

# Impressions of Ein Gev Music Festival.

By

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Ein Gev is situated on the slope of the hills that form the border of Palestine and Syria. Ten years ago the spot was a desert, with thorny shrubs and heavy stone barring the way of the wanderer. Today, the communal settlement of Ein Gev harbours some four hundred souls, a hundred and fifty of them healthy and happy little children born on the place; the houses are surrounded by evergreen meadows and palm trees; a little port has risen on the shore of the lake; bananas, vegetables, flowers, and little woods have replaced the shrubs and the stones. Trees have been grown and terraces built on the slopes of the stony hills, and a veritable beach invites you to bathe in the lake. Imagination, pioneer spirit, hard work and endurance have transformed a seemingly unyielding bit of desert into the little paradise it is today. Life is still difficult for the settlers of Ein Gev and it will certainly continue to be so for a good many years to come, but those young people know that there are ways of overcoming the hardships of life by turning to the eternal values of mankind, to the great works of art the spirit of man has produced. Almost from the first days of the settlement, the young people of Ein Gev have cultivated relations with those artists in the country who did not mind the then lengthy and difficult journey and the primitiveness of settlement life; today there is hardly a settlement in Palestine that has so great a number of artist-friends, who use every free day or week-end to hurry to the oasis in the desert on the other side of the Lake of Galilee.

It is thus that the idea of a Music Festival at Ein Gev was born. When the French pianist Loyonnet visited the settlement last year and some other musicians either happened to be there or were especially invited, a Festival Week was almost improvised. This year the Music Festival was organised well beforehand, and some leading musicians and singers were asked to participate; many more would have liked to come and take part as well. The recreation home, opened only a few weeks before, was overbooked—150 people applied for the 30 beds so far available and in Tiberias no accommodation was available either. Every night, from the beginning of the Passover—Easter week to its close, the Kinneret flotilla brought some two hundred friends of good music—or just lovers of romantic nights—from Tiberias to Ein Gev, and about midnight the boats sailed back across the moonlit lake. Enthusiasts those nightly tourists were, for when on the last night of the concert week a prospective visitor did not mind his step and jumped into the water instead of embarking, he went straight back to his hotel and returned in the nick of time—having just had time to change dress—and sailed to enjoy the recital of that great artist of the piano, Stefan Ashkenase.

The Music Festival was opened by a sonata recital given by Lorand Fenyves, the youthful violinist, and Pinna Salzman, who gave a recital of her own the following day. On Monday night, Miriam Sheffer, young and charming

Palestinian-born soprano, and Nissim Rosenthal, a fine baritone who is a member of the Ein Gev settlement, presented arias and duets from the operas of Mozart, with Werner Sommerfeld at the piano. Dr. Sommerfeld, a well-known Tel Aviv lawyer and an experienced and versatile amateur pianist (who at one time led a chamber opera long before the Palestine Orchestra and the Folk Opera came into existence), is one of the promoters of the Ein Gev Festival idea; for he has made the place his second home and in the course of the years taken many of his musician friends there. He was also at the piano in a fine Trio evening in which he played two Schubert Trios and a Beethoven work with Zvi Zeitlin and Daniel Hofmekler. A Schubert concert was given by the Bernstein Quartet (Bernstein—Silber—Blumberg—Katz) and Daniel Hofmekler, and highlight of the week was the classical chamber music evening in which Erich Toeplitz, the Palestine Orchestra flutist, Zvi Zeitlin, Gideon Strauss and Daniel Hofmekler presented music by Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. Miriam Sheffer and Erich Toeplitz also gave a concert for children.

The Festival Week was crowned by the piano recital of Stefan Ashkenase. Music-lovers from the settlements of Galilee and the Jordan Valley came on trucks and in boats in addition to the Tiberias visitors, and the Dining-Hall (where the concerts took place) and the meadows around it were crowded for the occasion. Ashkenase played Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti and Mozart and Beethoven, and 12 Chopin Etudes; especially the Scarlatti and Mozart were feasts for music-lovers. Every evening after last boats had taken their load of visitors back to Tiberias the indefatigable artists had given the Ein Gev community a "Second Programme" that never ended before two o'clock; the last night Ashkenase himself, seemingly as overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of his listeners as the music-lovers were by his fine music, gave a complete second recital himself—with works by J. S. Bach, Haydn, Chopin, and Stravinsky. And when the pianist retired just before two o'clock, the remaining artists—Erich Toeplitz, Miriam Sheffer, Nissim Rosenthal, Zvi Zeitlin, Robert Starer, and W. Sommerfeld improvised even a "Third Programme" consisting of no less than a Mozart Flute Concerto, a "Queen of the Night" aria from the "Magic Flute", a Verdi aria, and the G major Rondo by Mozart-Kreisler. The Ein Gev Musical ended at four o'clock on Sunday morning, April 13, but the settlers and their visitors were still celebrating when at five the morning star rose over the Sussita hill. . . . At 5:15 the first boat carried visitors back to their homes and places of work, and an hour later the settlement became its ordinary self again, with its inhabitants returning to the rooms they had given over to the visitors and then going out to work in the fields and the byres, in the boat-house and the carpentry, in the bakery and the kitchen.

I cannot say that the programmes performed in the course of the week were the ideal programmes for a Pales-

tinian festival. It was a little saddening to note that not a single work by a Palestine composer and in fact—with the exception of Ashkenase's Stravinsky selection—no contemporary music at all got a place in the concerts. Though it is still difficult to say what should really be asked from an occasion of the kind, there can be no doubt that every effort should be made to find a style for the Palestinian Festival just as every festival abroad has a style of its own, often conditioned by the very nature of the place. Drama and the dance should probably have their say here, such as it is the idea of Mrs. Lilian Friedlander for the festivals at Zichron Yaacov, and composers could well be asked to contribute to the festival idea. Ein Gev is dreaming of a tent-camp to accommodate some hundred festival guests, and an amphitheatre is to be erected in the open air. I think the ideal realisation of a Palestine Festival could be achieved when the artists taking part in it could assemble in camp for a week or two and prepare the festival together—working on the programmes and their presentation in friendly and inspiring collaboration, in much greater leisure than this can be done in the bustling town-life. The enthusiasm of the settlers and the artists is there, and a hospitality that is hard to surpass, and so little tired were the artists even during the week that they embarked with Dr. Sommerfeld on a concert-visit to another settlement on the only free evening they had.

But not all artists are fit for pioneer efforts of the kind, nor did all visitors realise the true character of the occasion, and amusing incidents were not missing. One artist demanded that the concert should be preceded by an address telling the audience of the artist's success abroad (which none of those present had actually witnessed) and was very particular about the stage-lights, while another did not mind selling ice-cream in the intervals to the visitors in the little pavilion on the seashore. Strolling round once during the second part of a concert to see something of the atmosphere "round about" the concert hall, I also noticed that a large number of visitors were music-lovers who preferred the concert of birds in the palm-trees and of whispering grass to the sounds of a Schubert or Beethoven work and who seemed to compose a pastoral symphony of their own. One night, there arrived at the settlement twenty-five young people introducing themselves as a "Friends of Music" Circle from Tel Aviv and asked for accommodation. There was no other possibility but offering them the spacious reading-room, on the walls of which an exhibition of picture by Genia Maiselis had been arranged. The "Friends of Music" did not attend the concert, by the way, and I have a strong suspicion that they presented themselves as a "Friends of Farming" Circle when proceeding the following morning to another, agricultural, settlement. One lady, on the other hand, a guest at the resthouse, was terribly disappointed and hurt that one evening of the seven she spent at Ein Gev was free of concerts!

The organisation and success of the musical week can make the settlers of Ein Gev proud indeed, and the Festival opens a new chapter in the adventurous and many-coloured history of the communal settlements. The exemplary hospitality and friendly atmosphere, together with the romantic landscape, made the week a unique experience for all those privileged to be present. There is no reason why the idea of an annual Festival should not succeed and

Continued in Fourth Column.

## Development of Folkdance in Palestine Settlements.

Jerusalem.

The Histadruth's Cultural Committee invited dance groups from various settlements to Tel Aviv to show the city the development reached by the villages in their evolution of the indigenous folkdance. Two well-attended performances in the Habima Building, Tel Aviv, testified to the keen interest of the public.

A series of colourful folk and festival dances was presented.

It was a joy to see how these young people had been trained and to observe the release which dancing gave them from their hard work during the day through physical and mental relaxation. Gymnastics do not fulfil the same purpose; they are not rooted in the character of a people.

We saw dances stemming from Eastern Europe, both Jewish and others, and dances born in present-day Palestine, with an Asiatic background. And we made the surprising discovery that Eastern European Jewish dances, such as "Sherele," despite their admitted charm, seemed less familiar than the dances which have come to life here. They were somewhat archaic, more like a fancy-dress dance, a homage to tradition. Our own folk dances were the real thing, instinct with pastoral feeling and danced with consummate grace by the young girls and enthusiastic zeal by the men.

The settlements of Beth Alpha, Ein Harod, Ben Shemen, Ein Hashofet, Gan Shmuel and Nahalal and the Hapoel Organisation of Tel Aviv had sent these delightful groups.

"Palestine Post."

Jerusalem.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Anglo-Palestine Bank here, Mr. Siegfried Hoofien, General Manager of the Bank and Netherlands Consul in Jerusalem, was co-opted as a member of the Board.

Mr. Hoofien, one of the leading Palestine economists, is 65 years old. On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday a grove was planted in his name at Maale Chamisha in the hills of Judea.

Continued from Third Column.

why in the course of the years there should not be developed a form and style suiting the particular Palestinian atmosphere, just as the Salzburg, Bayreuth, Prague, Glyndebourne, or Tanglewood festivals are held in the spirit of their place.

"Radio Week," Jerusalem.

GREEN AND SEA POINT HEBREW SCHOOL.

A

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