



Cantor Chagy

Jewish Music

By

Berele Chagy

THE average Jew is more fond of singing than of playing. This is not simply a coincidence, but a heritage handed over from generation to generation.

THE love for singing in preference to instrumental music has been implanted within the Jew since the days of the destruction of the Second Temple when, as a sign of mourning, our sages forbade the use of such instruments as were played in the Temple. In its place singing was introduced in the synagogue and, in the course of time, it developed to such an extent until, as a result of the tireless efforts of such great Jewish musicians as Weintraub, Seltzer, Lavendovsky and others, it assumed a modern character.

But in the very early development of Jewish music, instruments played an important part. In fact, various instruments were used on every important occasion. One of them—and in those days the most important—being the Ram's horn or Shofar, which was undoubtedly the most popular musical instrument among Jews. Although Jews utilised various other instruments which are still to be found among modern orchestras, nevertheless the Shofar is the only instrument of its kind which can rightly be called a Jewish instrument, because the Jews were the first to make use of it. All Jewish Holy days, years of remission (Shmitos), and days of mourning were announced by means of a Shofar. To the sounds of the Shofar the Jews received the Ten Commandments, and under Joshua they made good use of the Shofar in order to conquer the strong fortification of Jericho. On every occasion of war or other important happening, the Shofar was employed, and thus it undoubtedly played a most important role in Jewish life during the building of the first and second Temples.

The extent to which this instrument was beloved among Jews can be seen from the fact that the prophet, witnessing the suffering of the Jews in the Diaspora, comforts them with the enthusiastic promise that the day will arrive when God will take pity on His people and

then will be heard the sounds of a loud Shofar which will gather together the scattered remnants in the lands of Ashur and Mitzraim (Egypt) and bring them to Jerusalem where they will pay homage to God to the sounds of its tunes.

IT is really wonderful to observe to what extent the Jews have sanctified the Shofar. To this very day religious Jews consider it a solemn duty for every Jew to listen to the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh Hashonah or New Year. Old and young, men and women through the synagogues in order to listen to the sounds of the Shofar. And perchance, the sound is interrupted, a great fear overcomes the whole assembly as if a great misfortune had occurred. After the long fast of Yom Kippur, no one will dare to leave the Synagogue until he has heard the Shofar blown for the last time that day. The man who blows the Shofar, in addition to being skilled in his art, must also be learned and God-fearing, because the religious Jew firmly believes that Satan is frightened by the tunes of the Shofar. A religious Jew will even take an oath by his hope of hearing the Shofar of the Messiah.

Consequently, in the first period of its existence as a nation, singing was of very little importance to the Jewish people. With the exception of the song which the Jews sang on crossing the Red Sea and the singing of Deborah the prophetess, there is hardly any reference to singing by the Jews in the whole Bible. Singing only developed at a later period and, as far as we know, King David was the one who wrote the first psalms. Being himself very musical, he must certainly have made a few instruments of his own and organised an orchestra composed of four thousand people among whom were 280 masters, who, after his death, sang and played his psalms in the Temple which was built by his son Solomon.

The instruments which were used in the Temple were composed of harps (not more than six and not less than two), violins with ten strings (not less than nine), wind-instruments (not less than two and not more than 120), and one cymbal. They also had drums which were slightly different from our modern ones; while in the orchestra could be found flutes. The orchestra had three directors:—

JEDUTHUM was the director of the violins, Asaf—of the harps, and Heisan—of the cymbals. The directors did not direct with their hands, but were the first to start playing and were then accompanied by the choir and the orchestra. Everything was destroyed after the first destruction and when the Second Temple was built it was revived again on a smaller scale but in a more developed form.

The singing in those days was undoubtedly done in unison, no effort being made to harmonise even as far as the orchestra was concerned. At the time of the Second Temple the choir already plays the most important role, the orchestra just accompanying. So well trained was the choir that it could manage quite easily without the accompaniment of an orchestra. In fact very often, after its performance in the Temple, the choir used to visit and sing in the Synagogues which were to be found in those days in Jerusalem in order to accommodate the surplus pilgrims who were unable to gain admittance to the Temple on account of their large numbers. There were much less prayers than are to be found in our modern praying book. The whole service was composed of a few prayers which the Priest himself used to recite and a few chapters of the Psalms sung by the Choir of Levites while the congregation answered from time to time, Amen, Halleluyah, or "Ki Leolam Chasdo."

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Importance of a Hebrew Culture

New Year Message

From

Mr. HARRY LOURIE,

President of the South African Board of Jewish Education.



ONE prayer we must one and all devoutly offer to Providence on the forthcoming High Festivals: That our "She'erith Hapeleitah" שְׂאֵרֵית הַפֵּלֵיטָה—the small remnant of our community—may combine with a united effort to counter the forces of destruction which surround us, that the various sections of our community may forget their internal differences and show towards each other that spirit of toleration which we as a nation so naturally expect from other nations; that the importance of a virile, Hebrew culture—so fundamental to our very existence—be realised, and to this end, our Hebrew educational structure be strengthened; for only in this way will our sons and daughters be able to develop that inner strength from which they will surely have to draw in days to come.

To those earnestly imbued with the Zionist's spirit and its duties, I wish to quote the few words recently uttered by our beloved and highly esteemed leader, Dr. Nahum Sokolow, at the Zionist Congress: "We consider it the undeniable duty of a national Zionist organisation to further and advance our national literature, as it influences to a great extent the realization of our ideal. The thoughts, now taking root in modern Jewry, were born in the Hebrew literature; in it they were clearly established, and from it they shall continue to radiate."

JEWISH MUSIC.

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THE melodies of those days were nearly always in the Oriental style, the one exception being the well known Ozeish melody which has a modern sound. As far as we know this self-same melody was sung in the Temple. Among Portuguese Jews it is an accepted fact that this is the identical melody which the Jews sang on crossing the Red Sea. Jewish Liturgy possesses a greater wealth of original music than that of any other nation and yet one cannot state with any degree of certainty which were and which were not sung in the Temple. Only the sounds of the Shofar are probably exactly the same as in the Temple, perhaps the same can be said for "Sh-ma Yisroel" and the melody of the "Yomin Noroim." The oldest psalm-melody is that of Nizmor Shir L'yom Hashabos," which is sung even to-day by the Spanish, Portuguese and Yemenite Jews. There is also a melody which is sung in some Synagogues in the evenings—"Lamnatseiach Binginos." It is believed that this melody

which has a number of variations, was sung in the Second Temple. The tunes in vogue at present in the reading of the Torah are also very ancient among Jews and are similar to Armenian and Greek music of the same period, although among the Armenians they sound very monotonous whereas among us they are colourful and pleasant.

The notes according to which the Torah is read are really the same as music notes and express the same thing as modern notes. The difference between "Nezinos" (Jewish Notes) and modern notes lies only in the fact that a "note" represents one sound whereas a "Neginah" very often represents a whole phrase. The melodies of the "Nezinos" differ from each other. There is a special melody for Saturday, one for the "Haftorah," for the "M'Zileh," for "Eichah," and for New Year—each one has its own particular melody. The "Nezinos" were composed by men of Tiberius in, about, the 17th Century and they probably also collected the different melodies for them which were handed down from generation to generation and have remained unchanged to this very day.

The real development of Jewish music began with the development of Jewish poetry, which in those days was dedicated practically entirely to the Synagogue and was composed more or less of prayers and songs of praise to God. That poetry is called "Piyut." Special music original or borrowed, was composed for these "Piyutim," and when it was introduced into the Synagogues, it is quite understood that a person with a melodious voice, was obtained to sing them. Then began the period of Cantors which has enriched Jewish music and which prevented the traditional liturgical music from being forgotten.

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