

## **Music and Music Education in Israel in an Era of Social and Cultural Schism**

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**Abstract:** Post-Modernist thinking led to the dissolution of traditional classifications and hierarchies in the arts, in art policy and art education through the globe. Music and music education were no exception, as the roles of Canonical, Popular and Folk music were challenged and re-evaluated. In Israel, this confusing process was further intensified by the growing cultural tensions between the different "tribes" that make the Israeli society and fight over hegemony in Israel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How can a national music curriculum be built under such unusual circumstances; and how can the singular richness of music traditions in this country become a blessing, rather than another point of controversy?"

**Keywords:** identities in conflict; identity politics in Israel; culture and culture policy in Israel; music education and cultural identity; music curriculum and multiculturalism

### **Introduction**

The title “Music and music education in Israel in an era of social and cultural schism”<sup>1</sup> points at the rather fragile situation of the Israeli society nowadays; a society that enjoys, to its credit:

- one of its most prosperous times ever, economically speaking;
- one of its calmer episodes, from the standpoint of security;
- status as a “start-up nation,” well-respected in the world of technology and science for its innovation and brilliance;
- and a society ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in the world (out of 188 nations) in the global "Human Development Index" (HDI).

Yet, at the same time, Israel is a society with some worrisome prospects for the longer run, having:

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- demographic instability, with the highest population growth in the Western world, juxtaposed with one of the highest rates of population density on the planet;
- growing inequality between rich and poor, with the third highest rate of inequality in the industrialized world, according to the GINI index;
- unresolved security issues on most of the country's external borders;
- and quite a number of internal conflicts, between:
  - o Israelis and Palestinians,
  - o Jewish-Israeli citizens and Arab-Israeli citizens,
  - o Secular Jews and Orthodox Jews;
  - o and recently, due to reopened wounds, also between Israeli Jews of European origins (Ashkenazi Jews) and those with origins in North Africa and Asia (known as Sephardi or Mizrahi Jews).<sup>2</sup>

The inevitable result of this long list of conflicts is an ever-growing schism between the various sectors and “tribes” that make up today’s Israel, and a society approaching a point at which very little can be agreed upon consensually in many aspects of a shared life. And culture, music, and music education are unfortunately not immune – quite the contrary.

### **Music beyond Monoculturalism**

Challenging the naïve, utopian beliefs about the universal nature of music, which prevailed for generations in many circles, modern research suggests that both music and music education are culture-based phenomena (Middleton 2003; Grenier et al. 2006). Stated in a simple phrase: *My music is not necessarily your music*. Therefore, although offering a non-verbal means of communication and allegedly bypassing all linguistic barriers, music does not necessarily provide a universal channel of communication between different cultures, as has so often been regarded.

Contemporary research also argues that abstract acoustic signals, produced in order to make music (of any kind), are not enough to imbue it with meaning. For this complex process of loading abstract acoustic signals with meaning, other mechanisms must engage, such as cultural contexts, cultural codes, cultural conventions, characteristic cultural gestures, and the like (Middleton, op. cit.).

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<sup>2</sup> These terms refer to Jews by their Diaspora origins: Ashkenazi (from Central and Eastern Europe), Sephardi (descendants of those expelled from Spain and Portugal in 1492, dispersed primarily to Mediterranean countries), and Mizrahi Jews (from the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa and the Middle East). “Sephardi” (in Hebrew: Spanish) also designates the shared liturgical tradition of non-Ashkenazi communities.

All these culture-based factors are essential in order to decode those bare acoustic signals, to decipher the meaning behind them, and to enable listeners to relate to it emotionally. Unfortunately, however, different cultures employ different codes and gestures – therefore, *my cultural codes are not necessarily your cultural codes*.

Here are some examples that come to mind for potential “miscommunications,” in which cultural contexts are not shared by both performers and listeners:

- The dramatic expression in classical Indian music may seem passive and repetitive to a Western ear that has become adjusted to the maximalism of a Mahler symphony or to deliberately aggressive heavy-metal bands;
- The pathos in Italian opera would seem grotesque and ridiculous to young Western audiences of the 21st century, who have grown up with provocative, cynical hip-hop and rap music;
- The subtlest pitch-nuances in the classical Arab *maqamat* or melismas may sound annoying and literally out-of-tune to Western listeners accustomed to the tempered tuning system of tones and semi-tones;
- and the daring eroticism of Wagner’s *Tristan* or Strauss’ *Salome* would seem quaint and prudish to pop or rock music fans, who take the bold sexual contents of Madonna, Prince or Lady Gaga for granted...

How, then, could we truly expect to universally communicate through music? Can we nowadays conclusively determine that all utopian projections about a universal communication channel through “music” (but which kind, and whose?) were but a naïve illusion? Must idealistic statements, such as conductor Daniel Barenboim’s assertion that “before a Beethoven symphony, unlike in life, people are all equal,”<sup>3</sup> be dismissed as obsolete, Eurocentric dreams?

A close examination of music and music education-related issues engaging today’s state of Israel, with its striking social and cultural complexities, presents a challenging test case for all these questions.

### **Sources of cultural friction in Israeli society**

The foundations of modern Israeli society were laid mainly by Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants who left the old, turbulent continent—whether through religious or national

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Barenboim, “Equal Before Beethoven,” opinion column in *The Guardian*, 13 December 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/dec/13/middle-east-classical-music>

ideology or as refugees—and came to the Land of Israel in order to create new horizons for Jewish life along with developing an entirely new Jewish identity:<sup>4</sup>

- an identity divorced from the woes of Jewish life in the Diaspora;
- an identity which is secular, modern, and idealistic (largely socialist in orientation);
- an identity reconnected to the soil of the “Old-New Land” of Israel;
- an identity based on an eclectic fusion of European and Middle-Eastern traditions, what the founders’ generation called “the merging of East and West.”

Soon after the founding of the state of Israel, this credo became a *de facto* national policy, dubbed the “Melting Pot” doctrine. This—like the presumed universality of music—was based on another naïve assumption: that all Jewish immigrants, no matter where they came from, would be willing and even glad to leave their past behind them and join this great historical adventure of building a completely new Israeli-Jewish identity (Kemp et al. 2004).

The original idea was beneficent, even utopian in spirit. However, when the different cultures from the Jewish diaspora came together in Israeli reality, many mistakes were made—some with serious, long-term consequences—by the fledgling state’s authorities, most of them Ashkenazi and themselves earlier immigrants. This was especially the case during the mass immigration of Mizrahi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East, in the early years following the founding of the state (Ram 1999) when it was struggling to survive.<sup>5</sup>

Today, from a perspective of 70 years, it would be quite fair to claim that these two cultures, the Ashkenazi and the Mizrahi, were completely unprepared for their fateful encounter. The former was largely the fruit of the industrialized, modernized, secular European world; whereas the latter was mainly traditional, religious, and strongly embedded in the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The result was quite traumatic for many of the Mizrahi Jews. Many of these immigrants ended up working at unskilled jobs, earning very little money, and living in relative poverty. They had difficulties adapting to their new circumstances and felt like

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<sup>4</sup> Often referred to as a “Hebrew/Israeli” identity (Lichtensztejn 2010)

<sup>5</sup> “From 1950 to 1952 Israel’s population doubled from 650,00 to 1.4 million; by the decade’s end, 2 million people...” They and the post-Holocaust refugees (1944-1952, including those who arrived illegally during the last years of the British Mandate and detainees in DP camps in Europe or on Cyprus) arrived impoverished, largely uneducated and unskilled. See Meirav Arlosoroff, “When Ben-Gurion saved Israel’s economy at any price,” in “The Marker” economic supplement to Haaretz (English edition), 23 March 2018. Reference added for the print edition; retrieved from: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/when-ben-gurion-saved-israel-s-economy-at-any-price-1.5936686>

second-class citizens in a society dominated by others and operating according to norms and conventions unfamiliar and often unacceptable to them.

Although life in the newly built country was also no paradise for many of the Ashkenazi immigrants, many of whom arrived after the Holocaust, they were still better prepared to be absorbed in the quasi-European country which developed here.

Seventy years have passed since those times; the “melting pot” model has long ago been abandoned in favor of more pluralistic and multi-cultural approaches (Regev and Seroussi 2004); and although nowadays many third-generation families in Israel are of “mixed” origins, with both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi roots – the trauma of those dramatic years persisted as a bleeding wound, and in some circles, still very much so today.

Eventually, after long and complicated processes, Israel developed into a modern country, modelled after other Western countries: in its democratic legislature, its market economy, its high-technology infrastructure, and its liberal, progressive society. However, inasmuch as Western democracy, Western technology and a Western economy have become almost a given in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Israel – cultural matters seem to reflect an entirely different undercurrent, one of unresolved dissonance and tension (Yaar 2005).

A possible explanation for the above dualism may be traced to the fact that although the Mizrahi Jews had to abandon many aspects of their tradition in order to become part of a modern, progressive society—one of the only aspects they refused to abandon and possibly the only one in which they felt fully comparable with the European-Ashkenazi elite—was their cultural heritage.

Thus, in contrast to many other aspects of the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi conflict, which have faded over the years, the culture-related matters have refused to die. Quite the contrary: they have gradually become THE playing field, where the remnants of the old conflict are still alive and kicking.

### **The Mizrahi voice resounds**

It is in the last several years that a group of radical Mizrahi activists (notably from such groups as the *Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition* or *Ars Poetica*)<sup>6</sup> have presented an agenda that repudiates many aspects of the Western/European cultural heritage – an agenda which might be summarized as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Its name refers both to Horace's classical *Art of Poetry* and the Israeli slang term *ars*, a pejorative appellation for Mizrachi men, connoting rude, crude attitudes and vulgar behavior. See Ayelet Tsabari, “Mizrahi Artists Are Here To Incite a Culture War”. *The Forward*. 16 March 2016.

*We may have adopted Western democracy, Western technology and a Western economy - but this doesn't mean that we must necessarily adopt Western culture, let alone the Western cultural canon.*

*We therefore don't feel obliged to admire Beethoven. We don't have to support the opera or the Israel Philharmonic. We don't have to idolize Chekhov or Goethe, All these are essentially symbols of the Ashkenazi elite; of an imported culture; a foreign anachronism that has nothing to do with who we are and what we do here, in the Mediterranean Israel of the 21st century.*

*Why shouldn't our culture, the Mizrahi-Sephardic-Mediterranean culture, receive the same canonical status? The same budgets? The same place in the school curriculum? The same presence on the radio, TV, or in the public media? After all, we who don't belong to the European hegemony make up over 50 % of this country – so why shouldn't we get at least 50% of the resources and determine 50% of the public sphere?<sup>7</sup>*

The polemic was further intensified in the past several years, when the post of Minister of Culture was given to one of the more provocative and controversial politicians of the ruling Likud party: Brig. Gen. (ret.) Ms. Miri Regev – herself of the second-generation of Jewish immigrants from Morocco (Margalit 2016).

In a series of appearances and interviews for the media, she claimed that the “War of Independence” of the Mizrahi culture has just begun. In March 2016, she gave a long interview to the mass-circulation daily *Yediot Aharonot* and stated the following:

*I was ashamed of my culture and have never put it center-stage.*

*As a child we heard traditional melodies at the synagogue and were not proud of it. Talking about the prayers and melismas of our synagogue? At most, about Julio Iglesias...<sup>8</sup>*

*That was the right thing to do at home, that was the right thing to do in the neighborhood, with friends and so on. Even in the army we did not speak about our music, about Middle Eastern music, because it was not a subject that you were able to bring up. So we spoke about all the [Ashkenazi] popular singers: Aviv Gefen, Shalom Hanoch, Shlomo Artzi; at most – Boaz Shar'abi [of Yemenite parentage – Ed.].*

*For years I was trying to run away from this cultural conflict between East and West. I just avoided it... WHY? Because I'm a successful woman, I'm a brigadier general in*

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<sup>7</sup> The frequently used phrase, "We are more than 50%" is often extended to include the Arab population of Israel, who share many aspects of Mizrahi culture. See also Shira Ohayon in p. 11 below.

<sup>8</sup> The world-renowned singer from Spain, whose maternal ancestry is Jewish.

*the army, I hold a Master's degree...so I was running away from all these issues, away from the Mizrahi culture.*

*But I'm a believer. I believe in God, and by getting this post [i.e., as Minister of Culture] I received a clear message. The Almighty told me: you didn't want to face these issues all the way – so face it now, in front of the whole nation! Say it out loud, in a clear voice:*

*Our culture was ignored for many years. It was overlooked. Do you really want pluralism? If so – go fight for it. Is this a culture war? It is the independence war of the Mizrahi culture. [English translation – T.L.]*

Her operative plan was also stated very clearly in this interview:

*The budget of the Israeli opera was one of the things that surprised me the most when I entered the Ministry of Culture. I asked to see the budget and was shocked: out of an annual support of 80 million shekels [from the national budget] for the sphere of music, the opera receives 18 million shekels, and the Israel Philharmonic ten million. But only 3% of the population gets to enjoy it – and these are exactly the people who can pay 250 shekels<sup>9</sup> a ticket themselves.*

*Those days are over [...] A national Andalusian Orchestra<sup>10</sup> should become the twin sister of the Israel Philharmonic. It will receive the same budget, will get the same support from us, and will tour the whole world in order to represent a different voice of the state of Israel*

To properly evaluate Culture Minister Regev's pronouncements and the figures she referred to, a view of the larger context is required, with a focus on the state support of the arts.

As stated above, Israel was developed largely on the model of a European country, where the arts and culture are supported by the state authorities. Needless to say, the state does not support every artistic or cultural project, only getting financially involved in worthy projects which, commercially speaking, cannot generate sufficient support on their own; to compensate for a condition widely known as “market failure.” For instance, it is clear that an opera production or a proper orchestra performance cannot be covered by box office sales alone. To do so, the ticket price would probably be 10 times higher; or, alternatively, the artists would have to go home hungry as a result of outrageously low wages (if paid at all...).

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<sup>9</sup> At the time, this sum was more than a day's wages for an unskilled laborer or minimum-wage worker.

<sup>10</sup> Andalusian music and the Andalusian orchestras are discussed on page 8, following.

As it is evident that entities such as an opera house or a symphony orchestra are automatically subject to market failure, it is up to every society to decide whether these can be regarded as a “public good” that should be provided to the population – an essential service such as roads, a police force, or public radio; a service without which the society would be deprived of an essential component of its existence.

Does the state of Israel need a proper opera house? Does it need a world-class orchestra? Is there a consensus that such institutions are vital and essential for the proper existence of Israeli society – or for any other society nowadays? If these questions were raised some 40 or 50 years ago, the answer would have probably been an unqualified “yes.” Today, it’s not at all sure; much would depend upon whom you ask, that person’s cultural background, and if a politician – loyal to which sector of the population.

UNESCO, the United Nations organization for Education, Science and Culture, has recommended that 2% of a country’s total public monies should go to supporting the arts. And indeed, there are countries which are quite close to reaching this rate of public support of the arts.

And in Israel? The overall budget for culture is less than 1 billion shekels (a little more than a quarter-billion US dollars) which is around 0.2% of the national budget – a ridiculous rate: only one-tenth the rate recommended by UNESCO.<sup>11</sup> And this little money—unparalleled in any other developed country and hardly allowing a proper existence for its orchestras and its one and only opera house—will now have to be seriously cut and redistributed due to the “Regev Doctrine.”

### **Andalusian music and the “Andalusian revolution”**

What are the “Andalusian orchestras” mentioned by Culture Minister Regev? The term “Andalusian music” refers to the traditional music developed during what is called the Golden Age in Spain of the 12<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries: a fusion between Arab music from Baghdad and the local Iberian traditions. This music was also nurtured by generations of

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<sup>11</sup> The IPO, for instance, relies in its budget on an unimaginable percentage of box office income, comprising 60% of its annual budget. This is an unparalleled ratio compared with all the large orchestras abroad, and it forces the members of the orchestra to work much more, to tour very often for financial reasons, take very little risk in their programming, and constantly needing to “please” their audience. Only 12% of the IPO’s income comes from government support, with the other 28% coming from foundations and private donations. In other words, the big outcry of Minister Regev was over the fact that the Israel Philharmonic receives 1% of the total budget allocated to the arts. In America, governmental support for the arts barely exists, and it is the philanthropists who keep the artistic organizations alive. However, the donations are usually considered tax deductible, so indirectly – the government does support the arts, by relinquishing tax money; in this manner it is the citizens who decide where their tax money should go.



Jewish musicians in Spain. After the forced deportation of all Jews from Spain in 1492, Andalusian music was quite well preserved in the Sephardi Jewish diaspora, especially in North Africa. It was usually performed by small instrumental ensembles accompanying a solo singer, the *paytan*.

In Israel, the tradition has been kept alive by Jewish immigrants from North Africa, who took an active part in many community events throughout the liturgical and para-liturgical cycle of the year. Small ensembles performed this music, being either self-supporting through private engagements for weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and synagogues; or partly supported through special funding allocated for traditional culture at the national and local levels.

It was in 1994, in the city of Ashdod, that the “Andalusian Revolution” in Israel began: the first full-sized Andalusian orchestra was formed and began receiving state funding parallel to that of a conventional classical symphony orchestra. In order to be entitled to this support, the small ensemble of traditional instruments was significantly expanded by the addition of quite a number of professional string musicians. These new recruits were mainly Russian-Jewish recent immigrants, who had not found employment in the mainstream classical orchestras of Israel and sought other professional alternatives in Israel’s music scene.

Another aspect of this Revolution was the major change of format: from community events, in which music was an integral part of a larger event and a wider social context, to an imitation of the Western concert format, where people attend a scheduled performance exclusively dedicated to the listening of music, seated passively in a soundproofed auditorium.

Soon enough, the single Andalusian orchestra became multiple as other such ensembles were founded: in Ashkelon, in Jerusalem, in Maalot-Tarshiha, and in other locations throughout the country.

The next stage of the Andalusian Revolution was the claim to equalize their budgets to those of the classical orchestras. So, intentionally or unintentionally, the issue of support for the Andalusian orchestras became a test-case, through which the national culture policy was examined: would it respect the principles of distributive justice, or continue on the path of cultural neglect and alleged discrimination?

The director of the Jerusalem Andalusian Orchestra’s education department, Ms. Shira Ohayon, emphatically pronounced on the situation:

*The figures show a dark reality, in which one culture is being supported at the expense of the other. ...It is time that the majority culture in Israel—of the Mizrahis, Ethiopians, Palestinians—will be supported according to their relative numbers in the population.*

*And that these groups will be properly represented in all the committees that allocate the support money...it is time for Minister Regev to save us from that Europocentric, monolithic, monotonous, and obsolete culture...how? through the overlooked Mizrahi cultures, that bring cultural wealth, cultural vitality and a true link to the Arabic and Mediterranean spheres. Yes! These very “vulgar” cultures, so despised by the hegemonical elites.<sup>12</sup>*

Considering this dramatic context, it is clearer why Culture Minister Regev demanded that there should be a national Andalusian orchestra, an identical twin of the IPO, that would get exactly what the IPO gets: in budgets, opportunities, and national and even international representation.

So, rather than checking what a top-flight Andalusian ensemble really requires in order to flourish, defining the number of players suitable for its repertoire, and finding the right context for its performances based on its own authentic traditions – it is now a state demand that these very special ensembles will become a copy of the Israel Philharmonic and all the other conventional classical orchestras, whether this suits their artistic profile or not.

And the money? Where would all the money needed to sponsor such a revolution come from? This, too, depends upon whom you ask. The more militant activists say it out loud: it is very simple: cut the budgets of all the existing orchestras and give the money to the “new guys on the block...” The less militant understand that already now, government support for music is at a ridiculously minimal level, and that subtracting from this minimum would mean a death sentence to many of the classical orchestras still surviving with so little support from the authorities.

But is this “zero-sum game” actually inevitable? Must we only make decisions similar to the Judgment of Solomon, in which no party would be able to hold a living infant in its arms, and both sides will be grieving over the dead body of the half-child given to them in the name of blind justice?

### **A Zero-Sum Game - or perhaps there is another way?**

If music and cultural identity are such important issues for Israeli society, and if supporting the arts has become such a crucial subject for the harmonious coexistence of the different “tribes” and sectors living together in this country – then perhaps all those who care about the country’s cultural profile could join forces, bang on the doors of all

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<sup>12</sup> From an opinion article by Shira Ohayon, “The time has come for Miri Regev to save us from European culture,” published online by the popular Israeli news website *Walla*, 21 June 2015 [English translation: T.L.] Retrieved from: <https://news.walla.co.il/item/2865034>

the decision-makers and protest against the shameful under-funding of the arts. If this is an important matter in this country, allocating for the arts only 0.2% of the total national budget is simply a bad joke. If our national profile requires the nurturing of several cultures, several heritages – it’s time to stop setting the cultural camps against one another, with frictions over fractions of a percent, and instead start re-calculating the priorities in this country.

Just imagine how wonderful this would be, if for some tens of millions of shekels a year there would be a marvelous Golden Age for the arts and for the many different traditions coexisting in this corner of the world. How fruitful and fulfilling this could be! And how all these strong negative energies would be re-channeled for creation, the joy of music-making, and getting to know one another’s cultural identity!

The skeptical may say: “Ah, this is so naïve. There’s never enough money in this country!” But the facts show otherwise: Israel is a rich country. It has a flourishing economy and there is enough money to go around. Our mission is to reset priorities to ensure that this money goes to the right places.

And for all those who care so much for the culture (or better say rather: cultures) in this country – it is our duty to help our politicians and public officials think differently about the arts. As illustrated above, matters of culture and cultural identities are vital for the ongoing function of this country. And past misconducts should not be solved by creating new ones – as the old saying goes: “Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

With UNESCO’s figures before us, with examples from other countries whose economies are parallel to Israel’s yet do a much better job of funding the arts – let us follow their examples. It is important everywhere; and in a country as unique and as culturally complex as Israel, it seems vital.

Yet despite all of these discouraging arguments, we can already see that the picture is not entirely bleak. Intermarried Ashkenazi/Mizrahi couples are now well over a third of Jewish marriages in the country<sup>13</sup> – and with healthy curiosity and freedom of choice, cross-cultural examples are far more common than might be supposed from the antagonistic picture presented by factional politicians. Among numerous examples are many members of the IPO—the best in their field—are of Mizrahi origins, many are of mixed parentage, and even the head of the IPO’s board of directors, French hornist Yoel Abbadi, is from a Moroccan/Egyptian family.

At the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, which is Tel Aviv University’s music academy and the IPO’s preparatory program, we have an outstanding mosaic comprising recent arrivals from the former Soviet bloc, scions of veteran Mizrahi and Ashkenazi families, Israeli Arabs, Palestinians and many students from abroad – all completely

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<sup>13</sup> Already in the mid-1990s, the figure reached 28% (Okun 2001) and shows a continual increase.

indifferent to the question: “where does your family come from?” And for the 2017 Spring semester gala concert under the baton of Maestro Zubin Mehta, he chose two dynamic young Israeli young soloists: pianist Motti Fang-Bentov, whose parents hail from Morocco and China, and soprano Nour Darwish, daughter of a Muslim family from the Arab village of Iksal near Nazareth.

So, in a reality wherein most of the musician members of the Andalusian orchestras are actually new immigrants from Russia, many of the players in the classical orchestras are of Mizrahi or mixed origins, and when the IPO players dedicate much of their time to learn and perform Middle Eastern music in the ensemble of “Shesh-Besh,” [who performed just prior to this lecture in the conference opening event – *Ed.*] – then who needs this artificial masquerade of ethnic identities? Who benefits from this unnecessary, ongoing “culture war?” Why retain obsolete identity-politics in a country that is blessed with such great diversity and cultural affluence?

### **Creating a National Curriculum for Music Education in Israel**

Imagine what it would be like to attempt constructing a national curriculum in music while having underfoot this minefield of political pressures, cultural conflicts, and historical traumas. This indeed was the imposing challenge facing us 12 years ago, when I was approached by the Ministry of Education to head the National Curriculum Committee and write, with the help of outstanding colleagues from all sectors and communities, a new curriculum for music education, Grades K–12, in the Israeli national education system.

The committee was formed of ten Israelis from different sectors and communities of this country, setting forth to materialize a dream that seemed quite impossible at the time: a comprehensive national curriculum of music which would suit all the archetypes in the population: secular Jews, whether Ashkenazi or Mizrahi; new immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia, along with Arabs, Orthodox and Haredi Jews, et al.

Likewise, in terms of the professional fields represented on the committee, its composition was no less complex and bewildering: academic experts vs. representatives from the field, Western classical vs. jazz, pop and rock musicians, an ethnomusicologist, a new media expert, and authorities in Jewish and Arab traditional music. It was quite clear that the issue of multiculturalism would be our main issue, and that our success would be judged by our ability to create a coherent curriculum that would be broad yet modular enough to accommodate all parties involved.

## **One curriculum for one diverse, inclusive society**

Why did we insist on one curriculum for all? We wanted to make sure that every pupil in the Israeli primary and secondary educational system would be able to become familiar with the musical culture of his or her own community, as well as the musical cultures of the other communities co-existing in the country – and beyond those, to be introduced to a variety of musical traditions from around the world.

In the program’s introduction we presented our concept:

*The multi-cultural reality in Israel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by a rich spectrum of unique musical traditions. This broad spectrum presents a real challenge for the agents of music education and raises questions about the very role of music education in general, and the concept of a national curriculum of music in particular.*

*The arts are often perceived as a means of cultural expression and thus provide a rich platform for profound queries related to cultural identity: who am I? Who are we? What makes us the community that we are? In this respect, music education can offer creative ways to be introduced to the culture of the “other” (or “others”). The music lesson can function as a nexus of multicultural pluralism and promote values of tolerance, as well as promoting positive curiosity, openness and respect for the surrounding’s “others.”*

*The intricate reality in Israel required the writers to observe two basic principles throughout the writing process:*

- a) Commitment to a wide and pluralistic representation of the different cultures comprising the society in Israel, and clear, practical ways to define these cultures and their relations to one another.*
- b) Establishing alternative guidelines for a recommended repertoire, bypassing the standard, culture-based classifications of genres and cultures alike.*

The solutions found to define and classify these rather sensitive issues are presented below.

## **Circles of Identity in Israeli Society**

Postmodern thinking has led to a markedly flexible understanding of the concept of *cultural identity*: from one-dimensional, “closed” definitions to much more open concepts, enabling every individual to belong simultaneously to a number of cultural spheres.

Following this philosophy, it seems that every pupil in the Israeli education system will be able to find his or her personal place in a constellation of several identity circles (see Figure 1):

- a) The “Civic Circle” – representing our shared, common identity as citizens of the state of Israel.
- b) The “Community Circle” – representing the more specific aspects of our identity – Jewish, Arab, religious-observant, secular, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, first or second-generation immigrant from Russia or Ethiopia, etc.
- c) The “Universal Circle” – representing our identity as members of the global community and our natural curiosity to become familiar with the world’s diverse musical cultures and their treasures.

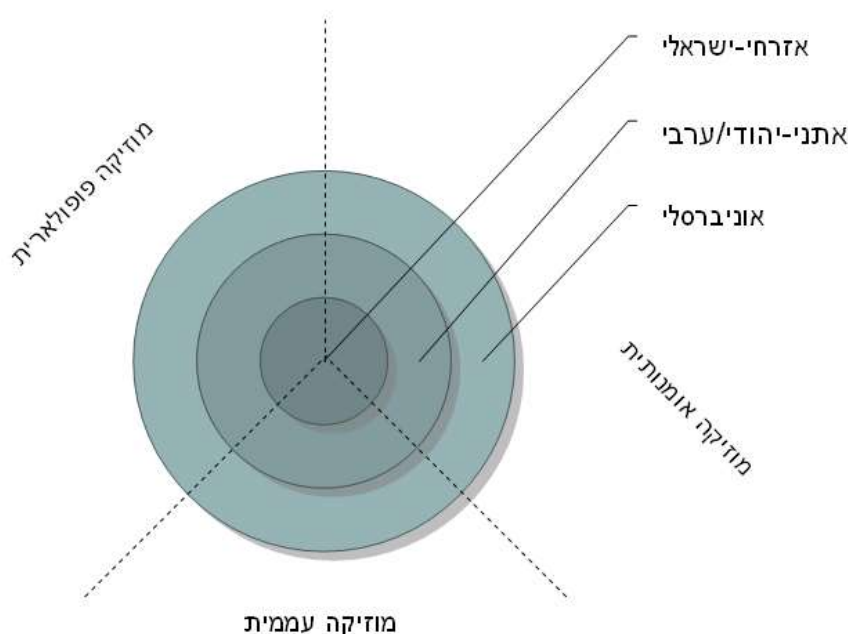


Figure 1: “Identity Circles” in Israeli Society

אזרחי-ישראלי	The Civic Circle (Israeli)
אתני-יהודי/ערבי	The Ethnic Circle (Jewish/Arab, Ashkenazi/ Sephardi-Mizrahi)
אוניברסלי	The Universal Circle
מוזיקה אומנותית	Art music
מוזיקה עממית	Traditional music
מוזיקה פופולרית	Popular music

According to this conception, the music education curriculum will include repertoire representing: (a) the music created in the state of Israel; (b) the traditional musical

heritage of the Jewish and Arab communities and their different sub-groups; and (c) canonical repertoire from the world’s various musical cultures. In doing so, the selections will properly reflect the standard genres of art music, popular music, and traditional (folk/ethnic) music, and will ensure a proper mix of these genres in each musical culture studied and presented in class.

### **The inevitable question of repertoire**

How, then, would the music teachers select the actual repertoire? Rather than dictating to them with a published list of mandatory musical works, our committee recommended that there would be general guidelines followed by concrete examples. These would either be adopted “as-is” by the teacher or selectively replaced by equivalent alternate choices. In order to allow such alternatives, a set of three esthetic criteria was provided as a pedagogic guideline to the teachers in order to help them select the repertoire suitable for their pupils. This was presented with the following statement:

*The curriculum will give priority to musical works that will challenge the pupil in one or more of the following regards:*

- ***Intricacy*** – *the studied repertoire will include aspects that would broaden pupils’ musical knowledge and further develop their perceptive abilities;*
- ***Subtlety*** – *the studied repertoire will include aspects that would develop the pupils’ ability to decipher emotional nuances and delicate subtexts;*
- ***Dialogue with extra-musical spheres*** – *the studied repertoire will serve as a trigger to explore broader relevant contexts, such as its aesthetic, philosophical, historical, sociological, or political backgrounds.*

### **Commercial vs. Canonical**

Serious consideration was given to the issue of commercial music vs. the canonical and traditional. It was agreed that the music curriculum will give priority to genres and cultures that are not ordinarily promoted by the music industry, thus exposing young pupils to musical treasures not otherwise accessible to them. By doing so, the music lesson will act as an agent of the *preservation*; of music cultures and heritage content at risk of being pushed aside and even vanishing in the coming generations due to their exclusion from the commercially dominated public sphere. It is also anticipated that it will strengthen cultural continuity and encourage inter-generational bonds in the community. At the same time it will ensure that schoolchildren would be exposed to a

broad spectrum of artistic ways of thinking and emotional means of expression not limited by the dictates of fashion or commercial interests.

### **Epilogue – April 2018**

As of 2011, the new national curriculum in music was gradually being implemented at all grade levels in the state-administered education system. In some educational streams it was welcomed. In others it provoked strong resistance and even rejection, particularly from the Orthodox Jewish state-religious educational stream.

Early in 2017, 13 out of 14 music departments operating nationally in the Jewish orthodox high schools requested to withdraw from the national curriculum in music and independently create their own. The Ministry of Education initially rejected this request, claiming that these departments have sufficient freedom of choice within the existing national curriculum. Will this refusal hold? Or will it lead to a stronger resistance and pressures on the political system to restrict the national curriculum to the education system’s secular stream? As of this writing, the matter remains unresolved.

This is merely a first test case; others are anticipated in the future. The Arab community in Israel has just started to develop their first music departments in high schools around the country. Will they find their own voice within the guidelines of the national curriculum; or will they follow the Jewish Orthodox schools and try to withdraw from it? The answers to these questions are, for now, highly speculative and will be gradually revealed in the future.

However, regardless of the odds for its success in reality, a national curriculum in music constitutes a worthwhile, even essential venture, an attempt to contribute to the healing process of the Israeli society. But even if partially successful, it is to be hoped that the future graduates of the national education system may better value the issues of cultural identity, know about each other's cultural heritage, and perhaps, when they come to decision-making positions in the Israeli public sphere, they will do better than our current leaders.

The most fitting way to end this portrait of a country coping with its many cultural profiles, appears to re-emphasize the troubling question raised earlier: why retain the obsolete, unnecessary identity-politics in a country that is blessed with such great cultural affluence? A broad spectrum of cultural traditions is a blessing, not a curse. It is our role, as educators who deal with the different aspects of art and culture in the public education system, to suggest, and hopefully prove, that there is another way to look at it. And it would be the role of our graduates, those who will have studied the new curriculum, to change the reality according to the values they received from their music



studies in today’s Israeli schools. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that when these graduates attain positions of authority, there will be no conflict whatsoever between the public commitment of supporting the Israel Philharmonic and the Israeli Opera, along with their younger sisters, the Andalusian orchestras.

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