

Jews as Creative Musicians

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EVER since "higher Anti-Semitism" made its appearance on the intellectual horizon in Germany, the Jews have been subjected to the reproach that they are devoid of creative musical genius. This chord of discord has been harped upon in a single key. Even such fanatics as Wagner, Renan, Voltaire, etc., did not deny that the Jews played an important and prominent part in the musical affairs of the world, but of course their contention was that they were merely influential factors rather than leaders, and that at most they can be said to possess talent—creative genius being outside their sphere.

The relation between the ordinary Jew-baiting and the "scientific" anti-Semitism of Wagner, Renan or Voltaire can scarcely be delineated.

Deplorable as it is that the distorted views of the cynic Voltaire, the renegade Renan and the highly gifted but just as highly conceited and egotistic Richard Wagner should enjoy such a wide vogue among the intellectuals with an artistic bent of mind, it is nothing more than pathetic to find that even so many of our own people are carried away by the prestige of these men, and accept their pronouncements as "Sacrosanct."

This is due perhaps to the fact that the musical theorists, encyclopaedists and historians have always slurred and have treated in a niggardly fashion the great genius of the Jews in music, and it will be many decades before the place of the Jews in the development of music is even approximately established.

LET us turn a few pages of ancient history and note from the start a fact worthy of serious attention. The author of Genesis names Jubal, the son of Lemach, as the inventor of music. Later on we see in the Biblical passages reference to the musical attainments of Miriam, David, Deborah, and the cravings of Saul for musical expression. Still further, we find that the musical services of the Temple formed part and parcel of Israel's ritual, and only a slight acquaintance with the Psalms is sufficient to convince even the most skeptical of the musical appreciation of the Hebrews 3,000 years ago and earlier.

Contrary to the apologetic mention of some sympathetic historians as to the musical sense among the ancient Jews, much about Greek music has been written.

The Greek modes and the tetrachords have been expatiated in the greatest of detail, but in spite of many centuries of research in this field, very little is known about the outstanding figures of Greek music.

What, then, constitutes the cause of the everlasting pondering over the achievement of the latter and the negligent mention of the former? Personally I believe it is the universal neglect of the musical historians to investigate the subject involved that is responsible for this gap. I feel that there is a vast amount of material to be obtained relative to the Jews in treatises of music written both in the earlier centuries and during our own time, before the great problem as to whether the latter was influenced by the former or *vice versa* can be solved.

But let us come back to the unfounded statement of our 19th century trio which has disturbed and yet influenced the minds of some of our co-religionists. Has the Jew established himself as an innovator in the realm of music? Indeed "yes." A brief survey of several names from the long gallery of Jewish musical geniuses will substantiate our statement.

THE first and foremost of these innovators was Timothy of Miletus, an ancient Jew and a contemporary of Plato. He not only revolutionised the musical form of that period, but added four new strings to the cithara. With the advent of Christianity we find that Jose Lucca, a Jew living in the northern part of Spain, has arranged the then unknown harmonic progression for a Catholic church hymn, borrowing some Rabbinical notes found in an ancient collection of plain song.

In the study of the Renaissance, we find a long list of names of Jewish composers, who were employed in the court of Pope Leo X, such as Jacopo Sansecoondo and Giovanni Maria. Also most noteworthy among them was the famous Salamone Rossi, who was the court musician and composer to the Duke Conagas of Mantau.

The Aryans may claim that they have given to the world the greatest three B composers, namely, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, but cannot we Jews also boast with pride of the same contribution, having given the three greatest M composers such as Meyerbeer, Mendelssohn and Mahler, who having lived in three differ-

ent centuries have created a specifically new and distinct form in music?

Among the ultra modernists of the present musical era who but Schonberg, Korngold, Ravel, Tansman, Tedesco, Florent Schmitt and Verprin can claim leadership? Poor Wagner; how his fulminations to stem the tide of Jewish influence in the world have come to naught. Would he not have turned in his grave if he knew that the music of Ravel, Dukas, Bloch and others have the supremacy over his at present?

WE have briefly indicated and surveyed the creative musical genius of the Jewish race since the first pages of Genesis until the present era. It has been remarked on more than one occasion that we have a tendency to appropriate many famous non-Jews as our own. But the matter of fact is that if anything our ignorance leads us to err in the opposite direction a hundred fold, because of the disguised names of so many celebrated Jews and their non-Jewish associations. The genius of the Jew in the realm of creative music is not and must not be disputed. In the Hall of Fame under the golden canopy supported by the millions of Jewish pillars—he stands erect and proud.

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