

About Books

Bridging a Gap

ISRAELI POETS

By DAVID PATTERSON

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MUSIC

By H. C. STEVENS

Jews in Music: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Present. By ARTHUR HOLD. Peter Owen. 30s.

Although, as the subtitle indicates, this book covers only the last two centuries of Jewish musical culture, within that period it casts its net very widely; indeed, it is a real rag-bag of a book: anyone who knows what a rich store of treasures a rag-bag can be will appreciate that the description is not necessarily uncomplimentary.

It begins with the development of modern liturgical music, tracing its history from the Enlightenment right down to the present day, and in its course revealing to English readers the wealth of synagogal music the last 50 years have produced in America. It goes on to discuss the contribution Jewish composers, conductors, and soloists, not to mention musicologists and literary men, have made to the musical culture of various countries, and devotes a whole chapter to the problem whether there is such a thing as a specifically Jewish style or approach to music.

But before this final chapter is reached, the author has dealt with such fascinating subjects as the Yiddish Singspiel, as it developed first in Eastern Europe and then in America (but with no reference to its brief efflorescence in England) and the Jewish contribution to opera, operetta, and musical comedy. There is a chapter discussing yet again "the Ideological Conflict, Antagonism to Jewish Music and Musicians," starting with Wagner and ending with Hitler and his victims. And there are 30 pages devoted to "The Music of Palestine-Israel."

The foregoing incomplete summary indicates why one refers to the work as a "rag-bag": it is full of a great variety of miscellaneous information, with no real attempt to co-ordinate the material in an organic whole, such as would be achieved by a straightforward, comprehensive history. On the other hand, the very heterogeneity of the information makes the book valuable. If it has a decidedly American slant, that in

some respects is of additional service to the English reader, for it shows how very much is being done in the United States in the fields of liturgical and secular composition, as well as in the scientific branches of musicology, collection, and documentation of materials, and historical research. Thus the specialist, whether writer or musician, will find the three chapters on collectors of manuscripts, books, and music, on the Foundations, and Institutions, and Organisations, of very great assistance.

The small bibliography and the ten-page index of names are both useful, though neither is fully adequate. It is the index which most clearly lays bare the omissions in the work. When reading the text one might not notice that a number of Jewish musicians of the past and present are not mentioned at all. It is surprising to find no reference to Pechmann, nor to the Hambourgs, Mark, Boris, and Jan, and their father Michael. Are we to understand that they were not of Jewish origin?

Composers and Conductors

Among the conductors one finds no reference to Walter Goehr and Harry Newstone, though Norman del Mar and Harry Stech are mentioned. Perhaps it is too soon to expect an American publication to give the names of Alexander Goehr and Samuel Lipkin among composers, but surely Ben Frankel has been composing long enough? Still, more surprising is the omission of Arthur Benjamin's opera "Tale of Two Cities," which is now ten years old, though several of his earlier works are given. After that, it is not surprising to find no reference to a number of artists and conductors of Jewish origin who have come to the forefront in Britain and on the Continent during the last ten years.

But despite these criticisms (and, after all, a book has to stop somewhere, though it should be consistent in this as in other respects) "Jews in Music" is a useful contribution to the still incomplete catalogue of the Jewish musical heritage, and those who seek to study the subject will find it helpful, though erratic.

Jewish Values. By LOUIS JACOBS. Valentine, Mitchell. 21s.

Dr. Louis Jacobs's new book is a valuable and courageous attempt to bring into contemporary reference some of the values of traditional Judaism. Of these, it discusses eleven (the study of the Torah, the fear of Heaven, the love of God, the sanctification of the Name, trust in God, holiness, humility, the love of neighbour, compassion, truth, peace), first illustrating them from classical and more recent Jewish authorities, and then endeavouring to bring them into relation with the anxieties of our own age. The whole is prefaced by an important introduction. In it Dr. Jacobs explains what he means by the term values and in what sense those he treats of can be called Jewish.

He then proceeds to say that, since there is a "gap between the values of the past and the spiritual needs of the present," there is need of re-interpreting, in some part at least, some or all of them; but he maintains that "it is possible to build a strong bridge connecting the two." He recognises the fact that there are people who deny that a gap exists, as there are people who deny that the gap can be spanned. He disagrees with both sides and writes for the "thinking people" (and he expresses the hope that they form a "sufficient number") who "both see the gap and believe that it can be spanned." But he has no complete solutions to offer. Indeed, he looks upon his book as, "at the most, a surveyor's estimate of part of the work to be done."

Limits of Compassion

The treatment given to the individual topics named would seem to be fair and not overloaded to the credit side. An example may be offered from the chapter on Compassion (x). Dr. Jacobs first surveys the literature—Bible, Targum, Talmud, Prayer-book, Zohar, Codes, etc.—giving in each case some special and interesting point; but he notes that, while "pious resignation to the will of God is a virtue when practised on one's own behalf, it ceases to be a virtue when practised on behalf of others."

It follows that compassion has limits. It has to be "grounded in reason." Judaism, says Dr. Jacobs, knows two such limits. The first is that justice must be maintained; the second, that compassion is not for those who lack compassion themselves. The place of imagination is then discussed, and we are shown that we are required by Judaism to put ourselves into the place of the unfortunate; and at this point various instances are adduced of the delicacy of observation and feeling to be found in the literature, both early and late. All this seems to me to be excellent. One might perhaps have asked for a more systematic account, but this would require for the eleven values selected, not a modest 160 pages, but a large volume or even a series of volumes.

Ground for Appeal

Here perhaps we have ground not for complaint, but for appeal. All detail apart, could not Dr. Jacobs show us why just these values and not others are peculiarly Jewish, and why just these go together? Is there any one principle from which they all derive or around which they are naturally groupable? And are there not values which are even more characteristic of Judaism than some of those selected by Dr. Jacobs? After all, trust in God, humility, love of neighbour, and so on, are, as Dr. Jacobs himself remarks, common ideals of religious human-kind, and when he calls them Jewish it is because (as he says) they have a special emphasis, or present special distinguishing characters, in the tradition of Judaism, or (as he tells us, although I think less convincingly) because they have passed into the routine life of Jews. (It is one of the unsolved problems of religious education generally how to make "religious" people live up to their principles in actual practice.)

But are there not values unique to Judaism? Dr. Jacobs is in fact saying something of the sort when he singles out as his very first value the study of the Torah. The pursuit of knowledge as a religious duty (even, according to some, as the highest religious duty) would seem to be, indeed, without precedent. Of course, it all depends on the sort of knowledge which is pursued. Dr. Jacobs seems to confine it to "religious" know-

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American Jewish Year Book 1960, edited by Morris Fize and Milton Himmelfarb (American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society of America, 36), is Volume 61 of this indispensable reference book about Jewish communities in the United States and other countries.

ledge ("one or more of the great fields of Jewish learning"); the medieval philosophers, on the contrary, thought that knowledge covers all departments of thought. But whatever our view of this, surely the very idea of Halacha itself is, for the student of religions, unique.

Aggadah is common enough, as any general dictionary of mythology and folk-lore will show, and even the Chassidic anecdotes so much in favour today are suspiciously reminiscent of wonder-tales found elsewhere; but the Halacha which pours the Aggadah into a set mould is surely unique to Judaism. And, if so, does it not invite special study, not only in its detail, which is the province of the specialist, but in its idea as it impinges on (or is impinged on by) the moral values of holiness and trust and humility and the rest? I wonder whether it is because Dr. Jacobs is so close to the Halacha and so good an Halachist that he does not notice that Halacha (and not, as is so often thought, Aggadah) is, in the history of religion, something quite special. It also, in its detail, constitutes a quite special practical problem, and on that too, the "perplexed" of our day require guidance.

Dr. Jacobs would be the first to agree that in these days such guidance cannot be given by anathemas and excommunications. We need a sober and serious discussion of the view of life represented especially by the idea of Halacha, and a reasoned statement of its significance for the relationship between the human and the divine, which is summarily described as religion. We need in fact a "philosophy" of Judaism, which would take up the values treated of in this book by Dr. Jacobs as well as much beside, and would set them into the unified context of one intelligible whole.

Surveying the Scene

This is only to say again what I have already quoted Dr. Jacobs as saying himself in his introduction. There is a "gap" which both must be bridged and can be bridged. Dr. Jacobs claims for his book no more than the standing of a "surveyor's estimate." But even so, he should take warning that surveyor's work requires checking and rechecking. Travellers in India hear of bridges put up by the ever-resourceful and ever-benevolent experts of American Aid. They are imperishable structures made of the finest materials thrown indestructibly across what is now dry land: between project and execution the rivers themselves shifted their courses! The important thing is not only the strength of the bridge. One has to be sure first what the gap is which has to be spanned.

When I speak of the need for a philosophy of Judaism I do not mean a system of metaphysics. This may and will come in time, although there are few signs of it yet. I mean (as Dr. Jacobs would) a rethinking, in the light of the present time, of the implications of the tradition of Judaism. We should call to mind the nature and source of the influence exerted in the early years of the century by Schechter and Ahad Ha'am. They were both essayists, that is, casual writers, not authors of systematic treatises; but each separate essay of each one of them reflected a unified view which could be used as a general touchstone. Their writings may have been casual, but their opinions were not.

The bored young men of today need clear and distinct ideas. And (let us make no mistake) they want something deep. They demand a completely thought-out position, however, expressed in simple language. They want guidance for independent judgment.

This Dr. Jacobs has shown that he can give; and this new book of his is to be welcomed, not only for itself but as an earnest of still further expositions from his pen. Yelamdenu Rabbenu—may our rabbi teach us!

Israeli Poetry in Peace and War. By G. PREIL. New York: Herzl Institute Pamphlet No. 13. 25 cents.

The text of this pamphlet is based on two lectures delivered by its author at the Herzl Institute, New York, and, although it consists of four chapters, the first three maintain a certain loose cohesion, while the fourth is devoted to a separate theme. The major part of the pamphlet, therefore, is devoted to a discussion of the poetic qualities of three of the most important Israeli poets, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Leah Goldberg, and Shmuel Shalom. The author concludes that the one common denominator is their Jewish nationalism. But whereas Greenberg's approach is dynamic, with his dominant themes devoted to the decimation of Jewry and the survival of its remnants in the ancient homeland, Leah Goldberg writes in lyrical and subdued vein, expressing her patriotism in muted tones, while Shalom sings as a tormented mystic, whose bruised spirit is assuaged by the healing powers of Israel's soil.

Lyrical Vein

The second item indicated in the title, namely Israeli poetry in war, is treated in the fourth chapter of the pamphlet, and deals briefly with some poems by Haimin Guri, E. Hillel, A. Gilboa, and Abba Kovner. The author postulates that the two common points of view discernible in all these poets are those of hope and despair; that their poems are not heroic, but largely stem from the consciousness of a stark, unrelenting reality, of a fate that must be faced and accepted out of personal necessity. There is much sentimentality, but much toughness too, and, on occasion, a note of scepticism, while many of the poems are written in lyric vein.

The very modest scope of this pamphlet inhibits the author from developing his ideas at any length. When poetry is the subject of discussion, such a limitation only serves to emphasise the inherent difficulty of conveying its values to such readers as are innocent of any acquaintance with the original works. Nevertheless, the author makes a number of attractive observations and does, at least, attempt to evaluate the aesthetic qualities against broader and less inbred standards than are often encountered in the critical analysis of modern Hebrew literature. The value of the pamphlet is considerably enhanced by the inclusion of numerous translated extracts, some of them of high calibre, which have been rendered into English by some half dozen translators.

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