

EARLY HEBREW MUSIC.

By **BORIS CANIN.**

Many nations accredited the origins of their musical instruments and melodies to gods and superhuman beings. Plato said that Egyptians ascribed the invention of their music and musical instruments to the Deities, Osiris, Isis and Hermes. The Hebrews, on the other hand, attributed it to man; Jubal, the sixth descendant from Cain, is mentioned by Moses as "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Gen. 4:21).

No mention is made in the Scriptures of a general practice of music until more than 600 years after the deluge. In Genesis 31, verses 26 and 27, we learn that both vocal and instrumental music were in common use about 1700 B.C. according to Hebrew chronology.

The first Biblical hymn recorded is the song of Moses (Sirath Hayyam); its text is based on the pious jubiliations of Moses after the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage by their miraculous passage of the Red Sea. On this occasion, Moses is seconded by Miriam, who, according to the passage found in Exodus 15:20, "took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." In this instance we observe that women were permitted to take part in the performance of religious ceremonies, and that singing, accompanied and unaccompanied by instruments, as well as dancing, formed part of these rites.

During the reign of David, music was held in the highest esteem by the Hebrews; numerous Biblical references bear out the tradition that David, who was himself an excellent player on the lyre or kinor, and composer of psalms, did much to bring Hebrew music to a high state of perfection and extend its use greatly in all religious rites and ceremonies.

"And David, and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals and with trumpets" (1 Chron. 13:8).

Chapters XVI to XXV of the first book of Chronicles give an account of the singers and its instrumentalists appointed by David in the service of the Ark, before a temple was erected. In 1 Chron. 1:23, David is said to have appointed 4,000 Levites for performance of sacred music.

The profession of music was hereditary among the Hebrews; all musical offices in the Temple were relegated to members of the Levitical family. Each particular branch of the Levite group had a Chief, some of the principal leaders being Asaf, Heman, Ethan, Jeduthun and Cheneniah. These smaller branches of the Levite family were further distinguished by the special musical function performed in the Temple service.

Thus one group led the singing, while other groups played on the trumpets, drums or pipes.

The orchestra employed in the Temple comprised the following instruments: Nevel, a large harp, which according to Josephus, was played with the fingers; Kinor, a small lyre, for which a plectrum was used; this instrument, which was supposed to have been the invention of Jubal

(Gen. 4:21) was the favourite instrument of David. Rabbinic records state that David suspended the kinor over his pillow during the night—both of these stringed instruments were used in public and religious ceremonies.

The Shofar, a long ram's horn trumpet that has been preserved to the present day in the religious services of the Jewish people; it is still blown in the synagogue, as in ancient times, at the Jewish New Year's festival. The shofar, however, was used primarily for purposes of announcements and signals during the religious service rather than for musical reasons; Elijah is supposed to tell of the coming of the Messiah by blowing on it. The Chatzotzera, a trumpet made of silver, and about two feet in length, was used for signalling during religious ceremonies; this instrument was played both by priests and Levites. A reproduction of the chatzotzera is found on the arch of Titus in Rome. The Uggav, a form of syrinx or pipe, was an ancient wind instrument associated with the early days of the first Temple; the Halil or Chalil, a large pipe, somewhat like the Greek anlos, was used in secular festivities as well as in religious functions. Because of its great tonal power, the halil was used for processional purposes.

The Alamoth was a form of a double-pipe; the Magrepha, a species of pipe-organ, is said to have been a powerful organ which stood in the Temple at Jerusalem. The magrepha consisted of a wind-chest constructed of skin, with ten holes, containing ten pipes. Since each hole was able to produce ten different sounds, the instrument was capable of producing a thousand different tones. Authorities do not know whether the magrepha was a bagpipe, organ, or a Kettle-drum. It is said that the instrument's powerful tone could be heard as far as Jericho. The chief function of the Magrepha was its use in summoning the priests and Levites to their duties. The Tof, a small hand-drum or tambourine, was used in celebrations; Miriam employed this instrument when she led the women of Israel in songs of joy over the destruction of Pharaoh's host; King David also used it at the installation of the Ark in Jerusalem. The Metziltayim or Tziltzal was a cymbal made of copper; Asaf, chief musician of David, played the cymbal. The Paannonim were little bells which were attached to the skirts of the robe worn by the High Priest.

According to Mishnaic sources, the following number of instruments were used in the Temple services: Nevel, two to six; Kinor, nine or more; cymbal, one; Halil, two to twelve. The chorus, according to the same source, consisted of at least twelve adult male singers—the number of singers was not limited in amount. After a five-year period of training, the chorister was admitted to the choir at the age of 30, and usually remained for 20 years. Nothing is known about the actual music performed in the Temple. The Hebrews left no theoretical works, as did the

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Habonim Hit'harut.

The 1939 Hit'harut for the Kirschner Levenim took place at Jaffe's Farm, Grassy Park, on Sunday and Monday, 6th and 7th inst. Save that the weather and condition of the ground prevented the competitors from sleeping over, the competition proceeded according to schedule.

Undaunted by the threat of rain and an occasional drizzle, the twelve qevutzot (each consisting of six bonim or bonot) carried on full of good spirits. Even the serious fact that coveted trophies were at stake did nothing to suppress the fun and comradeship which permeates Habonim.

This year's Hit'harut takes Western Province Habonim a step nearer to its aim of a complete week-end under canvas. More than that, it takes it a great leap forward towards its greater aim: to instil the practice of halutzit. It would have been easy to call the event off at the threat of rain, and on the advice (unsought) of panic-makers. But life for our people is not everywhere easy, and Habonim must fully understand what that means. In any case, those on the spot knew best, and those with the pluck had the luck—and the rain remained an empty threat.

The 45 individual competitions ranged from such mundane matters as making a brown stew to making a plasticene model of bringing first fruits to the Temple; from the geography of Eretz Israel to attending to a sprained ankle.

It was this (nowadays) strange mixture of Jewish and everyday life that caused Rabbi Abrahams to say it was a "Hit'harut (unity) rather than a Hit'harut (competition)," when he presented the Bonim Levenah after Mrs. Abrahams had presented that for Bonot.

The winning Bonot team was from Gedud Naomi (Wynberg), which repeated its success of last year, with Zionah (Gardens) runner-up.

The winning Bonim team was from Gedud Tel-Aviv (Wynberg), last year's runner-up, with Tel-Hai (Gardens) runner-up.

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Greeks, because their music was handed down from generation to generation by oral tradition only.

With the destruction of the Temple, the practice of instrumental music was banned; only vocal music found a place in the new synagogue. The Hebrews adopted a system of written signs, called cantillation, in order to retain the original Biblical intonations. This system was probably one of the first attempts at musical notation.

סי'ס אגודת-אחים

New Hebrew Congregation,
ROELAND STREET, CAPE TOWN.

Rabbi H. PALEY

Principal, Ohel Torah, Jerusalem.

WILL PREACH BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE
FOR PALESTINE.

On Saturday, 12th inst., at 5 p.m.

Subject:

"THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE."