands of idolaters. How, then, could it ever occur to them that they are engaged in a form of foreign worship?

Conclusion

In order to restore our music to the glory of its former days, a sacred duty rests upon us to implement the following measures. (a) The names of the musical instruments mentioned in the Bible testify that, while we dwelt in our own land, we possessed a distinctly Hebrew music, as well as Hebrew craftsmen who fashioned musical instruments; for in the Temple no instruments manufactured by idolaters would have been employed. In exile, however, only the faint echo of our ancient music has remained to us—namely, the cantorial tradition—and we possess no Hebrew artisans engaged in the invention and manufacture of musical instruments. With regard to wind instruments, however, we need not be overly scrupulous. As explained above, such instruments are always acceptable to us, for the notes they produce are natural in their gradations, and Christians will never be able to alter them according to their own spirit and taste. The principal stringed instruments, by contrast, must be Judaized. The violin requires only a rearrangement of its strings: the four strings must be ordered from right to left, as we have already indicated. This alteration requires no special craftsman, since every violinist strings his own instrument. The

[44]In *Ha-ʻolam*, no. 15 (Berlin, 7 Nisan 5684 [1924]), there appeared a public appeal concerning the "Hebrew Theatre of the Land of Israel," signed by some of the most distinguished and eminent of our poets and writers. We must surely rejoice at this appeal, and with all our heart and soul we long to see the success of the Hebrew theater, which, if it finds both supporters and devoted adherents, will become one of the principal pillars in the revival of our language and our Hebrew art. Yet so long as we do not implement the measures that will be proposed below, its contribution to the renewal of our music will remain but slight.

reordering of the piano strings, however, demands a specialist. Yet in the commercial world, one nation does not concern itself with the religion of another. All civilized nations strive—whether by peaceful means or by war—to establish markets for their manufactured goods in the lands of the Far East, despite the fact that the peoples dwelling there profess different religions. If the Jews demand a piano fashioned according to their own spirit and taste, they too will obtain their desire. In commerce there reigns but one iron law: money can purchase everything. Moreover, Jewish demand for a piano arranged and constructed according to Jewish principles would create an entirely new branch of industry. There are Jews of considerable skill engaged in the manufacture of fine furniture, and when they perceive that profit may be made by producing pianos suited to Jewish requirements, they will undoubtedly undertake the task willingly. Nor is there any doubt that such work would lead naturally to similar enterprises in the manufacture of other musical instruments. Piano production is at present almost entirely in German hands; under our proposal it would henceforth pass entirely into Jewish hands, since only Jews would make use of our piano.

(b) An original Hebrew textbook should be written containing the rudiments of musical instruction. It goes without saying that both the writing and the reading of musical notation must proceed from right to left. We have said "an original textbook," for little would be gained by merely translating an existing foreign-language manual. The explanations, the names of the notes, and nearly the entire terminology ought, insofar as possible, to be rendered in genuinely Hebrew form.[45]

[45] With this measure—which constitutes one of the principal foundations of the renewal of our music—we bring the present essay to its conclusion. True, we have not composed a complete treatise on music in all its particulars and technical refinements. Yet all nations that have distinguished themselves in the writing of musical textbooks likewise begin by teaching only the foundations, or elementary principles, of musical study. Once the student has acquired a sound knowledge and thoroughly mastered these fundamentals, the second stage is placed before him—the study of harmony—and so on thereafter. The science of music cannot be learned in a single lesson. It is a profound discipline, and it must be studied gradually, proceeding from the simple to the complex.

(c) Efforts should be made to collect and publish in a single volume all the melodies of our earlier cantors. Naturally, both the musical notation and the words of the prayers and songs printed beneath it must appear from right to left and in Hebrew script. This is a cardinal principle from which not so much as the smallest stroke may be altered. Yet by making the old cantorial melodies suitable for singing we shall have fulfilled only half of our obligation. The second half—and perhaps the more important half—is to adapt these melodies for performance on the piano, whose influence, as we have already indicated several times, is exceedingly great. If we carry out these measures, then "our mouths shall be filled with laughter, and our tongues with songs of praise" [Psalm 126:2]—with original Hebrew songs of praise.