

Music in the Synagogue.

By A. W. BINDER.

In this article Mr. A. W. Binder, a noted American musician and Director of Music for the Y.M.H.A.'s of New York, discusses the place of music in the Synagogue. In the field of Jewish music, Mr. Binder's operettas and arrangements of Palestinian, East European and Synagogue music have become authoritative.

The story is told of a young man living in Poland who was unable to secure a wife from a religious family, because he could not distinguish the difference between the kiddash tune of the Sabbath and that of the holy days. For in former years this was an important part of the educational equipment of the Jew.

Almost every Jew knew how to chant all of the home services; knowing also the different tunes and modes of each. It was quite frequent to find a large number of men in a community who could read the Torah with the traditional trop, and could lead the religious service at any time of the year with the proper tunes and proper modal prayer-motifs. Some of the ordinary tradesmen in a community could, in many cases, do even better than the salaried cantors. And if per accident the Baal Tfiloh or the cantor would change or mistake one traditional tune for another, snickering and humming could be heard from all parts of the synagogue. One could rest assured that that cantor would not be re-engaged for the following year, or if he were a real Baal Tfiloh he would not be allowed to mount the pulpit again.

We are even told of the wife who refused to allow her husband to drink the kiddash wine, because he had made a mistake in the kiddash melody.

The Prayer-Motifs.

In past generations the nussach or modal prayer-motifs were adhered to with great religiosity. The Jew could not conceive of Sabbath Eve service without the beautiful mode which was associated with V'shomru. How could he truly believe that it was the Sabbath day without the Yissmach Moshe mode, or the Misheberach style? What would Passover be without its traditional Seder and synagogue tunes, or Hallel modes? And would the New Year or Day of Atonement be complete without its sacred chants, like those of the Kiddash, the Pijutrim, the Avodah, or the Neetah?

These are but a few of the traditional modes which were zealously guarded by our forefathers. For in Rabbinic literature we very often come across passages which tell us of those like in our own day who attempted to bring into the synagogue secular and popular melodies of the day. Many were the attempts to substitute these for the existing traditional modes, and many were the Rabbinic assaults which these innovators encountered. For the Rabbis maintained that in these traditional Nischoath lay the spirit of the Jew. Take these away from

the synagogue, and you rob the synagogue of a most precious and most spiritual heritage. For in our prayers and in our melodies the innermost soul of the Jew finds expression.

As time went on and the art of music developed these modal prayer-motifs came into their own. With the development of choral music, and the reinstatement of the choir and organ into the modern synagogue, Jewish musicians took to the task of developing the choral art of their houses of worship. Many were the cantors and choirmasters who undertook the task of composing music for the synagogue. All sorts of styles and schools developed.



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But it was not until the appearance of Solomon Sulzer, the famous Viennese cantor in 1826, that the attempt to utilize the synagogue nussach in the newly developed synagogue choral music was made.

Sulzer's chief contribution through his two volumes of "Shir Zion" lies in the fact that he laid the foundation for the manner and style through which the nussach could be embodied in the classical forms. More so in his treatment of the recitatives for the cantor than in his choral parts. His logical successor to this task was Louis Lewandowski (1823-1894), who in his two volumes of "Todah V's'mrah," developed the style and foundation which Sulzer began to build, but in a much broader manner. Then came Naumbourg in Paris, and Weintraub in Koenigsburg, who were able to weave these precious modal prayer-motifs, not only into the sections allotted to the choir. But the synagogue composer par excellence was really David Nowakowsky of Odessa. Nowakowsky was a man who, in his own quiet way, sat in

Odessa and composed work after work for the synagogue in which he was choirmaster, and the late Pinchas Minkowsky, the cantor. This Nowakowsky was surely a genius. For in his only two short published works, which consist of "Shir David," a Sabbath Eve service, and Neelah (the closing services for the Day of Atonement), and a few manuscript works which have been circulated around the Jewish musical world, one feels such musicianship, such grandeur and above all, such wonderful Jewish spirit expressed, as never before. One must only hear his "Ana Tavoh" (Day of Atonement Service) for double chorus to realize the immensity of his Jewish soul and his marvellous musicianship.

In between these great masters, and in our own day, there have been and are still such men as Grunzweig, Gerovitch, Lowenstamm, Shorr Rose, Zivi, Birnbaum and the very talented Samuel Alman of London and many others of merit.

In our own country the greatest contribution to synagogue music has been made by the late Josef Stark, who for many years was the cantor of Temple Emanuel of San Francisco, was imbued with the spirit of the synagogue and its music from early childhood. This opportunity he later on used, when he took to composing synagogue music,

to the, at that time, new version of the prayer book, now known as the Union Prayer Book. Of the majority of his works, it may be said that they are not only distinguished for their musical value, but also for the fact that they adhere in detail, or in spirit, to the traditional musical modes of the synagogue.

These great men of genius realized the importance of genuine "Music for the Synagogue." The leaders and the Rabbis of most of the modern synagogues of Europe realized the all important part which music played in Jewish worship; that the proper music at the proper time, not only set the right tone and the right spirit, but was really the backbone of the service and the background to the sermon.

In our country conditions are deplorable. There is, first of all, very little realization of the importance of the traditional Nussach of the various services. We sometimes hear a Rosh-Hashana "Kedushah" on an ordinary Sabbath, as well as other exchanges that are similarly sad. We are constantly borrowing melodies from secular sources, and in reform synagogues seventy per cent. of the music which has been composed for the Union Prayer Book, and of the music which is sung, has been composed by non-Jews.

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