On Gustav Mahler's Reception in Israel: The Fourth Homeland?[1]

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Abstract: The performances of Mahler's music all over the world never elicited a unanimous response of delight. Quite naturally, performances of his music in Israel also generated ideological discussions, in the context of the Jewish Eretz-Israeli culture of the 1930s and into the early 1950s, after the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel. The range of opinions mirrored the arguments about the essence of Jewish identity in the evolving Promised Land.

Despite the disagreement about Mahler's place on the spectrum of Jewish-Israeli culture, his Resurrection Symphony was performed at three crucial junctures in Israel's history: during the War of Independence in 1948, after the Six-Day War in 1967 (both times under the baton of Leonard Bernstein), and at Masada in 1988, marking 40 years of Israeli statehood (this time under the baton of Zubin Mehta).

On January 22, 2007, a square in Tel Aviv was named after Mahler. Thus Mahler acquired one more home, in addition to Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic, in recognition of Israel's appreciation of a great European composer who had been born a Jew.

Keywords: Mahler's reception, spiritual homeland, Israeli culture, Jewish identity

For more than one hundred years, both Mahler's music and his *Weltanschauung* have remained subjects of intensive debates. Irrespective of the time and place of his music's performances, Mahler never enjoyed a unanimous response from the audiences: either acclaim or dismay, but never indifference. The persistence of intense discussions about Mahler's music suggests that we cannot evaluate the responses as a series of separate events, each having its own specific reason; instead, the controversy about Mahler in the outside world can be seen as a mirror of his highly ambivalent inner world, giving rise to a diversity of interpretations.

Among other issues, one of controversial points has for a long time been Mahler's ambivalent attitude toward the spiritual Israel, *id est*, his Jewish heritage. Mahler's connection (or lack thereof) with his Jewish spiritual roots remains a thorny issue, despite

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much interest in the subject and the many publications that have focused on the topic.[2] When we examine the question of Mahler's national and cultural identity, however, we must distinguish between his self-identity and his reception by various audiences, both Jewish and Gentile.

The attitude of non-Jewish audiences varied widely, from racist anti-Semitism to enthusiastic delight and admiration ("the man who, as I believe, expresses the art of our time in its profoundest and most sacred form" – Thomas Mann, after the premiere of the Eighth Symphony in Munich, 1910[3]). Jewish audiences also reacted to Mahler's personality and work in different ways. Their most common attitude was a dual one of love and antipathy: partly due to Mahler's conversion to Christianity, partly to his seemingly exclusive affinity with Christian culture. Naturally, therefore, performances of Mahler's music in Israel generated ideological strife and were the subject of animated discussions.[4] To gain a picture of the historical background for these discussions, we have to take into consideration the historical facts connected with the performance of Mahler's works in Israel.

The Newly-Created Palestine Orchestra Performs Mahler

The initiative for Mahler's performances came from the Jewish violinist and conductor Bronisław Huberman (1882–1947), who founded the Palestine Orchestra in 1936.[5] Huberman's ideological beliefs did not remain static during his lifetime. In the 1920s, before he became involved in the Palestine orchestra project, he was one of the adherents of the pan-European movement and "went so far as to define himself as a European in his national affiliation."[6] Nevertheless, during three touring visits to Eretz Israel ("Land of Israel - Heb.) from 1929 to 1934, he was greatly inspired by the warm reception given to him by the local audiences, as well as by his observation of the egalitarian nature of culture in the Zionist project for the entire community. "I believe firmly that Palestine will in a short time be the first country where the human humiliation of a culture limited only to one class or section will disappear, the first country where we shall witness the miracle of an entire community culture."[7]

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[2] Among recent publications, "Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna" by Carl Niekerk (Rochester, New York 2010) is of special interest owing to its wide cultural context and view.

[3] Cit. in Norman Lebrecht, Mahler Remembered, London 1987, 310.

[4] My research of this subject was supported by a research grant from the Municipality of Vienna. The results were partly presented at conferences in England and Greece (2003), and later in Israel (2006).

[5] In 1948 it was renamed the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Thus, the orchestra is twelve years older than the State of Israel. For more detailed information about the Palestine Orchestra, see Jehoash Hirshberg, Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine 1880–1948. A Social History, Oxford 1995, 122–139.

[6] Ibid., 123.

[7] Ibid. Hirshberg cites here from Ida Ibbeken/Tzvi Avni (eds.), An Orchestra is Born, Tel Aviv 1969, 11 (Heb.).

Apparently, the final incentive for his idea to establish an orchestra in Palestine was the rise of Hitler to power in Germany, which was followed by the dismissal of many Jewish musicians from their places of work. Most members of the future Palestinian orchestra were Jewish refugees whom Huberman had recruited through auditions in Europe. In fact, Huberman conducted a rescue operation that saved nearly one hundred musicians and their families from extermination.[8] The best local musicians joined the new immigrants to form the first professional orchestra in Palestine.

As early as April 1937, during the orchestra's second season, Mahler's First Symphony had already been incorporated into the repertoire; it was performed in Palestine three times (under the baton of Hans Wilhelm Steinberg): in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa.[9]

Significantly, the status of Mahler's music in Israel has evolved considerably in the more than seventy years that his music has been performed. At first, Huberman was convinced that one symphony by Mahler per season would do; he did not see a reason to play Mahler's music more often. His position was based on two points. First of all, Huberman preferred to perform Classical and early Romantic music, which was more popular in Palestine at the time. His preferences were based on his acquaintance with the local conditions in the Palestine of the 1930s: as hard as it is to believe today, even the most educated Palestinian Jews had little opportunity to listen to a live orchestra performance on a regular basis (although chamber music was performed frequently, giving the needed background for their reception of Classical and early Romantic music, but not Mahler's).

In Huberman's view, "it would be foolish to perform two Mahler symphonies and two or three works by Berlioz during the second season in such a country, while only three symphonies by Beethoven and one by Schubert are included. Our audience consists of all classes of society, and we will be able to preserve and even broaden our audience only if we succeed in 'planting' a feeling that they come to us not out of a sense of duty […] but simply to enjoy the concerts and to get from them inspiration."[10] The second point is even more revealing, and even surprising. Reading Huberman's correspondence, we realize that he never considered Mahler a Jewish composer. In his opinion, Jewish music had to be popularized in Israel through performances of the works of living composers who had settled in Palestine.[11] For Huberman, looking from the Tel Aviv of the 1930s, Mahler was

[8] At the same time, we must remember that many of the musicians who auditioned for the orchestra were not accepted. In one of the episodes in the novel *The Rosendorf Quartet*, the main character repeats the sentence he heard from one of his colleagues who was unlucky: "I am going to die because I am a mediocre oboe player." Nathan Shaham, The Rosendorf Quartet. Trans. from the Hebrew by Dalya Bilu, New York 1991, 35 (Germ.: Nathan Shacham, Rosendorf Quartett. Aus dem Hebräischen übersetzt von Mirjam Pressler, Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig 1994).

[9] From this point on, all information about Mahler's performances in Israel is taken from the archives of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (Tel Aviv). I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Naama Ramot, who searched for relevant materials in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) archives.

[10] Ibbeken/Avni (eds.), An Orchestra is Born, 44.

[11] Ibid.

appreciated as a Viennese figure and a symbol of European culture. In Israel, such appreciation proved to be rather influential in the years to come, and was reflected in Israeli literature as well. Accordingly, German émigré writer Egon Leventhal, one of the main figures in the novel *The Rosendorf Quartet* cited above, speaks about Mahler in the context of Austria's *Anschluss:*

> 14/3/1938. Vienna's final hour. The Vienna of Kraus, Mahler, Schnitzler, Freud, and Herzl is no more. Her frivolity did not save her from the seriousness of others, just as the sensitivity of the victim does not do away with the cruelty of his persecutors. In the era of the radio, bad news reaches its destination immediately. But perhaps precisely owing to this speed, the essential facts are still shrouded in obscurity. Now it's the turn of Czechoslovakia, after looking up to Germany all her life long. The Allies won't save her. […] The atmosphere was full of gloom: like people in a hospital talking about illnesses and acquaintances who have passed away. […] 'The only thing we can do for Vienna is to play more beautifully and more correctly than the Germans,' said Friedman. A childish, if touching, idea. But I myself am trying to do the same thing with the German language.[12]

Mahler's Belonging or Otherness: A Time of Dissent

Mahler's belonging or otherness, while looking at it from Tel Aviv and not from Vienna, remained a topic for discussion for a long period of time. In the context of the Jewish Eretz-Israeli culture of the 1930s, before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and into the early 1950s, a heterogeneity of opinions was typical, as it was a time of ideological controversy over the nature of the new Jewish identity desired by immigrants to the Promised Land. For no less than seven decades, from 1937 to 2007, the appreciation of Mahler was a sort of mirror that reflected different opinions about the essence of Jewish identity, especially in the field of culture. Fully aware of the complexity of the subject, some of the critics simply preferred to present the question, leaving the answer open-ended. Thus, Menashe Rabinovich (Ravina)[13] wrote in 1935, in connection with a concert of Jewish composers' music:

> Each people, when its national aspirations begin to awaken and take form, tries to distinguish itself from its neighbors and searches deeply in its soul for the characteristics which separate it from other nations, and then works to develop them and adapt them to the world culture, in order to introduce these new elements into it. But our approach must be different. In search of the fundamentals of our art, we have to examine the treasured elements of the many other nations among whom we have lived in the past, since a significant part of their creation is also ours, despite the distance in time that separates us. […] Taking this as a starting point, we have to note

[12] Shaham, The Rosendorf Quartet, 313.
[13] Menashe Rabinovich (1899–1968) was a professional musician and music critic who published his reviews in the *Davar* newspaper. Originally from Russia, Rabinovich Hebraized his family name to Ravina in 1938.

> the Ninth Symphonic Concert, under the baton of Taube, as an important event in our musical world.[14]

The question of Jewish identity was central in this critic's rather long article. Reviewing the professional reputations of the Jewish composers whose music was performed (Mendelssohn, Mahler, Bloch, Sternberg, Toch), Ravina emphasized: "However, their [Mendelssohn's and Mahler's] value for us has not yet been proven, and we must wait for the results by researchers, who will hopefully provide us with an analysis in the near future."[15] On the one hand, the decision to postpone an unequivocal answer to the question about Mendelssohn's and Mahler's belonging or otherness marks an intellectual honesty on the part of the author. On the other hand, such a statement leaves the reader to anticipate opinions and judgments by future researchers.

While Menashe Ravina is not sure whether Mahler is relevant for the Eretz Israel of the 1930s, other critics were quite ready with their answers. Typically of Mahler, his work and personality had both ardent adherents and no less motivated opponents. For instance, Gershon Swet was a devotee of Mahler who considered the composer a figure no less influential than Herzl, in the context of Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century. While not ignoring Mahler's conversion and apostasy, Swet was sure that Mahler "belongs to us, even despite his assimilation and strange ambitions. In the future, when times are quieter and happier, we will come to terms with Mahler the musician, the person and the Jew. Tonight, to mark the day when Mahler would have turned 80, Karl Solomon and Edith Boroshek will perform some of his songs. An appropriate memorial to the memory of a great Jewish artist."[16] A diametrically opposed attitude was expressed by those who could under no circumstances forgive Mahler for his conversion to Christianity. Two Hebrew words, *mumar* (convert) and *meshumad* (apostate), reflected a clearly reproving and even disparaging connotation (the latter term was an especially pejorative term). The extreme representative of this position was Professor Yeshayahu Leibovitz, a well-known religious intellectual who wrote indignant letters to the *Kol Israel* (Voice of Israel) radio station to protest against the broadcasting of Mahler's music, which he couldn't bear because of his apostasy. One letter states:

> The broadcast about Gustav Mahler on January 2, 1971, tried to present Mahler's character not only as a great composer but also as a great personage. Among other things it was cited, as proof of his greatness, that 'despite his being a Jew, he was appointed to the most senior position in the world of music of anti-Semitic Vienna.' The author [of these lines] has forgotten – or deliberately ignored – the fact that the appointment was conditional upon his conversion, and that Mahler converted to

[14] Menashe Rabinovich (Ravina), A Fine Beginning, in: Davar, 10 May 1935. I would like to express my gratitude to Israela Stein for summarizing the press releases and statistical data.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Gershon Swet, Around the Radio. Gustav Mahler and Theodor Herzl, in: Haaretz, 7 July 1940.

> Catholicism to promote his career. *Kol Israel* posits that the honor of a deserter from Judaism is an honor for the Jewish people.[17]

Leibovitz indignantly denied that Mahler's music had any spiritual value – at least, for the Jewish-Israeli audience. Here, as on many other issues, he remained rather alone in his extremism. However, the adherents of the quite opposite point of view were no less convinced of the validity of their position. Some Eretz-Israeli Jewish critics, for example Olya Zilberman,[18] emphasized Mahler's Jewish origins from a positive angle, even going so far as to call him "the Jewish genius," and commented that his works belonged in the realm of Jewish music. As if answering Bronisław Huberman, who wanted to limit the number of performances of Mahler's works, Zilberman wrote in 1938:

> The name of Gustav Mahler, the ingenious Jewish composer, has been almost absent in our country up to now. Should not the only Jewish orchestra in the world provide the opportunity to perform his symphonies or his cantata, *The Song of the Earth*? However, at the moment we must be content with listening to *The Song of the Earth* from the recordings that have recently appeared, presented by Schlezinger and Springer, under the baton of Bruno Walter. For Mahler's devotees, listening to this wonderful performance, even though through a mechanical recording, results in true satisfaction.[19]

Ten years later, she continued to be convinced that Mahler deserved more performances, and emphasized his Jewish origins as a significant reason for promoting his music:

> It would be only natural that Mahler, a great Jewish composer, should be performed three or four times each season. Instead, a performance of Mahler's works has become an extraordinary event, an unusual occurrence […]. Do we have so many Jewish composers and great writers of symphonies, that we can simply pay them no attention?[20]

There was also another aspect to how Mahler's music was received in Israel: some critics perceived Mahler's Jewishness as the main cause of his internal contradictions and his constant inner struggle for a harmonic *Weltanschauung*. The temptation to explain the ambiguity of some of Mahler's works as being a result of his inner conflicts was so strong – it made for an all-inclusive argument – that it was quite understandable that some critics would yield to the temptation. For example, while writing about Mahler's Fourth

[17] See, for example, his replies to the many letters that he received, in: Ratziti lish'ol otcha, Professor Leibovitz. Michtavim el Yeshayahu Leibovitz u-mimenu [I Wanted to Ask you Professor Leibovitz. Letters to and from Yeshayahu Leibovitz], Jerusalem 1999, 389 f. (Heb.).
[18] Olya Zilberman was born in Russia and trained as a pianist in Vienna. Zilberman first collaborated with David Rosolio in the *Haaretz* newspaper and later wrote as a music critic in the socialist daily *Al HaMishmar*.
[19] Olya Zilberman, On the Performances, in: Haaretz, 27 January 1938.
[20] Idem, Musical Impressions, in: Al HaMishmar, 19 March 1948.

Symphony, David Rosolio[21] underscored the gap between Mahler's aspirations and his real musical message:

> The prevailing mood of Mahler's Fourth Symphony is in principle different from that of his other symphonies. In the Fourth, Mahler wanted to convey peace of mind, simplicity, eternal peace, and the joyful mood of exultation. He wanted to convey them – and in fact did do so – but there was no peace in Mahler's own soul, no supreme joy. What is really touching during the performance of Mahler's music is his humanity – his work expresses his human qualities, both the good ones and the detracting ones, as well as his internal contradictions – after all, Mahler was Jewish […][22]

Similarly, Menashe Ravina wrote in 1952 about "the profound inner crisis" which was, in his view, Mahler's permanent condition.[23] In 1954, Ravina delivered a lecture about Jewish music in which he mentioned great Jewish composers like Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn, Mahler, and Gershwin, who were "caught up," as he put it, by the culture of the people surrounding them. In this context, the lecturer asked a rhetorical question: "May we give up such composers?" And he himself answered: "No! They are ours, just as Heine the apostate also belongs to us!"[24] Thus, Ravina actually "answered" the question he posed in 1935, and, as it were, accepted Mahler into the world of Jewish music. As we see, most critics did not reject Mahler because of his apostasy, since they believed that the conversion could not change Mahler's basic Jewish essence. However, the differences of opinions continued to exist in regard to the inner contradictions of Mahler's personality and art.

Mahler in the Context of Israeli National Events

A crucial event in the debate was Leonard Bernstein's arrival in the newborn State of Israel in October 1948, during the War of Independence. First of all, it was very dangerous to visit Israel at the time. Frequently during his Israeli tour, Bernstein conducted the orchestra accompanied by the sounds of bombs and not-so-distant gunfire. Despite the constant danger, he conducted forty concerts of six different programs in sixty days! In his interview to *The Palestine Post*,[25] Bernstein said: "I must tell you how happy I am to be in Israel and to open the first season of the Philharmonic Orchestra in the Jewish State." After his return to America, he acknowledged in another interview: "It is a wonderful feeling to be working

[21] David Rosolio (1898–1963) was an immigrant from Germany who was self-taught in music. He worked as music critic for the newspaper *Haaretz* in his free hours (his main career was in the civil service).
[22] David Rosolio, On the Performances. Gustav Mahler's Fourth Symphony, in: Haaretz, 26 March 1948.
[23] Menashe Ravina, Notes, in: Davar, 4 April 1952.
[24] Our Treasures, unsigned report on a lecture by Menashe Ravina on "A Month of Jewish Music," in: Yedioth Ahronoth, 20 June 1954.
[25] The Palestine Post, 1 October 1948, cit. in Christopher Jarrett Page, Leonard Bernstein and the Resurrection of Gustav Mahler (PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif., 2000), 83.

in an atmosphere where you feel needed rather than simply carrying out professional duties."[26]

In Israel, Bernstein performed Mahler's Second Symphony, widely known as the *Resurrection Symphony* (due to the text of the final part). At the time, this symphony was perceived as an expression of the conductor's ideological beliefs, as well as his audience's hope for the resurrection of the Jewish people after the Holocaust. It may be an exaggeration, however, to speak of national unanimity in the critics' attitude toward Mahler. One reviewer wrote in *The Palestine Post*: "Mahler's whole life-work centered around the idea of death and resurrection, but in the conventional Catholic sense; although of Jewish extraction, Mahler professed the Catholic faith, and even Mahler's devotees are not likely to claim that he was dreaming of Israel's resurrection."[27] Disagreeing with the reviewer (who referred to himself as "Frango"), Peter Gradenwitz argued that it would be hard to conclude that Mahler had become "a true Christian" after his conversion.[28] Indeed, to the best of our knowledge today, Mahler was never satisfied with one and only one solution to the eternal question of the meaning of life and death; he continued his "search for meaning," as the Viennese psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who belonged to the same culture as Mahler, put it. In any case, Bernstein did a remarkable job of impressing Israeli audiences by including Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* in the context of the War of Independence. Significantly, the 1948 performance of it was the first one in the country (between 1937 and 1948, other symphonies by Mahler, including the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth, had been performed several times). In subsequent years, Israelis have had the opportunity to hear interpretations of the Second Symphony by other conductors, including such noted names as Sir John Barbirolli and Paul Kletzki. Bernstein, however, had both the courage and the artistic energy to be present in Israel at a crucial moment of its history.

The next crucial moment was the Six-Day War of 1967. According to Ernest Fleishman, who did preparatory work for Bernstein's tour of Israel, Bernstein decided to go to Israel immediately when he heard about the outbreak of the war. The Israelis, who hoped to wrap up the war in a week (and succeeded), thought "it would be great if Lenny came over to reopen the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University, which had been closed to Jews for some 20 years, and to do a great concert in the amphitheatre. And he decided to do Mahler's Second. Negotiations went on, and the news came from [the Israeli] embassy [in Vienna] that, yes, the war might be over by the end of the week, but there were so many land mines, it wasn't safe to get an audience up there. [They asked for] three weeks to clear all the land mines."[29] Despite all the efforts, the concert on 9 July was accompanied by "the sound of some live mines which [were] detonated in unexpected counterpoint […] at some points, several music stands are suddenly blown over and sheets

[26] Musical America, 1 December 1948, cit. ibid., 83 f.
[27] Bernstein Press Books, Library of Congress, see Page, Leonard Bernstein and the Resurrection of Gustav Mahler, 86.
[28] Hador, 19 November 1948, cit. ibid.
[29] Ibid., 317.

of music flap away, to be rescued by other musicians and returned, foot-marked and crumpled, to their owners."[30]

The ambivalence regarding Germany and, accordingly, regarding Mahler, was reflected in the choir's refusal to sing in German and the decision to use Hebrew instead. However, in his brief opening remarks, Bernstein emphasized the universal value of Mahler's spiritual message: "still the ancient cycle of threat, destruction, and rebirth goes on; and it is all mirrored in Mahler's music – above all, the expression of simple faith – of belief that good must triumph – *En b'rerah!* – there is no alternative!"[31] As a matter of fact, this performance was a unique event from several points of view. First of all, both the political and artistic establishment of the time participated in it. All key state figures were present: the President, the Prime Minister, ministers, judges of the Supreme Court of Justice, and members of the Knesset, including the former Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. Two Israeli orchestras, the IPO and the Symphony Orchestra of the Radio *Kol Israel*, played together that evening. Second, all of the guests artists – Leonard Bernstein, Isaac Stern (who played the Concerto for Violin by Mendelssohn), Russian-American mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel and others who came from abroad performed without accepting a fee, and all the income from the ticket sales was handed over to a foundation which promoted cultural institutions in Jerusalem for the benefit of both its Jewish and Arab children. Third, it was a very special moment, a moment of hope, as Leonard Bernstein put it:

> To perform the "Resurrection" Symphony in Jerusalem is a very significant deed and the expression of the hope that Jerusalem will set an example for the whole world. The message of peace for the area and for the entire world will go forth and the verse will be fulfilled: "The Torah shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[32]

Bernstein seems to have had the good fortune to inaugurate a new tradition in the Israelis' perception of Mahler. Thanks to the historical context and Bernstein's emphasis of Jewish elements of Mahler's music, the Israeli attitude toward Mahler took on a new, patriotic flavor.[33] In those circumstances, Mahler – converted, seemingly rootless, and previously excluded to some extent – became an Israeli symbol.

Later, in 1988, at the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the State of Israel's establishment, Mahler's Second Symphony was performed once more, this time under the baton of Zubin Mehta, the Musical Director of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. In the context of a commemorative event, the *Resurrection Symphony* was played on Masada, a famous hilltop archaeological site that has been preserved as a reminder of the courage and

[30] Ibid., 320.
[31] Ibid., 319.
[32] Unsigned article, Festive Concert on Mt. Scopus, in: Maariv, 10 July 1967.
[33] A year after the legendary 1967 performance at Mount Scopus, Bernstein conducted Mahler's First Symphony on Israel's Independence Day.

tragic death of its defenders. Guests included the President, the Prime Minister, other Israeli dignitaries, and foreign celebrities such as Gregory Peck and Yves Montand. Most of the seats for this spectacle went to foreign tourists and well-to-do Israelis, because of the high price of the tickets. Nonetheless, four hundred artists and four thousand listeners from all over the world were united at this moment in their excitement and admiration while listening to Mahler's music in the open desert air. According to the press releases, two hundred forty light projectors from the sound and light show "Masada Lives" were synchronized with the music. At a designated point in the concert, twelve groups of forty children, representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the forty years of Israel's independence, descended from the mountaintop. The evening concluded with the singing of *Hatikva* (The Hope) – the Israeli national anthem – and a dramatic fireworks display.

However, it is quite natural that Mahler's cultural and ideological ambiguity has continued to be a topic of dissent, even as late as 1988. Before the commemorative event, the decision to choose the *Resurrection Symphony* for the closing evening of the Israeli national celebrations was again discussed in the press, primarily because of the Christian connotations of Mahler's work. Nevertheless, Benny Bora, the producer of Masada event, emphasized the modern Israeli context of the performance: "The choice of Masada was not accidental. Masada is a tragic place in our history. It is synonymous with a complete downfall, with death, with destruction […] there is nothing more symbolic than to cry for the return of the people to its land and for the resurrection of the State of Israel."[34] The same idea was raised in Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's speech at the concert:

> It is very touching to see […] the unity of the past, present and future, the unity of the great historical events with the achievements of the present and the hope for the future – the unity of a truth that perhaps only a musical work, one that is Jewish and universal such as the monumental 'Resurrection' Symphony, can produce with a joyous and sublime feeling. It is doubtful that Gustav Mahler, the great Jewish composer, one of the giants in the annals of musical history, could conceive of the possibility of such an event, in which one of his greatest symphonies is performed in the Land of Israel, facing the glorious mountaintop of Masada … this combination says it all. This is a combination that says that we have returned to Eretz Israel, we have revived our independence, and there will never be another Masada.[35]

In the Israeli political context, the speech was considered quite right-wing, as Shamir was a member of the Likud Party (the party of Menachem Begin). Naturally, as usually occurred with Mahler performances, the reaction of the opposite camp was rather different: "This ceremonial concert drew cynical remarks from Israelis, attesting to the feeling of alienation at the incongruity between the imported foreign glitz and the indigenous Hebrew

[34] Dalia Ben Ari, Creator of Performances, in: LaIsha, 10 October 1988. (In Hebrew, the title is a word play on the word for "creator," which is also the meaning of the last name of Benny Bora, who staged the concert at Masada.)
[35] Remarks delivered at the concert by [Prime Minister] Yitzhak Shamir, Unity Facing Masada, in: Maariv, 25 October 1988.

tradition associated with the location."[36] The Masada performance brought an indication of the changed attitude towards Mahler's music. The famous performance of Mahler in 1967 was, to some extent, a spontaneous initiative of Bernstein's, embodied in the after-war constraints that permitted no time for a long preparatory process. The Masada concert was, on the contrary, planned and organized with a clear vision of its specific connotation. As Yael Zerubavel commented in her book, *Recovered Roots*, "the use of an ancient site to mark a national anniversary was clearly deliberate. So was the choice of the music performed, Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony."[37] Apparently, this combination of the ancient site of Masada and the almost modern music of the convert Mahler, a nineteenth-twentieth century composer, was to symbolize a continuous chain of Jewish history, uninterrupted by all the changes in the Jewish life style and ideology which had occurred during the previous two thousand years. Indeed, the audience of the Masada event was highly impressed by Mahler's music, as well as by the encompassing human message of the *Resurrection Symphony*, which embodied Mahler's belief in the immortality of the soul, the common belief held by many faiths, not only Christianity.

Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* had been performed, as mentioned, at three crucial junctures in Israel's history: the War of Independence (1948), the Six-Day War (1967), and at the commemorative event at Masada in 1988 (forty years after the establishment of the State).[38] Significantly, Mahler's music was also played by the orchestra at a special concert in 1996, within the framework of celebrations marking three thousand years of Jerusalem's history. The symphony chosen for this event was the Eighth Symphony, with its Christian background.[39]

Mahler as a Part of Israeli Culture

Since 1937, the Palestine Orchestra and its successor, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO), have performed Mahler in its repertoire in almost every season (sometimes far more than one work in a season). The proportion of Mahler's works has remained fairly constant over the years at nearly 6 percent of the orchestra's repertoire.[40] Speaking about the

[36] Yael Zerubavel, Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition, Chicago, Ill./London 1995, 135.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Besides those legendary concerts, Mahler's music was played far more than once in connection with other state occasions. For example, the *Resurrection Symphony* was played at the concert for Independence Day in 1973, under the baton of Zubin Mehta, the choice possibly following the performance of the First Symphony on the same holiday in 1968, conducted by Leonard Bernstein. Zubin Mehta said at the time, in an interview to the *Maariv* newspaper: "I have chosen this work since, from my point of view, there is a resurrection of spirit and not rather *(davka)* a resurrection in a Christian sense. I believe that such a phenomenon is typical of Israel and of the Jews, people who do not surrender and remain devoted to the great aim – resurrection …" (Idem, in: Maariv, 14 May 1973).
[39] The Eighth Symphony was performed in Israel for the first time in 1976, two decades before the event mentioned above.
[40] Over the past several decades, interest in Mahler's music has increased, as reflected not only in the programs of the IPO, which remains the leading orchestra in Israel, but in the repertoires of other Israeli

performance of Mahler on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the IPO, the renowned composer Yosef Tal answered a journalist's question: "What is your attitude about Mahler's position as a central composer during this Jubilee season?"

> When Huberman wrote the article, fifty years ago, Mahler's 'resurrection' had not occurred yet. There were a few who wanted to conduct his symphonies (among them Walter, Klemperer, and Mengelberg). We in Israel rightly consider Mahler to be a Jew. He was a Jew – and what a Jew! If you want, you can find in his music signals of a Jewish frame of mind, of an intimate and complicated relation with the Hebrew language that he heard in his childhood. Mahler's Jewishness is reflected not in the subjects and texts but in the music itself. It was in his soul, whether he desired it or not. I think that if Huberman knew that the Philharmonic was performing many of Mahler's works during the Jubilee season, he would have been satisfied.[41]

In step with the changing cultural atmosphere over the years, the tone of the musical critics also underwent an evolution. In fact, the more balanced appreciation of Mahler's music originates from the 1950s, and was apparently based on a more weighted appreciation of the past Jewish experiences in the Diaspora. To put it briefly, before the foundation of the State of Israel, the conflict between the experience of the Diaspora Jews and the Eretz-Israeli experience was far more pronounced, but over time, the opposition gave way to co-existence and later a synthesis. Accordingly, there were gradual changes in the reviews of the Mahler's performances as well. At the beginning, the reviews were written with the aim of broadening the audience's educational level, and included biographical information as well as a survey of Mahler's heritage, with a short explanation about the concert itself. Then, from the 1980s and even more so from the 1990s, the reviews became shorter and included more facts about the performance and opinions about the interpretation. At the same time, from the 1980s on, the discussion about the preferred language for the performance, including the animosity towards the German language, disappeared entirely.

Mahler continues to live on not only in the concert halls, but also in the literary space of Israeli culture, as a part of the Israeli spiritual experience.[42] Metaphorically speaking, Mahler was brought to Israel in the memory of the German-speaking European Jews, including the musical memory of former musicians or knowledgeable music lovers. From this generation of immigrants of the 1930s, the memory was transmitted to the next generations. In such circumstances, it is not so surprising that Yehudit Katzir, an Israeli writer who was born in Haifa in 1963, made Mahler's *Song of the Earth* one of the central personae of her novella *Schlafstunde*. The existential sadness of Mahler's *Das Lied von der*

orchestras as well. A look at the statistics of Mahler's performances by other orchestras calls for a special investigation.

[41] Yisrael Daliot, Huberman on the Philharmonic, with Comments and Interpretations by Composer Yosef Tal, in: Davar, 26 December 1986.

[42] In the play "Alma", written by Israeli Yehoshua Sobol (1996), Mahler was even presented on the theatrical stage, as a key figure in his wife's life story.

Erde (The Song of the Earth), which was written by the composer with the consciousness of his impending death, is the prevailing mood of the novella. The German title of the novella,[43] the untranslated German title of Mahler's work – (*Das) Lied von der Erde*, as well as the singing of Mahler's music in German, symbolizes a distant world of adults which is full of enigmas for the teenagers in the story: at the beginning of the novella, the main protagonist, a girl who is a storyteller, and her cousin, her first love, are both teenagers.

The entire text of *Schlafstunde* is written in a very musical, as if flowing, manner, at times streaming over two entire pages without any division into paragraphs. This flowing manner coexists with flashbacks into another, distant time period, distant but yet full of the same feelings. In the novella, Mahler's music plays the role of a leitmotiv, giving the reader foresight into events that have not yet happened. Accordingly, the first appearance of *Das Lied von der Erde* in the novella, approximately one third of the way into the text, gives us the perspective of the sad future, when the "singer," Uncle Alfred, will be buried:

> He couldn't know that someday, on a steamy shuddering mid-summer afternoon, we'd be standing in the old cemetery at Carmel Beach […] backs to his tombstone, on which were the words, in gold letters as he requested, of the Chinese poet from Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*:
>
> > "When sorrow draws near,
> > The gardens of the soul lie wasted,
> > Joy and song wither and die,
> > Dark is life and so is death.
> > Now it is time, companions!
> > Drain your golden goblets to the dregs."[44]

Later in the novella, Uncle Alfred enters once more, this time alive but already very ill, and now we hear, metaphorically speaking, Mahler's music in Alfred's performance:

> First he greedily polished off three pieces of cake. Then he sipped noisily, smacked his lips, faced us and declared, Now I will sing you the first Lied from Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*. He cleared his throat twice, clasped his hands on his stomach, and started singing in German which we couldn't understand. His voice burst out of his chest as a solemn trumpet blast, rose to a great height both bold and trembling like a tightrope walker, and suddenly it fell and plunged into a dark abyss, where it struggled with fate, pleaded, prayed, shouted like a hollow echo, whimpered, abased itself. The face that of a drowning man, tears flowed from his eyes and from Grandmother's too, she

[43] Yehudit Katzir titled her novella *Schlafstunde* (A Sleeping Hour), and her translators into English as well as Russian left it as it is, without translation, while the German translators gave it the name of Mahler's work.
[44] Yehudit Katzir, Closing the Sea. Translated from Hebrew by Barbara Harshav, New York/San Diego, Calif./London 1990, 11 f. (collection of stories which includes *Schlafstunde*). The translation of the text from Mahler's *The Song of the Earth* is taken from Deryck Cooke, Gustav Mahler. An Introduction to his Music, London 1988.

> understood the words, and even Grandfather blew his nose a few times […]. Uncle Alfred finished it with a long endless shout and his arms waved to the sides and hit the credenza, and the gold vase teetered a moment in surprise and then slid off and smashed on the floor into sparkling slivers. Uncle Alfred sat down, panting heavily, and whispered, Sorry, and Grandmother said, It's nothing, and she came and kissed him on the cheek and Grandfather didn't look at the squares of the carpet and didn't murmur, Bravo, but shook his hand and looked into his eyes and said, Wonderful, wonderful […].[45]

As the reader is told later, some days after this almost theatrical scene, Uncle Alfred dies in the hospital. However, the sound of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* has not yet disappeared in *Schlafstunde*. As in music, the last scene of the novella is a sort of recapitulation of the beginning: in both cases, it is a funeral. In the beginning, the name of the deceased is mentioned – Aaron Green,[46] and it looks as if the protagonists – a girl and a boy, as we know from the introductory pages – are already of marriageable age. At the end of the novella, the name of the deceased is not mentioned at all, but Uncle Alfred and his funeral are permanently present in the memory of the formerly young girl, who is now an elderly woman. Here, the age of the protagonists is changed once more:

> I wipe my tears and go with all the old people to put a little stone on the grave, and now everyone is turning to go, but I stay another moment at Uncle Alfred's yellowed marble, I know you are standing here next to me. Up close you can see that I too have lines at the corner of my mouth and many gray hairs, and the two of us read by heart the lines from the first Lied of *Das Lied von der Erde*, whose words we didn't understand then, and I put a little stone under the words and you put a little stone and then you put your hand on my shoulder and say, Let's go.[47]

So, Mahler's music returned once more – as if understood this time by the boy and girl, once young but now people who are not so young anymore, with lines and gray hair – and it is like the reminiscence so often used in Mahler's music.

However, the existential message of the novel, in a way similar to Mahler's symphonies, can be deciphered only at the end, when the reader reflects on the story, starting from the end and moving back to the beginning. The reader's imagination is invited to decipher the hidden message as if reading the plot in Hebrew, which is written from right to the left, and not from left to the right, as is typical of European languages. In the context of time, it moves in the opposite direction – from the present back to the past, rather than the normative direction – *id est*, from past to present.[48] One of the many possible

[45] Ibid., 25 f.
[46] The name "Green" returns later, giving the reader a hint that the grandfather of the girl and the deceased from the beginning of the story are, in fact, the same person.
[47] Katzir, Closing the Sea, 29.
[48] The interpretation of Mahler's symphonies from the end to the beginning, as if in Hebrew, was suggested by Max Graf in his article about Mahler's Fourth Symphony. See Henry-Louis de La Grange, Gustav Mahler, 4 vols., here vol. 2, Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897–1904), Oxford 1995, 474 f.

interpretations of the novella is presented in the first third of the story, stated by the grandfather as he speaks with his granddaughter and her cousin: "Don't fight, children, human beings have to love and pity one another, for in the end we all die." And the storyteller continues: "And we didn't understand what he meant but we stopped."[49] Some pages later, the lines from Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*, written on Uncle Alfred's gravestone, sound like fulfillment of the grandfather's request to the girl and boy. Thus, Mahler's music serves as a sort of mediation between the generations, living simultaneously in different spiritual worlds.

In 1990, Katzir's *Schlafstunde* was published in Hebrew in her collection of stories, *Sogrim et ha-Yam* (Closing the Sea). Some years later, in 2007, Mahler's inclusion in Israeli culture received a visual embodiment as well. On 22 January 2007, a square in Tel Aviv was named after Mahler. Thus the composer acquired one more home, in recognition of Israel's appreciation of him as a great composer of the Austrian-German tradition who had been born a Jew.

Today, it is common knowledge that Mahler once expressed his feelings of otherness and lack of belonging through the famous sentence: "I am three times homeless – as a Bohemian in Austria, as an Austrian in Germany, and as a Jew in the whole world." The composer was speaking of the lack of identity that was thrust upon him by the outside world against his will, and his feelings were the result of his interaction with all the cultures mentioned. However, since World War II, the situation seems to be the opposite: all the countries mentioned are proud to emphasize their connection with the famous composer and conductor, and it is a significant trait of the modern epoch. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the idea of "homeland" has become more and more a spiritual notion, sometimes not even connected with citizenship or a place of residence. Mahler, whose career began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was destined to experience this state of affairs more than a hundred years earlier. However, while thinking of his statement about being "three times homeless," we now observe him as being at least four times at home – in the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, and Israel. Today, Mahler's being "between cultures" is very much in harmony with the spirit of our times, and it seems to be one of the reasons for Mahler's immense popularity.

About the Author

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[49] Katzir, Closing the Sea, 7 f.