



An Exploration of American Jewish and Jewish American Music

From the Artistic Director

Joshua R. Jacobson

I was excited as I began to plan the theme for this spring's program, but I couldn't figure out what to call it: Jewish American music or American Jewish music? Was there a difference? As I began to unravel these threads, I confronted some fascinating questions.

Investigating American Jewish music, we are struck by how the American experience changed the nature of Jewish music. Jews, in unprecedented numbers, came to these shores from Eastern Europe. Between 1880 and 1925, some 2.4 million Jews arrived, accounting for nearly 10 percent of the total immigration. Their new home considered itself a "melting pot." The ideal was a cauldron into which were poured immigrants of many heritages and out of which would emerge the ideal "new American," speaking English with no trace of an accent, liberated of any Old World cultural baggage, and eating white bread with mayonnaise. In this land of opportunity, one had the opportunity—at least in theory—to redefine oneself. In this land of equality, many aspired to cookie-cutter sameness. The first generation of immigrants and many of their children couldn't wait to shed their distinctive ways and become "real" Americans. Izzy Baline, for example, quit the Yiddish theater, changed his name to Irving Berlin, and went on to define his American identity through compositions such as "God Bless America," "White Christmas," and "Easter Parade."

But there were others who maintained some aspects of their Old World culture, while adapting it to the New World environment. In 1939, the young Leonard Bernstein wrote, "It is easily understandable that a composer who is a second-generation American, whose parents were immigrants, still maintains a close contact with the old racial traditions. If the traditions are part of his childhood, they are inevitably part of his life." Then this insightful Harvard undergraduate added, "The jazz influence is common to all Americans;...add...the tempering influence of each individual composer's own heritage, and the result is a personal, yet American, musical style, with jazz as the ultimate common denominator."

A perfect example would be Bernstein's own *Jeremiah Symphony*, composed three years later. In the second movement the composer presents a symphonic rendering of the Ashkenazic *haftarah* cantillation, mutated into the syncopated rhythms of jazz. Indeed, jazz, the music that most uniquely represented the American way of life, began

to color nearly every corner of the Jewish *melos*. Klezmer bands, the Yiddish theater, and eventually even the cantor and choir in the synagogue began to take on jazz rhythms, scales, and instrumentation.

Beyond the audible assimilation of the popular idiom, there were other, more intangible, aspects of America that came to be felt in Jewish musical life. First, America's culture was more casual than that of Europe. Formality in music as well as in manners was out of vogue; performances were characterized by familiarity. Second, the pace of life seemed faster here; gratification was instant, turnover was continuous, and music, like everything else, would have to keep up with the times. Americans wanted stylish songs, but songs they could understand right away. Third, in this democracy it seemed that culture and custom could be voted in or out as easily as political candidates. "Tradition" wasn't enough of a reason for choosing worship music; the hegemony of *nusakh* (the ancient system of prayer modes) was at the whim of the majority. Furthermore, the rejection of aristocracy even led many congregants to democratize the leadership of the sacred service. Superior musical talent, once considered to be an appropriate qualification for a cantor, was now seen as a form of outmoded aristocracy. "*Nusakh America*" was developing.

But what about Jewish American music? Was acculturation a two-way street? Did Jews have a tangible effect on American music? Consider these words from an article that appeared in the *Dearborn Independent* in 1921.

Popular music is a Jewish monopoly. Jazz is a Jewish creation. The mush, the slush, the sly suggestion, the abandoned sensuousness of sliding notes, are of Jewish origin.... It is rather surprising, is it not, that whichever way you turn to trace the harmful streams of influence that flow through society, you come upon a group of Jews?...And now, in this miasma of so-called popular music, which combines weak-mindedness with every suggestion of lewdness—again Jews. The Jewish influence on American music is, without doubt, regarded as

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A special "Paper Symposium" starts on page 7

featuring thoughts on American Jewish music

from David Burger ★ Marsha Bryan Edelman ★

Michael Isaacson ★ Ellen Koskoff ★ Matthew

Lazar ★ Sheldon Levin ★ Charles Osborne ★

Nick Page ★ Emanuel Rubin ★ Judith Tischler

NOTES FROM ZAMIR

published semi-annually by

THE ZAMIR CHORALE OF BOSTON



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The Zamir Chorale of Boston is a non-profit mixed chorus whose mission is to be the premier performer of Jewish choral music. The Zamir Chorale of Boston:

- Enhances appreciation of Jewish culture and strengthens Jewish identity by heightening awareness of the variety and quality of Jewish music.
- Serves as a world-wide resource for the dissemination of Jewish choral music through concerts, recordings and publications, and by commissioning and premiering new works.
- Provides an opportunity for singers to share their passion for Jewish choral music in an environment that respects traditional Jewish observance.

*For information on our recordings, or to hire the Chorale,
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*The Zamir Chorale of Boston
is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council,
supported by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies,
and is choir-in-residence at Hebrew College.*

*Notes from Zamir is supported in part
by a grant from the Aaron Foundation.*

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Letters

I am hoping that you can help me with some information. I am a member of a new chamber choir in Ottawa, Canada, recently formed to sing Jewish choral music. We would very much like to find the sheet music for “Al Giv’ot Shekh Abrek,” which is on Zamir’s CD *The Songs Live On*.

I also have to tell you how much I love that CD. The songs, the singing, and the shape of the CD (the choices, and even the order of songs—you take the listener on a musical voyage through Jewish history!) are wonderful.

In truth, it was learning about the exciting arrangements of Jewish choral music through several of Zamir’s recordings that led us to form our choir. I sing in another, non-Jewish, choir and, until discovering Zamir, I never knew that we too had a rich tradition of wonderful choral music.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Thank you,
Barbara Kagedan

My name is Shawn Lawton and I am a high school choral director from Muskegon, Michigan. We do a holiday concert every December and I have always included Jewish music on the program. I was very happy to come across your CD *Lights*. I enjoy this disc very much and I got excited about all the new music ideas I had discovered. I saw that you had a web site and I thought I would see if I might get the arrangements.

I am interested in “Al HaNissim”—I loved this arrangement, particularly with the instrumental parts. I would like to do this piece as close to how your choir did as possible with the instrumental parts at my concert. I had given up on doing “Al HaNissim” this year, but I have renewed interest now that I have found your web site.

I thank you for your time and the wonderful resource you provide.

Shawn Lawton
Mona Shores High School Choir
Muskegon, MI

Glossary

baal t’shuvah one who has begun to follow traditional Jewish observance

cantillation a set of musical motifs and rules for chanting biblical texts.

gemarah the largest and most recent component of the Talmud

ha-Aretz the land of Israel

haftarah a section from the biblical prophets chanted each

week in synagogue

hazzan cantor, prayer leader

leil shabbat Sabbath eve

musaf a morning service for sabbaths and festivals

nusakh a set of chants, usually specific to a liturgical occasion and to a geographic region

selichot a midnight service preceding Rosh ha-Shanah

trope a cantillation motif

From the Chair of the Board

Joyce Bohnen

Dear Friends,

I would like to share with you some thoughts from one of our chorus members, Andrew Greene:

At one of our concerts in Florida last spring our host, Cantor David Feuer, pointed out a remarkable continuum. We had just finished performing "Macht Zu di Eygelech" with our guest soloist, Carol Tellerman. Carol had sung in the original Ha-Zomir chorus in Lodz, Poland, which lasted from 1899 through the early 1940s. Cantor Feuer's father had founded the Hazamir choir in Buenos Aires in 1938, and that chorus existed until the early 1970s. The Zamir Chorale of Boston was founded by Joshua Jacobson in 1969. Standing on stage were three individuals representing over a century of Jewish continuity.

As chorus members, we must always think in two directions. We are singing phrases, and each note must fit in with the ones before it and after it. But we are also singing chords, and each note must fit in with the ones being sung by the other voices in the choir.

For members of Zamir, those same two directions apply metaphorically. Each of us is a note. We must be aware of our role in ensuring the continuity of the phrase to which we belong—we must preserve the traditional songs that have come before, while commissioning, premiering and performing new works that ensure the future of Jewish music.

We must also be aware of our relationship with the notes found in other voices: Zamir's membership and audiences span the spectrum of Jewish denominations and observance and include non-Jewish voices as well. Zamir fosters something all too rare today: a place where Jews of all stripes create harmony, not dissonance, from our different voices.

I am so proud to be part of this continuum. Particularly now, when there is so much dissonance in the world, the Zamir Chorale of Boston creates a special harmony, so that our children will know and enjoy the rich musical culture we have inherited.

This is the time of year when we ask for your help to ensure that we can continue to do those things that have made Zamir the renowned choir that it is. I thank you for your past support and hope that you will consider making an increased gift this year. With your help we can share the beauty and harmony of our music and help make our very dissonant world a better place in which to live.

From the General Manager

Jan Woiler

One of the best things about my job, and one of the things that makes me so proud to work with the Zamir Chorale of Boston, is the opportunity to interact with people around the country who want to bring a Zamir performance to their community.

Nancy Holder of Beth Am Synagogue, Baltimore, Maryland, particularly inspires me. Nancy made it possible for her congregation to present us at Beth Am on April 14, 2002.

Nancy called me for the first time back in July. At that point, most of her congregation's financial resources for the year were committed elsewhere, leaving her with a very limited budget. One idea that we considered was to turn this into a larger tour by finding one or two more presenters in the Washington and Baltimore vicinity. All presenters would then share the costs.

As I began making phone calls to cantors in the communities of Washington and Baltimore, I was thrilled to learn of the high regard in which they hold the Zamir Chorale of Boston. Everyone I spoke to expressed their desire to include us in their programming. Unfortunately, nearly all the congregations had, by that time, fully booked their schedules for the year.

But let's turn back to Nancy's story. What were we going to do now?

Nancy told me that her passion for Jewish music, as well as her understanding of how vital this music is in nourishing our Jewish soul, kept her motivated. She also relayed how she couldn't let go of the vision of the Zamir Chorale of Boston singing in her own beautiful synagogue. She kept talking to folks in the larger Jewish community. She told them about the importance of knowing Jewish music as a way of understanding our collective history. She didn't give up.

Eventually Nancy's persistence paid off, the remaining funds her congregation needed were raised, and Beth Am Synagogue will be our sole presenter for this trip. I'll never forget Nancy's excited voice when she called me with the good news.

Zamir looks forward to our day in Baltimore with great anticipation.

The Zamir Chorale of Boston is currently filling concert dates for the 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 seasons. If you would like to obtain information on how to bring the Chorale to your community, call Jan Woiler toll-free at 866-926-4720.

Your gift to Zamir helps us educate and inspire audiences around the world!

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Sacred Bridges: An Interfaith Musical Initiative

Our first *Sacred Bridges* concert on November 17 was an exciting evening. There is no “rush” quite like seeing people lined up on the street, sitting on the floor, standing at the back of a magnificent sanctuary, enthusiastically gathering to hear Jewish music performed beautifully by our Zamir Chorale of Boston. The accompanying reprint of an article that appeared in the *Jewish Advocate* tells more about the concert.

My role as chair of the Steering Committee has been gratifying and enlightening. The partnership with the Archdiocese of Boston, and collaboration with a remarkable group of presenting organizations, has taught us all about building bridges of healing across the gap that divides faith communities.

We are in the process of scheduling *Sacred Bridges* programs throughout the Greater Boston area, preparing an exciting itinerary for our interfaith concert tour of Italy in the summer of 2003, researching the history of the Italian Jewish community, and raising the funds necessary to support these bridges of harmony. We are delighted to announce that Eric Stange, of Spy Pond Productions, one of the co-producers of our educational and inspirational documentary film, *Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland*, has agreed to work with us to create a film about the *Sacred Bridges* initiative, including the planned tour of Venice, Florence, Mantua, and Rome.

We welcome you to be part of this exciting effort. Create a partnership with your local synagogues and parishes to present a *Sacred Bridges* event. Contact your friends and family to spread the word that Zamir is coming to Italy! Plan to join the interfaith group of non-singers who will tour Italy along with Zamir. Help us identify foundations and individuals who share our dedication to create bridges of understanding. Together we can create a more harmonious world.

Warmest wishes,
Ronda Garber Jacobson
Chair, *Sacred Bridges*

The Success of New Interfaith Initiatives

“*Sacred Bridges*” Concert Draws Standing-room-only Crowd
by Mara Tencer; *reprinted by permission from the Jewish Advocate*, Nov. 30, 2001.

Despite wintry temperatures, on Saturday night, November 17, more than 1,000 people attended the launch of a new interfaith initiative, *Sacred Bridges: A Musical Encounter*, featuring a performance by the Zamir Chorale of Boston. Inspired by the principle that music can serve as a bridge across faiths, *Sacred Bridges*, a two-year initiative of the Zamir Chorale and the Archdiocese of Boston,



Joshua Jacobson, Jan Woiler, and Joyce Bohnen of the Zamir Chorale of Boston and Fathers Walter Cuenin and David Michael of the Archdiocese of Boston celebrate the success of November 17's *Sacred Bridges* event.

explores the musical connections between the synagogue and church over the past two millennia.

Among the presenting organizations were the Theology and Arts Program of Andover Newton Theological School, Archdiocese of Boston, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, Interreligious Center on Public Life at Hebrew College, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston (JCRC), and Synagogue Council of Massachusetts. The concert was generously funded through the support of major sponsor Fleet and benefactors Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), Honda Village of Newton, JCRC, and Newton South Co-operative Bank.

Playing to a standing-room-only crowd at Our Lady Help of Christians Parish in Newton, the concert featured works of Jewish liturgical settings, focusing on shared texts such as the psalms and the Sanctus (*Kedushah*). According to Joshua Jacobson, founder and artistic director of Zamir, “The goal of this program is to increase mutual respect and empathy between Catholics and Jews. Music has unique powers to open the doors of understanding, and we are eager to reach out to our friends in other communities of faith.”

Planning for the program began last summer, but since the events of September 11, the project gained new importance for both organizers and attendees. “Over the past weeks, we have experienced the worst kind of behavior perpetrated in the name of religion.... Together, we seek a time when interreligious communication is characterized by harmony, in every sense of the word,” commented Joyce Bohnen, chair of the Zamir Chorale.

“During the final song of the program, a round of *Sim Shalom* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*, we were all invited

Continues on next page

From the Editor

Andrew M. Greene

Many of you have no doubt noticed that for the past several issues *Notes from Zamir* has been undergoing a make-over. Thanks in part to a generous grant from the Aaron Foundation, we have expanded *Notes* both in length and breadth. *Notes from Zamir* is no longer merely the newsletter of the Zamir Chorale of Boston, informing you of our latest successes and upcoming concerts. It is becoming a magazine of Jewish choral music.

Zamir's mission is not merely to sing, it is to educate. We do this through the lecture components of our concerts, through the liner notes of our recordings, and increasingly through our website. *Notes from Zamir* is one more way in which we hope to pique—and then satisfy—your interest in the context of the music we sing.

With this issue, we convene our first “paper symposium,” a counterpart in print to our May 2 symposium and June 9 concert of music that is both Jewish and American. We invite you to contribute your thoughts on our website, www.zamir.org, where the symposium will continue. We also welcome your comments and suggestions on the future of *Notes from Zamir* at notes@zamir.org.

We are grateful to the Aaron Foundation, whose generous support has made the expansion of *Notes from Zamir* possible. Any contributions to Zamir designated for *Notes* and received by June 30 will be matched, up to a total of \$8,000. We hope you'll take this opportunity to have your support of Zamir doubled.

Finally, we encourage you to sign up on our website for our new e-mail lists for announcements of new recordings, concerts, and more!

“Sacred Bridges” continued from previous page

to sing.... I was overwhelmed with a sense of spiritual unity,” noted Carol Rubin, an attendee.

Ronda Garber Jacobson, *Sacred Bridges* chair, commented, “Partnering with the Archdiocese of Boston, the Zamir Chorale of Boston brought together a steering committee of dedicated representatives to build bridges of healing across the gap that divides faith communities. It has been an honor to serve as chair of this first *Sacred Bridges* event, and to work with these inspiring individuals.”

Saturday's *Sacred Bridges* concert was the first of what organizers hope will be a two-year program of workshops and lecture-concerts. The organizers are currently exploring other ways to bring Jewish music into Christian settings. The Chorale also hopes to participate in cultural exchanges with local Italian choirs and to culminate the two-year venture with a tour of Italy in 2003.

Alumni and Member News

Susan Carp-Nesson

Mazal tov to:

Francine (Ferraro) and David Rothkopf on the birth of their son, Micah Gabriel.

Susan London and Brian Cutler on the birth of their son, Seth Herbert.

Helen Wanderstock and Barry Wershil on the arrival of their daughter, Sarah Jae Thuyhien.

Andi Weiss and Yoram Ravid on the bat mitzvah of their daughter, Sari.

Rena and Robbie Fein on the bar mitzvah of their son, Jeremy.

Board member Susie Jacobs and her husband, Fred, on being honored by the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston at their annual Purim Ball.

Leila Joy Rosenthal on receiving the 2002 John Griffin Technician of the Year award by the Massachusetts Dental Society.

Linda Stacy and Harry Sinoff on the birth of their daughter, Amalya.

Condolences to the family of Elaine Finkelstein who passed away in March. Elaine was a member of the chorus for a number of years, as was her daughter, Rena.

Condolences to the family of choir vice-president Marilyn Jaye on the loss of her father, Leonard Appelbaum, in March.


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serious by those who know anything about it. Not only is there a growing protest against the Judaization of our few great orchestras, but there is a strong reaction from the racial collusion which fills the concert stage and popular platform with Jewish artists to the exclusion of all others.

This vitriol, sponsored by none other than Henry Ford, was blatantly anti-Semitic. But in fact American Jews were tremendously active in music in the first half of the 20th century. A reputable study of major American symphony orchestras published in 1933 disclosed that 26 percent of the players were Jews. In American “amusement orchestras,” 36 percent of the players were Jews. And this at a time when Jews comprised less than 4 percent of the total United States population. In the world of arts and entertainment, superior talent often overcame racial prejudice.

A tremendous number of Jews were composing, arranging, and performing popular music in the first half of the 20th century. Here are just a few of the more stellar names: composers Charles K. Harris (“After the Ball Is Over”), Gus Kahn (“Makin’ Whoopee”), Irving Berlin (“God Bless America”), Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein (*The Sound of Music*), George Gershwin (“Summertime”), Harry von Tilzer (“Shine On Harvest Moon”), Gus Edwards (“By the Light of the Silvery Moon”), Harold Arlen (“Somewhere Over the Rainbow”), Jerome Kern (“Old Man River”), Lorenz Hart (“Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered”), Frederick Loewe (*My Fair Lady*), Frank Loesser (*Guys and Dolls*), Mark Blitzstein (*The Cradle Will Rock*); and performers Sophie Tucker, Danny Kaye, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Fannie Brice (*Funny Girl*), Dinah Shore, Ziggy Elman, Stan Getz, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Paul Whiteman.

But what of the *Dearborn Independent*’s assertion that Jews had changed the nature of American music? It wasn’t the Jews; the most profound change in American music must be credited to African Americans, whose blues, spirituals, gospel, ragtime, and jazz created the foundations of popular music 100 years ago. Still, the question remains: Why do we find so many Jews composing and performing jazz? Perhaps Jews felt a natural affinity for this music. Perhaps it was based on empathy with the African American community—a shared history of suffering and exclusion. Perhaps they were drawn by the similarities between certain cantorial styles and the scales and rhythms of the blues.

There are a few notable cases of Jewish traditional and popular music entering the American mainstream. The great cantor Yossele Rosenblatt toured America on the vaudeville circuit in the 1920s. The first “talkie” (mo-

tion picture with synchronized soundtrack) was Warner Brothers’ 1927 hit *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson as the Orthodox cantor’s son who runs away from home to be a performer of popular songs. Several songs from the Yiddish theater became mainstream hits when retrofitted with English lyrics, including “Dona Dona,” “And the Angels Sing (Der Shtiller Bulgar),” and “Ba Mir Bist Du Sheyn.” Harry Belafonte had one of his greatest successes with “Hava Nagila,” Perry Como sang *Kol Nidre* on television once a year, and the Weavers put Issachar Miron’s “Tsena Tsena” onto the top of the Hit Parade in 1950. Musical shows such as *Milk and Honey* and *Fiddler on the Roof* also crossed over to achieve mainstream appeal. The most prominent American orchestras have performed Leonard Bernstein’s *Jeremiah Symphony* and *Chichester Psalms*, both with Hebrew texts.

If you’d like to hear some of these works, I hope you’ll join us this spring as we investigate and enjoy these musical phenomena. Join us at Hebrew College on May 2 for

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a stimulating symposium. Professor Debra Kaufman of Northeastern University will moderate. Professor Stephen Whitfield of Brandeis University will probe the nature of American Jewish culture. Professor Judith Tick of Northeastern University will present the case of Sophie Tucker, the “Red Hot Mama” who crossed over from the Yiddish stage to the risqué side of the American mainstream. And with assistance from the Zamir Chorale, I will provide musical illustrations of the complementary phenomena of Jewish American and American Jewish music. This program is supported by a generous grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and by the Northeastern University Jewish Studies Department.

Join us on June 9 at New England Conservatory’s magnificent Jordan Hall for a full-length concert titled “Jewish Composers in America” (yes, I finally came upon a title). The first part of this program will focus on American composers who turned to Jewish texts, including Leonard Bernstein, Kurt Weill, Arthur Berger, Robert Starer, and Alice Parker; as well as synagogue musicians who have expressed themselves in a uniquely American idiom, including Cantors Charles Osborne, Charles Davidson and Robbie Solomon. The program concludes with contributions of Jews in popular music. We will perform hits from the Yiddish theater, including “Eyli, Eyli” and “Abi Gezint,” as well as such crossover sensations as “Ba Mir Bist Du Sheyn,” “And the Angels Sing,” and “Dona Dona.” Featured guest performers will include Mark Kagan, Cantors Aryeh Finklestein and Charles Osborne, and musicians from the Klezmer Conservatory Band.

We hope you will join us for these exciting programs.

A Symposium on American Jewish Music

I recently invited several of my distinguished colleagues to share their thoughts on the nature and condition of Jewish music in America. I received ten responses. Together they present a fascinating look at the subject from a variety of angles.

— Joshua Jacobson

I would like to invite you to send me your thoughts on the subject—any length, from a single sentence to a page, personal or scholarly. You may want to consider these questions: How is American Jewish music different from other Jewish music? How is Jewish American music different from other American music? In what ways does music reflect American Jewish (or Jewish American) life?

Marsha Bryan Edelman

What we think of today as “American Jewish music” is a relatively recent phenomenon. To be sure, there have been Jews in what was to become America since the first Sephardic Jews arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654, but their musical traditions were born in other times and places, and remain virtually unchanged to this day.

Jewish immigration in the 1840s brought with it the new music being promulgated by the reformers of Germany. The “modern” music of Solomon Sulzer and his contemporaries inspired the creation of English language compositions to accompany the first prayer books being compiled for use in American temples. This music had more in common with the hymns of Protestant congregations than with any Jewish precedent, though, and in any case, such music was not heard outside the sanctuary, and thus had no extra-liturgical effect on the lives of the worshipers.

The waves of immigration that brought some two million Eastern European Jews to the United States between 1880 and 1920 also brought with it a variety of Ashkenazic traditions. “*Nusakh America*” was quickly imprinted with the sounds of the Lithuanian *hazzanim*, who were the first cantors to serve American congregations. This same music influenced the sounds of the folk musicians known as *klezmerim* who entertained at life-cycle celebrations and in the Yiddish theater, and also found its way into occasional “art music” by Russian Jewish musicians transplanted to America as synagogue music directors and teachers of a new generation of composers.

But while “Jewish music” thrived in the early years of the 20th century, it was not until 50 years later that American Jewish music began to do what all Jewish music and musicians had done before them: adopt and adapt the musical conventions of the surrounding culture. The reasons for this are complicated. On one hand, the “culture shock” which the immigrants from the Old World experienced upon their arrival in the New led many to hold tightly to the music and traditions of the past. This was

especially true of liturgical music, which, in all societies, tends to evolve much more conservatively than does popular music. But, while Jewish music and musicians made disproportionate contributions to America’s popular culture (former klezmer Nathan Glantz wrote the popular “Chicago, Chicago” and the “Odessa Bulgar” became a hit of the “swing” era as “And the Angels Sing”), the new immigrants were more interested in making themselves into “real Americans” than they were in preserving Jewish musical tradition.

All this changed in the second half of the century. First, the post-World War II generation sought a more active voice in synagogue services that, for decades, had been dominated by cantors and choirs. Congregants wanted to sing, and composers responded with melodies that could preserve the traditional flavor of the synagogue while enfranchising the worshiper at the same time. Still, the flight of the baby boom generation from the synagogue was presumed to be a rejection by Jewish young people of the “old-fashioned” music of their parents’ generation, and composers tried to use the contemporary vernacular to bridge the culture gap. Cantor Charles Davidson used the style and instrumentation of “rock” music to accompany the traditional High Holy Day motives of the *Selichot* service in his “The Hush of Midnight.” Michael Isaacson and Debbie Friedman came onto the Jewish musical scene in 1972 with their own “folk/rock” services, and the course of synagogue music (in some circles) was changed forever.

But the biggest change in American Jewish musical life came when the notion of “Jewish music” began, once again, to extend beyond the walls of the sanctuary. Shlomo Carlebach used his own neo-Hasidic music to touch a generation who had rejected Jewish musical tradition in favor of American “folk songs” like “This Land Is Your Land” and “Where Have All the Flowers Gone.” His tunes for “*Essa Einai*” and “*Pitchu Li*” were heard and popularized on college campuses and in coffee houses (before finding their way back to the synagogue). Cantor-composers writing for the Reform movement, where the ban on the use of instruments had long since been abrogated, wrote music that easily “crossed over” from the synagogue service on Saturday morning to the campfire *kumsitz* or concert hall on Saturday night. And instrumentalists who had embraced jazz and the ballads of Appalachia as “authentic” American sounds re-created klezmer music when they began to seek their own musical roots.

The 21st century is now witness to an unprecedented richness of musical creativity in the Jewish community. The operative question, though, is “How much of it is Jewish music?” As the technological advances of the last

100 years make it possible for the musical sounds of the global village to reach into our radios and our hearts, we have become comfortable with the musics of Sephardic and Oriental Jewish communities, as well as a host of sounds emanating from Israel. We have also been treated to acculturations producing “Jewish reggae,” “Jewish rap” and “country Jewish”—not to mention jazz improvisations on “Ani Ma’amin” and translations into Yiddish of “White Christmas” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” These may be the inevitable gleanings of our ongoing contact with the wider, non-Jewish world. But do they constitute Jewish music?

For some, music which bears no relationship to *nusakh*, cantillation modes, or traditional folk music will never be “Jewish.” For others, musicologist Curt Sachs’s 1959 dictum that defines Jewish music as that written “by Jews, for Jews, as Jews” continues to obtain (no matter what the definition of “Jews” or “Judaism” turns out to be). The synagogue continues to be a barometer of Jewish musical sensibilities, and despite the well-documented denominational fragmentation that divides the American Jewish community, a remarkable consensus has emerged. Today, the sounds of Louis Lewandowski (Reform), Max Wohlberg (Conservative) and Shlomo Carlebach (Orthodox) can be heard in synagogues of all liturgical stripes, with the only variation the presence (or absence) of choral and/or instrumental accompaniment. The borrowing of “foreign” melodies for settings of synagogue texts and Sabbath table songs continues to mark the music of the contemporary American Jewish community just as it contributed to the creation of our inherited “tradition.” In the same way that German battle hymns (“Ma’oz Tzur”) and drinking songs (“Ein Keloheinu”) have infiltrated our services, someday “Erev Shel Shoshanim” may be more associated with the Sabbath *musaf* service than with popular Israeli culture, and Andrew Lloyd Rice’s music from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* may live side by side with “Sloop John B” in the pantheon of Jewish musical tradition.

Despite misgivings about the appropriateness of particular melodies (one can always debate which are the ten worst tunes for “Adon Olam”), one could argue that anything which emanates from the synagogue must constitute “Jewish music.” The even greater challenge to Jewish musical continuity will rest on the concert stage. Ever since Ernest Bloch rejected traditional Jewish musical motives in favor of expressions from his own “Jewish soul,” the possibility has existed for Jewishly themed music with no discernible connection to the Jewish community beyond titles like “Schelomo” and “Baal Shem Suite.” In the popular vernacular, this “Blochian notion” of Jewish musical anarchy achieves its fullest realization in

the “Knitting Factory” phenomenon, which pushes the envelope of “Jewish music” beyond klezmer to encompass a new “in-your-face Jewish music” which doesn’t look—or sound—particularly Jewish at all. In the realm of choral music, while many settings have been based upon traditional texts and tunes, an equal number (especially those written in English) are devoid of historically “Jewish” content. Is this Jewish music?

The contemporary American Jewish community faces a constant tension between embracing the best that American life and culture have to offer and preserving the uniqueness of Jewish tradition. American Jewish music faces a similar challenge. In the past, Jewish music has always borrowed from the surrounding majority culture, but has adapted those styles and motives to express Jewish sensibilities. Let us hope that future American Jewish musicians will learn from the creativity and values of our forebears, so that they can infuse a recognizable Jewish musical identity into their own “new songs unto God”—and the next generation of Jewish concertgoers.

Marsha Bryan Edelman is Professor of Music and Education at Gratz College in Melrose Park, Penn., and serves as president of the Zamir Choral Foundation.

Emanuel Rubin

What is Jewish music, anyhow? Here is a question which lands squarely on my turf, because I teach a course at UMass called “Music of the Jewish People” and another called “American Music.” You would think that if anyone should know the answer, it ought to be someone like that. I find myself in a position, though, similar to Justice Potter Stewart, who characterized pornography—or rather, declined to do so—in a famous 1964 case by writing, “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it.”

In one sense there is no such thing as Jewish music. No particular chord or scale, no melodic type or harmonic sequence, is specifically Jewish. Yet it seems easy enough for most people to identify certain music as “sounding Jewish.” Such identification, however, depends on one’s own experience. To a European Jew, the singing of Yossele Rosenblatt “sounds Jewish,” but that style is foreign to the Jews of Azerbaijan. Nor is “Jewish music” limited to music with Hebrew texts, for there is a rich heritage of songs in Yiddish and Ladino, as well as Arabic, English, Russian, and who knows how many other national languages, not to mention instrumental music without words.

Perhaps an answer could be framed as “music written by Jews.” But then “Hatikvah” would be excluded, since it is based on an old central European folk song. When a Christian composer like Schubert wrote music for the synagogue, or Jewish musicians co-opted a Christian

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hymn (for example, “Ein Keloheinu”), was it then Jewish music? Jewish composers themselves have been confused over the question. Just how Jewish must a composer be for inclusion in the register of Jewish composers? Did Ferdinand Hiller write Jewish music (he was born to a Jewish family)? What about Georges Bizet, son of a mixed marriage with no particular Jewish affiliation, but married to a Jewish wife? Or Paul Hindemith, a non-Jew married to a Jewish woman?

Israeli composer Alexander Boskovitch wrote, “When examining the question of Jewish music, we should not consider Jewish descent as a decisive factor.” In the same article he defined Jewish music as “the expression of the Jewish spirit and mentality in sound.” Does Jewish-born Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” or “Easter Parade” express such spirit and mentality? When *The Sound of Music* (Rodgers and Hammerstein) or *My Fair Lady* (Lerner and Loewe) were translated into Hebrew, did they become Jewish? Or were they Jewish even before, because their composers and librettists were Jewish? If so, does that make “Stormy Weather” or “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” Jewish because the composer, Harold Arlen, was a Jew? What about *Elijah*, an oratorio with an Old Testament subject by Felix Mendelssohn, a Christian who met with anti-Semitism because his grandfather was a Jew?

There is no parameter of musical style, nationality, birth, language, or even relationship to the liturgy that allows one to point to “Jewish” musical characteristics in the same way we can when talking about Scottish, Italian, or Balinese music. Characteristics of klezmer or synagogue music that supposedly produce a distinctive “Jewish” sonority turn out, on examination, to be not specifically Jewish. As an example, scales with augmented seconds, which give a characteristic sound to many Eastern European synagogue and klezmer melodies, actually seem to have been introduced by conquering Muslims in the late Middle Ages, while the klezmer style itself is closely bound up with the style of Eastern European and Romany musicians.

No musical style can be unqualifiedly designated as Jewish, especially if one tries to classify musical styles solely in terms of rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic features shared by a geographically defined culture that shared life and land for generations. This was not the case with the Jews, who absorbed the musical styles of every society in which they lived and, in doing so, became singularly multicultural in their musical practice. Yet there was also a cement that bound Jews from those different contexts together, bridging distinctions of time or place. That bond—the belief system of Judaism—swept aside the most disparate parochial concerns and minimized

esthetic differences with an overriding sense of unity. It is those commonalities, then, to which we must look for characteristics that might define music as “Jewish.” This goes beyond traditional analysis of musical style, which only examines components of the music’s sound.

The social function of music defines its meaning within a culture. Mordecai Kaplan called Judaism a civilization: a way of living that subsumed sacred and secular, religious and historical, within a single, unified world-view. Jewish civilization’s core beliefs, such as monotheism, the task of humanity in *tikkun olam* (perfecting the world), the aspiration of the intellect to understanding, the mutual obligations of individual and community, and the tolerance of other belief systems consonant with those values, are a heritage expressed in the art, as well as the life, of its practitioners. They shape aspects of music in which we will find common threads binding culturally different practices into a single tapestry. The best way to define Jewish music is in terms of how it serves Jewish communal needs. Despite differences in sound, structure, or language, *any music that has Jewish purpose can be said to be Jewish music.*

Of course, the “purpose,” or social need, of Jewish communities has varied historically with the circumstances of their participation (or lack of it) in different societies. The purposes of the Jewish community in a free America are broader than they were in a more circumscribed situation such as, let’s say, 19th-century Yemen, or the Polish *shtetl*. America has a more open culture, and Jewish purpose has come to be more congruent with the goals of the majority culture, so Jews can be found making music for the concert stage, entertainment, and universities. America is also a physical location, so it is easier to say that music made in or for that place is “of” that place. American music is not limited to one style—jazz, hymns, rock, or symphonic; it is not music made by black, white, Hispanic, or Polish Americans. It is music made in and for America by the people who live there. It is not a musical parameter that allows us to make the assignment, but a social one.

So can such a thing as “American Jewish music” exist? Can music serve two masters? The answer to that is easy, for Jewish music that serves American purposes, that “speaks to” America, is readily conceivable. Just as we have learned that this culture is enriched by those who retain immigrant identification as a qualifier to citizenship, so is its music enlarged by embracing those component parts. American Jewish music is bilingual, so to speak. Both traditions are augmented by the works of Sholom Secunda or Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesca, of Bob Dylan or Kinky Friedman, of Richard Rodgers, George Ger-

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shwin, Kurt Weill, or (more recently) Steve Reich, all of whom brought Jewish sensibility to music written for an American audience. A rich tradition of Jewish-American composers for the synagogue, too, such as Robert Starer, Hugo Weisgall, and Simon Sargon, to name just a few, has melded Jewish with American musical expression in creating a New World sound for the liturgy. American Jewish music, then, is a vital expression bridging two complex civilizations and serving the purposes of both.

Emanuel Rubin is a composer and Professor of Music at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Michael Isaacson

Just when I finally thought I had a handle on what Jewish music is and is not, my colleague, the inquiring Dr. Joshua Jacobson, has thrown down a yet larger gauntlet challenging me to define American Jewish music, no less! You might think that because I'm an active American Jewish composer and even designed the blueprint for the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, it shouldn't be too difficult; indeed, it should come as part of the job description. However, definitions are by nature insidiously inclusive and exclusive at the same time. There's always that one, magnificent exception of a musical work that throws a monkey wrench into one's encompassment. Nevertheless, for the sake of the joust, let me offer you my two cents.

First, one obviously has to figure out what Jewish music is. I go on record (or CD), as saying it has nothing to do with melody, musical style, or the religion of the composer. Gershwin is not a Jewish composer; neither is every piece that contains an augmented second. What does matter is the illumination. I shall explain.

Have you ever seen a page of Talmud? Surrounding the small square of the Mishnah's text in the middle of the page are columns of interpretations, discussions, and background by various scholars from different times in history. When one studies and digests all the peripheral scholarship, it is assumed that one understands the core, the Mishnah, in a deeper way. Jewish music, for me, is the Talmud surrounding the Mishnah we call the Jewish experience. Whether it deals with prayer, gratitude, historic, linguistic, cultural and/or poetic memory, Jewish music illuminates that Mishnah of Jewish life like the pictures surrounding a Medieval Haggadah illuminate the understanding of the Passover story.

Logically, you may now ask "But what is the Jewish experience?" Ah, there's the rub! When, where, how, and to what extent you identify with your Judaism completely increases the permutations and gradations of the Jewish color wheel. In other words, my Jewishness may be only tangential to your Jewish experience. You see, it gets

tricky!

And we get in even deeper by adding the adjective "American." We need to know:

- Where? Canada? Mexico City? Los Angeles? Ames, Iowa? Boston? Boro Park, Brooklyn? You know the old adage: In my *shtetle* we daven the only right way!

- Did you attend Yeshiva, Day School, Afternoon Talmud Torah, or the Arbiter Ring Shule? Who do you hang out with?

- When? 1900? 1930? 1950? 1970? 2000? Believe me, they're all quite different.

- Do you read, speak, and understand Hebrew? Yiddish? Ladino? Farsi? In other words, do you talk my language?

Yet there is something common to all our experiences as American Jews. It's the same now as it was when the first Jews arrived on these shores and it continues to differentiate our Jewish experience from every other country's, including Israel.

Our common thread is opportunity. The limitless opportunity to study, observe, taste, hear, sing, compose, record, and appreciate the fullest gamut of Jewish, secular, and musical activities; only in America!

Eclecticism touches each of us. *Hazzanim* listen to divas and folk singers, *klezmerim* listen to Dixieland and blues bands, and congregations want a little of everything. Just listen to the range of recordings on our retail shelves and at the Transcontinental and Tara websites from Rossi to B.T. (*Baal T'shuvah*) rock to Converso songs from New Mexico and you'll appreciate how resonant our Semitic soundboard really is.

But with the Klopman diamond, comes the Klopman curse! What I fear in our bountiful American gift of freedom and democracy is the undeserved sense of entitlement that pervades our society and our ears. Living in America today, one too easily gets sucked into a lowest common denominator mediocrity and foolishly ascribes greatness to it; nonetheless, mediocrity is still mediocrity. We desperately need to create a desire for musical elevation in our audiences and in our congregations. I worry less about our being American and more about our vanishing Judaism.

The problem with this endless menu of musical *Gemarah* is that we've yet to establish a Babylonian or Jerusalem Talmudic Academy to organize and separate the wheat from the chaff.

Anyone who strums a guitar or owns a synthesizer is now a composer and anyone who can sound out *Sh'ma Yisrael* is now a Jewish composer. The result is that there are lots of weeds out there stunting the growth and blossoming of the flowers.

Too often, I'm hearing uninformed, crossover, revival,

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and Bible Belt musical aesthetics mixing in, in the name of Jewish music. What Jewish intellectual and experiential credentials do these composers bring to their hyphenated music? There is a reason we read and prefer the Talmudic decisions of Rashi and Hillel; their scholarship, erudition, and comprehension of the widest Jewish palette is a given. American Jewish artists need to become more literate as Jews and as artists.

So, *shehechiyanu*, it seems to me that along with our great fortune in living in these times comes a great responsibility. It is now our mission and *tikkun* to both increase our own literacy and compassion and to be *or la-goyim*, a light unto the nations.

I've heard, sung and studied the Bach *B-minor Mass*, the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*, the Brahms *Deutsches Requiem*, the Fauré *Requiem*, the Vivaldi *Gloria*, the Pergolesi *Stabat Mater*, and even Morton Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna*—now it's time for our American gentile neighbors to know the Foss "Adon Olam," the Schoenberg "Kol Nidre," the Adler "Hayom Harat Olam," and maybe even my own *Nishmat Chayim* or *Shir Ari* services for Leil Shabbat. We need to stop limiting our concerts to mainly Jewish audiences, and proudly proclaim that our music is both Jewish and uniquely American and universal in its value.

Finally, I must add that American Jewish music (whatever it is) has been ennobled by the Zamir tradition. Thirty-five years ago I admired Stanley Sperber and Mati Lazar in New York, and I'm thrilled to learn of all that Josh Jacobson and the Zamir have achieved in Boston. Forgive me if I've preached to the choir. You, the singers and lovers of American Jewish music, are the ones who create its future. I'm hopeful that, together, we will all go from strength to strength.

Michael Isaacson is a composer and producer based in Los Angeles.

Ellen Koskoff

Recently asked to speak on the subject of Jewish American music at a local synagogue, I posed the following question as the title of my talk: "Is 'White Christmas' a Piece of Jewish American Music?" Written by a Jewish immigrant to the United States, Isidore Baline (1888–1989)—who became the proud American song-writer we knew as Irving Berlin—this song has become not only one of the most recorded popular American songs but also a symbol of the Jewish American experience in the first half of the 20th century, when many Jewish immigrants to this country fought for economic, political, and social equality, while at the same time constructed and negotiated new Jewish identities here.

Born in Russia the son of a cantor, Irving Berlin came

to New York City in 1893, where, at the age of eight, he became a street singer to help earn money for his family. With no formal music training, Berlin became one of the best-known composers in the American music publishing business, writing about 1,500 songs, among them the scores to the musicals *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *Miss Liberty* (1949), *Call Me Madam* (1950), *This Is the Army* (1952), and the songs "God Bless America" and "Easter Parade."

The question of whether or not "White Christmas" is a piece of Jewish American music lies less in the song itself (which shows no especial Christian sentiment in its lyrics or music) than in the social and musical context of its creation and in its meaning as a marker of midcentury Jewish upward mobility. And, if we are to take this question seriously, we must also address a larger issue: Does music carry its own meaning, or is that meaning created alive in specific social and music contexts and for specific people?

Written at a time when Jewish immigrant composers dominated the popular music business on Tin Pan Alley and on Broadway, songs that dealt with American values proliferated. Often composed in a popular style associated with contemporary American theater and film, with the immigrant experience, and with democratic values, songs like "White Christmas" and "Easter Parade" were less about Christian holy days than about a particularly Jewish view of America as an open and welcoming society, where anyone could succeed and thrive. To mistake them for purely Christian songs is to miss the point of the Jewish American immigrant experience, which, for many, was filled with an unbounded gratitude for American freedoms and economic security.

Certainly, most people would not immediately identify "White Christmas" as a piece of Jewish American music, because it does not appear to express or encode any Jewish sensibilities, either through its lyrics or music. Yet, as a product of a Jewish American musician, with lyrics that celebrate a nostalgic view of an America "where treetops glistened and children listened to hear sleighbells in the snow," and music distinctly drawn from a Jewish-dominated popular music industry, "White Christmas" could be said to be the quintessential Jewish American song of its time.

Thus, the question of what is Jewish American music is not a simple one. Who is asking the question and for what purpose? What music is being considered? What is the context of its composition and reception? And, perhaps most importantly, what is the symbolic meaning of such music to those who experience and love it?

Ellen Koskoff is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y.

Sheldon Levin

In a recent article on opera, complaints were made that major opera companies were rarely performing new works. The author deduced that since “new” operas were not being performed in these places that opera is dead. I wrote a lengthy response that opera is not dead, it is just changing.

I suggest that today new operas are being written and, in fact, are very popular. New works by Philip Glass or Pierre Boulez may not be readily accepted but, still, new operas are being sung all of the time to large audiences. These new operas are by composers including Andrew Lloyd Webber, Claude Michel Schoenberg, and even Stephen Sondheim. While not sung at the Met, audiences are lining up to hear glorious performances of *Les Misérables* and *Phantom* a few blocks from Lincoln Center in large Broadway theaters. Mozart wrote some of his works for popular audiences and I contend that if he were alive today, he would look to Broadway, rather than La Scala, for premieres of his works.

Similarly, music for today’s synagogues and worshipers are being written and accepted all over our country. 19th-century music, such as settings by Lewandowski or Sulzer, is being performed less often today. Operatically trained cantors, large choruses, and cathedral-style organs do not seem to be in vogue. Instead, American-Jewish compositions, attuned to the sounds of our country and the needs of our worshipers, are being beautifully written and sung. Music by Benjie-Ellen Schiller or Gerald Cohen may have a lighter, different sound than that of our European predecessors but their music is certainly Jewish and of the highest quality. Meir Finkelstein writes tunes that are easily singable and are clothed in the seventh chords and other harmonies of recent decades. Michael Isaacson brilliantly brings Hollywood flair to liturgical selections. Performers including Debbie Friedman, Jeff Klepper, Dan Friedlander, Craig Taubman, and Robbie Solomon,

to name a few, take American folk sounds, with which they were raised, and bring them to Jewish texts, bringing those texts to life for new generations of worshipers.

Jewish college students on many campuses today are singing “doo-wop” style arrangements of well-known Israeli and liturgical tunes. Twenty-something performers such as Rick Recht and the new band Yom Chadash show more “rock” influences in their compositions than those of previous generations. The beat goes on.

Jewish music has always adapted to its surroundings. Rossi’s psalm settings sound at home in 17th-century Italy. Sulzer’s music could often be compared to the Viennese waltzes of the Strausses. Lewandowski and Mendelssohn share choral styles and harmonies. It should not surprise or upset anyone that American-Jewish composers writing today include the colors, rhythms and styles that they have heard their whole lives. Broadway has found ways of keeping opera alive and thriving, and so have many Jewish-American composers, cantors, conductors, choirs, and congregations.

Hazzan Sheldon Levin is the president of the Cantors Assembly and the cantor of Neve Shalom in Metuchen, N.J. He is the conductor of many Jewish choruses and has arranged many of Debbie Friedman’s songs for choir, available from Sounds-Write Music.

Matthew Lazar

Defining American Jewish music is often much like interpreting a Rorschach test, revealing more about one’s perspective than about the actual material. For example, are we speaking here about an American form of Jewish music? A Jewish treatment of American music? And what of the differences between instrumental and vocal/choral music? Using Curt Sachs’s famous definition of Jewish music as being music written “by Jews, for Jews, as Jews” as our reference, let’s examine some possibilities. Leaving aside the audience (the “for Jews” in Sachs’s equation), let’s assume that an American Jew is the composer. Can



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instrumental music be thought of as being Jewish only if the music is in some way based on Jewish modes, tunes, or fragments? Or is there some other non-texted way in which a composer can use a contemporary or national musical idiom to express Jewish experience, culture, or ideas? Or, is any music written by a Jewish composer, *ipso facto*, Jewish music?

When we examine music with text—vocal or choral music or music with narration—we find additional permutations, including combining Jewish text with American musical style and American texts with a Jewish musical treatment. In order to stake out the parameters of the territory we are investigating, let's spotlight some specific repertoire. Parts of Bernstein's *Jeremiah Symphony* seem to encompass the confluence of all the influences we require. The music is often based on Jewish musical motives and developed in a contemporary American idiom, the sung text is traditional and well known, and the composer, in writing the piece, was making an American Jewish comment on the experience of the Jews suffering in Europe. *Chichester Psalms*, however, was dedicated to Chichester Cathedral and has, in the first movement, a musical theme based on a Beethoven fragment, but the theme is developed in an American style and the text, in Hebrew, is from the psalms (and the meter is in seven). What is the American Jewish quotient here? Copland's "In the Beginning" is suffused with that "American" sound that he invented and is sung in English with a text that retells the story of Creation—except that Copland's climax is not Shabbat but the creation of mankind. How American Jewish is this?

While nothing can top George and Ira Gershwin's jazzy American cynicism in teaching us that "the things that we're liable to read in the Bible...ain't necessarily so," and using *haftarah* trope to tell us so (the composer also worried that "Summertime" might sound too Jewish), the nexus of much discussion of the "American sound" centers around the setting of Jewish liturgical and secular texts to the sounds of popular American chord charts. Is this synthesis, antithesis, or something in between? Is a Bob Zimmerman (also known as Bob Dylan) writing American Jewish music when his hopes for repairing the world are sung in an American folk idiom? As the old joke concludes, "You're right, and you're right. And you're right, too." When it comes to American Jewish music there are a number of varieties that fulfill the requirement of combining Jewish and American identities with music. Only when we connect all the musical dots are we able to hear what it is that actually defines, and will define, American Jewish music.

Matthew Lazar is director of the Zamir Choral Foundation in New York.

Nick Page

I am a choral musician, composer, and song leader. I haven't been Jewish in 49 years, which is to say all my life. But in those 49 years I have formed a great love for the many forms of Jewish music. I attend many choral festivals, but my favorite is the North American Jewish Choral Festival. I love it because we sing all the time and I love it because the "we" in this statement doesn't exclude me, a non-Jew. I love it because I get to hear *HMS Pinafore* sung in Yiddish or the Zamir Chorale's Sheri Beker (from her college days) singing doo-wop in Hebrew. I love the festival because I get to chat with some of my heroes, like Josh Jacobson, Matthew Lazar, and the folk at Tara and Transcontinental Publishing. These people are expanding the "we" in the world of choral music. They are taking this incredibly rich and diverse tradition out of the closet. They are teaching people in the non-Jewish world that there is a world beyond the dreydel songs—that there is a wealth of music that can enrich all of our lives.

Nick Page is a Boston-based song leader, composer, writer, and workshop leader.

Charles D. Osborne

In many respects, the state of American Jewish music at the moment is very exciting. Current American society—with more or less universal religious tolerance and cultural acceptance—has created the sort of stable environment that has always fostered a blossoming of Jewish arts of all sorts, and that has, tragically, been all too rare throughout history. Additionally, unprecedented broad-based, nationally scaled organization within the Jewish musical community has led to greater interest and participation in Jewish music. The long-existing American Society of Jewish Music has been joined by the Zamir Choral Foundation (with its North American Jewish Choral Festival), Klezcamp, and other similar opportunities. Also, the advent of the Internet has made formerly hard-to-obtain recordings, sheet music, etc., as easy to get as clicking a mouse.

Jews, as ever, look to scripture as a source of inspiration. Love of God, of *ha-Aretz*, and of the Jewish people are common themes, especially since these represent ideas that have always been dear to Jewish hearts. But this is also a time of tremendously changing tastes and directions:

- While Eastern European musical influences are fading in the synagogue, there is a resurgence of interest in Yiddish music and theater, and klezmer.
- American synagogue music, having experimented during the 20th century with jazz and rock and roll, is turning more and more to the sound and feel of American folk music, especially in liberal congregations. As a genre,

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folk music is less formal (and therefore less stress-inducing, an important consideration these days), and lends itself to the mystical, “feel good” direction many congregations are moving in (as opposed to the prophetic, patriarchal direction).

- Many mainstream publishers of choral music (that is, publishers of church music) have been looking to bulk up their catalogues of ethnic, alternative, and “world” pieces, and are actively seeking out Jewish music and composers. This reinforces the fact that:

- Serious Jewish music is now composed at the same level of beauty and proficiency as any within Western culture. Some years ago, Professor Joshua Jacobson and I were asked by a local high school choral director to recommend some Jewish repertoire. He and I then came to the school and held a workshop with their chorus. Finally, I was soloist on one of the three pieces selected at a concert. While the entire event was educational for all of the students, it was also a source of tremendous pride and affirmation to the Jewish kids to see their music and culture being presented in a forum formerly reserved for Bach, Mozart, and Handel.

Charles Osborne is a composer and serves as cantor at Temple Emanuel in Newton, Mass.

Judith B. Tischler

I became interested in the subject of Jewish music in 1978, when I attended the World Congress on Jewish Music in Jerusalem. Of course, one of the items on the program was “What Is Jewish Music?” This same question has recurred at every conference I have since attended and the same conclusion has been reached: “No Conclusion.”

I am sure that I am not being original in expressing the general consensus that the purest form of “Jewish music” is cantillation—*i.e.*, cantillation according to each of our sub-ethnic groups, as notated by Idelsohn and since refined and researched further. The origins of these different cantillation motifs can only be hypothesized since we are studying an oral tradition. I am also not being original when I summarize the conclusions of many scholars that Jewish music in the Diaspora (and in Israel as well) is a composite of external influences, and that *pure* Jewish music doesn’t really exist. Eastern European, Middle European, Western European, Mediterranean, and Yemenite Jewish music all contain elements of the ethnic music of those areas. Jewish music, especially vocal music, is thus identified mainly by language, text origins, text content, and *melodic memory*. By the last, I refer to the traditional motifs of the area in question, which are a part of our collective memory regardless of their origin.

Three years after my first real contact with the subject

of Jewish music, I became the editor and director of Transcontinental Music Publications. One of my tasks was to review manuscripts of American Jewish composers, make certain decisions regarding their merit, and then bring them to an editorial board for final approval for publication. Another was the written editing of the musical syntax, text accents, and so on.

My first written editorial tasks included “Not by Might, Not by Power” by Debbie Friedman and *Nishmat Chayim* by Michael Isaacson. My first marketing task was the collected works of Jack Gottlieb. My reaction: Hollywood, Broadway, folk/rock! What kind of Jewish music is this? I questioned the overwhelming influence of theater and screen, of the American folk music scene, of the total absence of *nusakh* or “Jewish” themes. In my conversations with these and other composers, we discussed the following concepts:

- The *bimah* serves as a theater, a theater to God. Why not use music of theater to sing to God?
- What is *nusakh*? Why are we obligated to use Ashkenazic or Sephardic traditions? Why can’t we create an American *nusakh*, an American tradition?

And so we have created this American Jewish *nusakh*. It was born in the summer camps of the various youth and synagogue movements. As the young have matured, a “collective memory” is developing. It is different from the melodic memory of other traditions. Time and future generations will test its capacity to endure or to adapt with the changes of time.

Judith Tischler, former director of Transcontinental Music Publications, is now a professor at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.

David Burger

These are the ancient (60 years? 70?) questions that have so plagued the American-Jewish musical community, or shall I say the Jewish-American musical community—which, in a way, is the point of your inquiry. I can only speak for myself, but some premises seem apparent to me:

First, the music is not Jewish simply by virtue of the fact that it was written by a Jew: my criterion is that the music or the text has to be of Jewish origin (liturgical, historical, or cultural). Otherwise, it’s music that happens to be written by a Jew.

Second, the music is not American unless it is culturally American: just being American doesn’t guarantee that the composer is writing American music. Straight klezmer by American musicians is still straight klezmer. For that matter, one doesn’t need to be born and bred in the United States to write American music: just listen to the Beatles.

A Symposium on American Jewish Music (begins on page 7)

As to your questions:

1) American Jewish music is particularly informed by the American culture and music that surrounds the composer. It must always have been so: Copland was influenced by America's folk tunes and hymns, at least later in his career, when he wasn't directly under Boulanger's influence (not that that was anything but constructive, but he did write in a more generically cosmopolitan manner then, and only found the "American" voice with which we associate his music later on); Gershwin was moved by jazz and blues (although his clarinet does sound particularly klezmer-like sometimes, which suggests another thesis, namely, that there are connections between black and Jewish music that may not yet have been adequately examined; I know my direct association with black music via Richie Havens has left its mark on my sensibility); Bernstein was obviously directly influenced by all of the above and often had a particularly "American" sound, at least when he wasn't using devices such as *haftarah* trope as his raw material. And many later composers that I've spoken to have been influenced by those I've mentioned. So, I think it safe to say that by calling it American Jewish music, we are referring to music that is more influenced by American culture than by Jewish culture; if the equations were different, the result would be Jewish music that only happens to be written by Americans.

2) To me, Jewish American music is Jewish only insofar as the text or the context is Jewish. I don't know that there is anything particularly Jewish about my own compositions except for the textual sources: they are all that makes my music Jewish, and that's enough for me. And the texts are usually all that separates my work from that of American composers who weren't lucky enough to be born into the tribe.

3) In answer to your third question, in my own experience, my everyday life is consistently informed by the fact of my Jewishness. I am usually conscious of the fact that this is what makes me who I am, and that I am steeped in that particular culture and outlook. This is the case even

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Sun, July 21, 2002, 9:00 pm: North American Jewish Choral Festival, Nevele Hotel, Ellenville, NY. 212-362-3335. zamirfdn.org.

when my sensibilities are overtaken by Elizabethan chord structure, Scots-Irish folk music, the backrelating fourths and defiant syncopation of rock or the mordant pathos of Gorecki: as soon as I am once again conscious of who I am, culturally, I am aware that, as a Jew, I am "other." That may, in fact, go a long way toward explaining why I also connect emotionally to all of the above; they all have something of the other in them, which is part of why I find them arresting. So, to the extent that anything Jewish pervades the music or context of Jewish American composers, the life and times of that composer are reflected in his/her work. But the way in which that happens has to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. In other words, there's no easy answer to your third question.

I think it's possible that all of these considerations may be ones of semantics.

I don't know if any of this is useful, or if it even makes sense to anyone but me. But that too is a reflection of who I am as a composer, as a Jew, and as an American. You can put those three appellations in any order you wish. (But please, no jokes about appellation spring!)

David Burger is a composer and performer living in New York City.

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