

## ACROSS THE CULTURAL DIVIDE: IMMIGRANT ORIENTAL JEWISH CHILDREN MEET ISRAELI FOLKSONG

*Shai Burstyn*

*Abstract: Many songs created in pre-State Israel incorporated certain Oriental elements, but their overall stylistic slant, like that of other contemporaneous local cultural products, was largely Occidental. The radical demographic change caused by a massive immigration of Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries to the new state created enormous pressure to absorb the newcomers both physically and culturally. The ensuing melting pot policy declared by the young state as its supreme national task proved unsuccessful. This failure had many reasons, not least of them the condescending attitude of the absorbing establishment and its inability to fathom the socio-cultural processes involved in such a colossal national project. Against this background, I examine in this article the encounter of immigrant Oriental children with Israeli folksong, mainly from the perspective of musical perception and cultural conditioning. In the 1930s and 1940s, ingrained musical perceptual habits made European-oriented audiences insert variants into the newly composed modal, mildly Oriental songs they used to sing. In the 1950s, however, the musical perceptual habits of immigrant Oriental children hindered them from embracing Israeli folksongs created mainly by composers of Eastern European origin.*

*Keywords: Israeli folksong; immigration; melting pot; cross-cultural music perception*

מִמְזֶרֶת אָבִיָּא זְרָעָהּ וּמִמְעַרְב אֶקְבְּצֶהּ  
(ישעיה מ:ה)

**I will bring thy seed from the east**

**And gather you from the west**

(Isaiah 43: 5)

These words of the prophet Isaiah reverberated in Israel for over a decade after the establishment of the state in 1948. They were a slogan, succinctly expressing the national foundational ethos of the ingathering of the exiles. The Hebrew folksong, resonating the cultural locus of the society in which it grew, is indeed a stylistic mix of Occidental and Oriental elements, whose varied shades reflect the cultural makeup of the human tapestry which gave it voice.

The socio-cultural history of Israel may be likened to a bridge spanning a great divide, linking West and East. The direction of traffic on this bridge mirrors the demographic configuration of the successive waves of Jewish immigration to Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel): from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and on to the 20<sup>th</sup> century – from West to East; in the 1950s, the time of the great Oriental immigration to Israel – from East to West.<sup>1</sup>

The Occidental orientation of the future State of Israel was self-evident for Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the “visionary” of the Jewish state. In his epoch-making pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (1896), he claimed that “Palestine is our ever-memorable historic home... we should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism” (Herzl 1896). In Herzl’s Eurocentric view, the immigration of European Jews to Palestine would not create a weighty cultural problem: Jewish settlers were to continue their life in the Middle East as if they were in Europe, complete with what he called their “little habits”:

Whoever has seen anything of the world knows that just these little daily customs can easily be transplanted everywhere. The technical contrivances of our day, which this scheme intends to employ in the service of humanity, have heretofore been principally used for our little habits. There are English hotels in Egypt and on the mountain-crest in Switzerland, Vienna cafés in South Africa, French theatres

---

<sup>1</sup> From a strictly geographical viewpoint, the North African immigration arrived from West to East. Throughout this article the terms Orient(al) and Occident(al) are used in their cultural sense. Furthermore, by Orient, I mean the Middle East rather than East Asia.

in Russia, German operas in America, and best Bavarian beer in Paris. When we journey out of Egypt again we shall not leave the fleshpots behind... (Ibid.: 36).<sup>2</sup>

In order to gain insight into the cultural background of the Occidental/Oriental stylistic mosaic of which the Israeli folksong is made, it is necessary to take a close look at the waves of immigration from Europe to Palestine, for out of them emerged the elite layer which dominated Israeli society and culture throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even beyond. It is customary to divide the immigration to Jewish Palestine into five waves, extending from 1882 through the 1930s with short interruptions.<sup>3</sup> The majority of immigrants hailed from Eastern Europe, driven out by incessant anti-Semitic pogroms and/or ideologically motivated by socialist and Zionist goals. Particularly influential were small groups of immigrants from the second and third *Aliyot* made up of young idealistic pioneers, determined to realize their Zionist-socialist convictions. They rebelled against their parents' traditional way of life in Diaspora and sought to create a better, healthier Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael, the land from which their ancestors had been exiled some 2000 years earlier (Bartal 1997; Naor 1984; Hacoen 1998).

Notwithstanding their ideology and aspirations, the culture these young immigrant pioneers brought with them was the one in which they were born and raised and to which they were conditioned. They admired Tolstoy and Pushkin and listened (whenever they could) to Mozart and Chopin. Essentially, they were Europeans in the same deep Eurocentric sense as the Austro-Hungarian Herzl. They mostly spoke Russian and Polish, sang Slavic and Yiddish songs (essentially Eastern European in style) and danced the polka, the Krakowiak, and the hora.

Things began to change when the first generation of children was born in Eretz Yisrael, and the first kindergartens and schools were opened. The teachers, mostly of Eastern European origin, were often educated in Germany (Katinka 1933: 55) (Fig. 1).

---

<sup>2</sup> Herzl refers here to *Exodus* 16: 3: "And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the **flesh pots**, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (King James Version).

<sup>3</sup> The customary dating of the five *Aliyot* (plural form of *Aliya* – Hebrew for immigration to Israel) is: Aliya I – 1882–1904; Aliya II – 1904–1914; Aliya III – 1918–1923; Aliya IV – 1924–1929; Aliya V – 1930–1939. The historiography of the Aliyot is currently under scholarly revision. See Alroey 2004.



Figure 1: Tel Aviv kindergarten (1915). Photo: Avraham Soskin. Soskin collection, Eretz Israel museum, Tel Aviv.

At first, central European songs were sung with the original German words translated into Hebrew, but soon thereafter some enterprising kindergarten and elementary school teachers voiced dissatisfaction with the noticeable gap that existed between the European musical style of the songs and the new Hebrew life in the Middle East. They demanded Hebrew melodies that would mirror this new life (Ibid.). Responding to this demand, Yehiel Halperin (1880–1942), a pioneer of Hebrew kindergarten education, collaborated with Joel Engel (1868–1927), a world-renowned Russian Jewish composer, in creating 30 new Hebrew songs, specifically designed as “play songs for kindergartens and [elementary] schools” (Halperin 1927).<sup>4</sup> In the introduction Halperin wrote:

---

<sup>4</sup> *In the Corner* (B’kren Zavit) appeared in two parts containing fifteen songs each. Both parts were published in 1927; the second volume includes a eulogy for Engel, who had died a few months earlier. Engel had immigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1924, and made relentless efforts to advance the local musical scene. His sudden death nipped in the bud his quest for developing a new Hebrew melodic style from materializing. For an early assessment of his work, see Ravina 1947.



Figure 2: Camels on Tel Aviv beach (1937). Photo: Rudi Weissenstein, Zalmania.

When you pass by a Hebrew kindergarten in Eretz Yisrael, and when you listen to the songs sung by toddlers, if you have a discerning ear you will hear Russian, Polish, German, and French melodies. You will then realize that this is not a Hebrew kindergarten but a strange concoction of many nations translated into Hebrew (Ibid.: 3).<sup>5</sup>

One of the songs in this new songster was *The Camel*. Halperin's verses describe the camel's gait and the important role camels played in hauling the sand and the cement used to build Tel Aviv (Fig. 2). Engel's melody is purposely simple and repetitious, attempting to capture the Oriental scene portrayed by the words (Ibid.: 6).

Several camel songs were created in the late 1920s and 1930s, ostensibly because camels were at once exotic animals and a common sight of everyday life. Fig. 3 shows the striking opening phrase of the *Camel Driver's Song*, composed in 1927 by Yedidyah Gorochov-Admon (1894–1982):

<sup>5</sup> This and subsequent translations from the Hebrew are mine.



Figure 3: Camel driver's song.

Noteworthy here are the three successive tetrachordal ascents, presumably meant to invoke desert monotony, and the unusual chromatic shift between the stressed *f* and *f#*, ostensibly designed to emulate microtonal Arabic singing. Like most other composed songs of the time, this camel song was meant to be sung on various informal communal occasions, and to thereby attain folksong status. The drastic departure of the opening phrase from the stylistic mainstream of the Slavic repertory sung at the time raises the question of the song's reception, which in turn depends on the song's perception. When dealing with questions of musical reception, one might do well to expose the ingrained musical processing schemata of both the listeners and the performers. In order to understand the response of an audience to a given musical stimulus, one should define the horizon of musical expectations that arise from its deep-seated schemata.<sup>6</sup> Fig. 4 shows how the song was notated in *Shirej Eretz Yisrael (SEY)*.<sup>7</sup>

The intriguing pseudo-microtonal shift has disappeared. The initial motif is repeated here three times without any change, thus losing its strikingly original mark and making little musical sense. The editor of the songster was Dr. Jakob Schönberg (1900–1956), a German-Jewish learned musician, composer and music historian. He had probably received the correctly notated melody from his contacts in Palestine, yet found it advisable to “fix” it. Why? Because he must have been convinced that Hebrew folksongs cannot possibly start this way, and that the *f-f#-f* shifts were therefore notational errors.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The horizon of expectation concept originated in the work of Hans Robert Jauss in the field of literary reception theory, especially with regard to reader response criticism. I find it an effective tool in dealing with musical reception in general and with the topic at hand in particular (Jauss 1982).

<sup>7</sup> An important collection of Hebrew songs that appeared in Berlin in 1935. The title *שירי ארץ ישראל* means “Songs of the Land of Israel”. Among the almost 250 songs, the editor managed to include some of the newest songs composed and sung in Jewish Palestine, including this camel song.

<sup>8</sup> In the introduction to the songster Schönberg mentions that he notated some of the songs as they were sung to him. His informants were most likely Eretz-Yisraeli pioneers visiting Berlin. Since there

Figure 4:  
Camel driver's  
song  
(SEY 1935:  
87-88).

\* *Andante*

Ga-mal, g'- mal - li, — ga-mal, g'- mal - li, —

cha-wer at - tah li — w'sif-sif. Hoj!

*f con sentimento*

Mah to-wu o-ho'-lej-cha ja - a' - kow, misch-k'- no-tej-

- cha jiß-ra-ell *mf* Misch-k'- no-tej-cha jiß-ra-ell *poco rit.*

\* *Ritmo della melodia nell tempo del camelo.*

גַּמַּל, גַּמְלֵי חֵבֵר אֶתָּה לִי בְּפִיִּית. הִי, מֵה מוֹבֵו אֶהְלִיד  
 יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

deine Wohnungen      משכנותיך      Muschelsand      זיפויף

It should be pointed out, however, that notating a song correctly in a songster in no way ensures that it shall be faithfully performed. A good example from the same songster is the highly popular *Lo sharti lach artzi*<sup>9</sup> by Yehudah Sharett (1901–1979).

When sung without the support of notation (as is the norm in folk singing), the purposely modal 7<sup>th</sup> degree in the first two measures (notated accurately by Schönberg) was replaced, in fact, “corrected”, on countless community singing occasions, by raising it a minor second, thus making it a leading tone (Fig. 5). This dubious “improvement” considerably impoverished the opening phrase and made it quite mundane. The singing crowds changed the beginning to fit

---

is no documentary evidence as to which songs were sent to him in notation and which he had learned orally, it is not possible to determine positively whether the “simplified” version of the *Camel Driver's Song* was effected by him or sung to him. If the latter, the oral transmission of the song was already the result of a reception process influenced by Western musical bias. See also the comments in Bayer 1968: 76.

<sup>9</sup> “I have not sung to thee, my country”. The famous lyrics by the poetess Rachel (1890–1931) were written in 1926 and set to music soon thereafter by Yehuda (Shertok) Sharett.

*Andante* *mf* *J. Schertok*

Lo-schar-ti lach, ar-zi w' - lo fe-ar-ti schimech ba-  
 a' - li - lot g'wu-rah bisch - lal k' - ra-wot; rak  
 ez ja-daj nat' - u cho - fej jar-denschok-tim, rak  
 schwil kaw-schu rag-laj al p'nej - sa - dot!

לא שרתי לך, ארצי. ולא פארתי שמך. בעלילות נבוכד.  
 בשלל קרבות; רק עץ - די גמטע חוסי ירדן שוקמים. רק  
 שביל - קבשו רגלי על פני שדות. אכן דלך מאד - ידעתי  
 זאת. האם אכן דלך מאד מנחת בתך; רק קול תרועת הנזיל  
 ביום ינה האור. רק בכי במסתרים עלי ענך. רהל

es strahlt	(ננה) ינה	ich verherrlichte	(מאר) מארתי
heliglich	בססתרים	Tat	עלילה
deme Armut	ענין-העני שלך	Schlachtenbeute	שלל קרבות
		Ufer	חוף

Figure 5:  
*Lo sharti*  
*lach artzi*  
 (SEY 1935: 154).

better into their ingrained Western musical expectations.<sup>10</sup> The major-minor system and especially the leading tone, that powerful agent of the harmonic foundation of Western music, are the forces behind such variants. They are a direct outcome of the musical facet of deep-rooted cultural conditioning that was evident everywhere, in all walks of life: in the architectural style of most houses built in Tel Aviv, the new city built on sand dunes on the shores of the Mediterranean; in the absurdity of living in the hot Middle East but nevertheless insisting – as many European immigrants did – on dressing as if they lived in

<sup>10</sup> Ravina (1971: 302) thought that the great popularity of this song “proves that the style of the Russian romance is still very close to the heart of [Eretz-Yisraeli] audiences” and that by changing the natural minor into melodic minor, they have “brought this melody still closer to the European spirit”. I have encountered and collected hundreds of similar variants. Interestingly, a few folk composers, attentive to the “vox populi”, adopted the changes their songs underwent in oral transmission. For song composer David Zehavi’s reaction see Hacoheh 1981: 11.



Figure 6: Arab rababa player in Tel Aviv (1925). Photo: S. Korbman. Korbman collection, by special permission of the Administrator General, the State of Israel, as the executor of S. Korbman estate and Eretz Israel museum, Tel Aviv.



Berlin or Warsaw; in continuing to speak European languages and refraining from making an effort to learn Hebrew; in establishing Viennese-style cafés and European-like theater houses. In short, this cultural conditioning has led to the creation of a small Jewish version of Europe in the scorching Middle East. It must be stressed, however, that the overall acculturative situation was considerably more complex, and that concurrently with the phenomena just described, Oriental elements of various kinds gradually – and inevitably – made their way into the life of the Eretz-Yisraeli community, whether in food, social customs, architecture, or visual art (Zalmona 2010). As an integral part of this process, the Oriental soundscape – the muezzin call to prayer, or Arabic folk

music encountered on the streets of the new Jewish towns – was ever-present, and began to influence Hebrew music, both art and folk (Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup>

In folk music, initial experiments similar to the *Camel Driver's Song* have soon matured into an original song genre featuring stylistic traits more appropriate to the new environment. These newly composed songs set themselves apart by adopting Oriental musical elements such as a small range and repetition of short motifs, and above all by minimizing their dependence on harmonic structure (Burstyn 2008).<sup>12</sup> The reception picture of the new song idiom is mixed. Songs in which Oriental features were introduced in moderation were incorporated into the community singing repertory, while stylistically more radical ones did not fare well. Essentially, numerous songs remained anchored in Western tonality in spite of having adopted “Oriental” features such as modality and small range ornamental motifs. For a while such songs seemed capable of challenging the hegemony of the traditional Slavic song style (Ravina 1943: 7). These songs, still popular in the 1950s, were able to – and to some extent probably did – serve as a link, albeit not a strong bridge, between the singing practices of the “old-timers” and the new Oriental immigrants.

At this point, we arrive at the second major change in the direction of traffic on the metaphoric bridge: Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, huge waves of immigrants from Arabic countries (like Syria and Iraq) and North Africa (mostly Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya) inundated the newly born, Western-oriented state, and caused a far-reaching demographic change, which could not but produce a cultural friction of tremendous magnitude. The numbers involved are hard to comprehend: in the first three years of its existence, Israel, with a previous Jewish population of around 650,000, absorbed almost 700,000 immigrants (Lissak 1999: 3–15), thus abruptly doubling its population and drastically upsetting its demographic makeup. By 1960, Israel had absorbed one million newcomers. Obviously, this

---

<sup>11</sup> Arabic music heard on the radio was received less well: Many new settlers found it plainly intolerable. Immigrants of German descent sometimes dubbed it “Katzenyammer Musik” – cat wailing music (Interview with Meir Goldstein, 14.5.2003). Their reactions reflected that of many immigrants raised in European culture. Despite (possibly even because) of their high education, the integration process of Jewish immigrants from Germany in Eretz Yisrael in the 1930s was not entirely smooth. They were perceived as condescending, sure of the superiority of their European culture, and tending to shut themselves in a cultural bubble all their own (Shefi 2006: 104).

<sup>12</sup> Gorochoy-Admon's song *Yaleil* (composed in 1925) is the earliest composed song attempting to capture the style of Arabic singing. His *Camel Driver's Song* followed two years later (Admon 1973: 9). For the integration of Eastern elements into early Hebrew songs see Barth 2014.



Figure 7: Immigrant tent camp in Israel (1950). Photo: Rudi Weissenstein, Zalmania.

historically unprecedented phenomenon gave rise to numerous severe problems. The new immigrants, mostly, but not only, from Islamic countries, were settled in makeshift temporary tent camps. Daily living conditions were harsh, and affected all aspects of life (Fig. 7).

The leadership of the young state attached utmost national importance to the goal of achieving a speedy social and cultural cohesion between all Jewish Diasporas, and to forging a new collective Israeli identity. The means to attain this ambitious goal was the sociological concept of the “melting pot”, first developed during the great waves of immigration to America in the early 20th

century. The meaning of the “melting pot” approach is graphically portrayed in the theater program of Israel Zangwill’s play with the same name, first performed in New York in 1909 (Fig. 8).<sup>13</sup>

In a typical melting pot process, immigrants from numerous diasporas and diverse cultures are melted together in a giant virtual pot, thereby losing their original cultural identity and acquiring a new one, shared by all.<sup>14</sup> The melting pot policy, declared by Israel a supreme national goal, was implemented in earnest, not to say with a vengeance. According to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), the foremost advocate of the melting pot policy,

The exiles that are being uprooted and ingathered in Israel do not yet constitute a people, but a mixed multitude and human dust without a language, without education, without roots, and without being able to draw upon a tradition and a vision of a nation...The transformation of this human dust into a cultured, independent nation bearing a vision is no easy task, and the difficulties involved are no less than those of economic absorption (Quoted in Lissak 2003: 7).

Fearing that it would lose the hard-earned achievements which enabled the creation of the State, the political and socio-cultural hegemony misconstrued the metaphor of the melting pot as a license for enforced integration, in which the newcomers were pressured, at times forced, to relinquish their cultural values and adopt those of the absorbing society. Indeed, “melting pot” became a laundered term for cultural coercion.<sup>15</sup> The results were meager at best, especially in the social and cultural domains. All in all, the Israeli melting pot was a colossal failure (Lissak 1999; Zameret 2003).

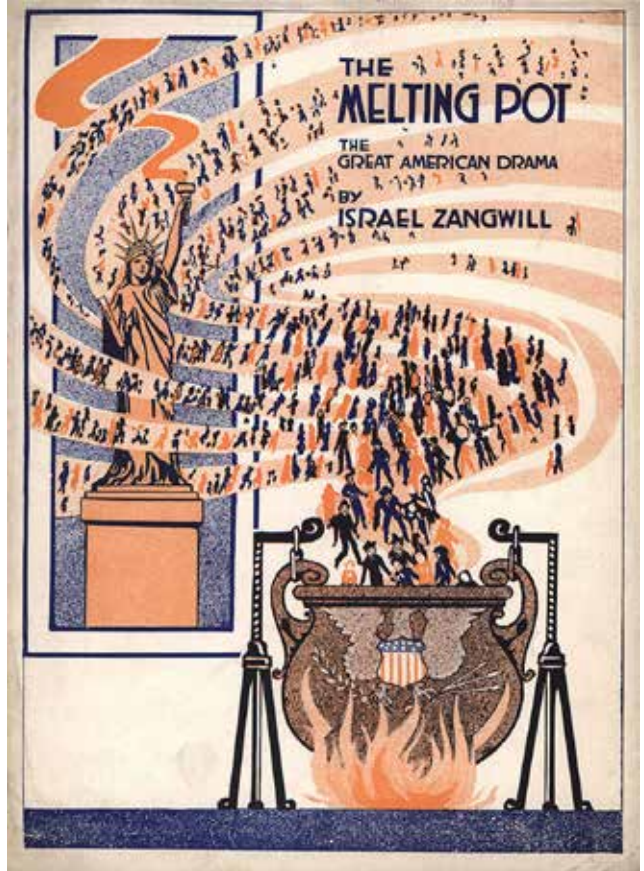
---

<sup>13</sup> Zangwill’s play was highly successful and ran through 136 performances.

<sup>14</sup> Because this rather crude nation-building social venture has more often than not failed, many countries have later opted for multiculturalism, which they hoped would prove a more amenable approach to forming a new national fabric. In a multicultural process (sometimes described as the “salad bowl” manner) a new entity comes into being, but not at the expense of its individual components, which are allowed to preserve their original identities.

<sup>15</sup> Many members of Israel’s political and cultural leadership blatantly criticized the new Oriental immigrants in a paternalistic, condescending manner. *Haaretz* newspaper’s respected journalist Arie Gelblum wrote in one of his biting articles: “This is the immigration of a race we have not yet known in the country... We are dealing with people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose educational level borders on absolute ignorance and who have no talent for grasping anything intellectual...They are at an even lower level than that of the former Arabs of Israel...They lack any roots in Judaism, and are totally at the mercy of savage and primitive instincts. As is the case with Africans, you will find among them gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution... chronic laziness and hatred for work; there is nothing safe about this asocial element. [Even] the kibbutzim will not hear of their absorption” (Gelblum 1949).

Figure 8:  
Theater program  
of Zangwill's play.



The vast majority of educational endeavors were directed at the young.<sup>16</sup> In his semi-autobiographical novel *Scapegoat*, Israeli author Eli Amir (b. 1937), who immigrated to Israel from Iraq at age thirteen, describes superbly the pains of absorption of a group of immigrant children in a kibbutz to which they were sent in order to “integrate” and acquire the values of their new homeland:

<sup>16</sup> Adult immigrants were often collectively referred to as a “desert generation”, in allusion to the Biblical desert crossing by the people of Israel after the exodus from Egypt. Criticizing the melting pot policy, the former minister of education Aharon Yadlin said: “We’ve sinned by considering the fathers’ generation a desert generation; Fathers living in a spiritual desert raise their sons in a cultural wasteland”. He further castigated the melting pot strategy as a “failure, a pressure cooker and a one-sided coercion of norms that caused spiritual assets to be lost in vain” (Hakak 1980).

Their [the counselors'] efforts to teach us how to behave, what to sing, how to dance, what to read and how to be different from what we were imposed a strain on us and on them. They tried to provide us with ready-made identities, which we were supposed to put on like a new suit of clothes in order to be like them. We had, indeed, shed our old clothes, but the new ones were too new, as uncomfortable as brand new shoes. Our meetings grew less and less frequent until one day they ceased all together without anyone even noticing. Our mutual failure lay heavily between us (Amir 1987: 72).

In an effort to instill in them the values of Israeli, Western-oriented culture, immigrant children were exposed to the latter's main achievements, among them music. At this point one may ask: What went on in the musical processing mechanism of Oriental children when they were all at once confronted with harmony-based songs? Granted that no human is merely a passive recipient of external stimuli, how did they process musical information that was new and largely foreign to them? Needless to say, no one thought in real time to investigate the cognitive musical processes involved; indeed, the field of music cognition itself had not yet developed appropriate conceptual tools to study the subject. More important, even an optimal cognitive understanding of the musical acculturative process would at best have yielded a partial picture, had it failed to consider the weighty sociological facets involved. Especially pertinent to this issue is the reminder that "reception is a process in which the subject, however conceived, is only relatively autonomous from broader social, economic and political structures" (Press 1994: 231–232). As far as music is concerned, it was found that "affective response to music is determined more by cultural tradition than by the inherent qualities of the music" (Gregory and Varney 1996: 47).

In spite of these reservations, recent music-cognitive research may offer some tentative responses to the above questions. A study carried out at the department of musicology of Tel Aviv University found that completing a musical phrase by improvising its second half is an effective way to expose the internalized stylistic schemata that subconsciously guide musical activities (Bar David 2006). 100 subjects were examined, half of them children. More important for our purpose, half of the subjects were Israelis with Western orientation, the other half – Arabs.

Clear differences were uncovered between the two groups' approach to the pitch parameter, i.e. their use of skips, range and especially concluding tones.

As expected, Western-oriented children always ended phrases on the tonic, or on one of the tones of the tonic chord. In contrast, Arab children ended their phrases on a wide range of diverse tones, and in some cases created continuations that would not have occurred to Westerners (Ibid.: 87) (Fig. 9).<sup>17</sup>



Figure 9: Phrase completion by Arab children.

This experiment supports what is already known about cultural-musical preferences concerning directionality. In broad general terms, classical Western music is dynamic and based on functional harmony. It is teleological, i.e. featuring a directional motion towards a tonal goal. In contrast, Oriental music is essentially static and melody-centered, and is interested above all in celebrating the moment with tiny melodic embellishments. The microtonal arabesques that irritate many Western listeners are its best delicacies. We have here two fundamentally different esthetic attitudes and consequently two divergent musical styles.

Participating in the national effort to mold old-timers and newcomers into a unified cultural entity, the music education leadership tried its utmost to bring

<sup>17</sup> Some Arab children adhered to what Bar David calls the “variant model”. Their completions essentially repeat the opening, leaving structural tones in their original place, but manipulating the “filling tones” around them, thus creating melodic nuances and tiny embellishments (Ibid.: 85–86).

Occidental and Oriental musical traditions into closer proximity. The viewpoint of Ben-Zion Orgad (1926–2006), a notable composer and Chief Music Inspector of the Ministry of Education between 1975 and 1988, is especially revealing:

Israel is in a process of amalgamating its various ethnic communities. This process is also reflected in musical expression; slowly and gradually, the unique tonal character of each community is fading away. For example, microtonal intonation, as existing in Middle Eastern music, and which is so characteristic of the traditional music of our Oriental communities, is disappearing. Gradually, there comes into being a sort of “tonal equalization”, and the diatonic-natural scales have become the common denominator of music in Israel. This common denominator does not impair the vast richness of the sources because the melodic expressive values which exist in the melody types of our communities find their expression in the art and folk music which is created within the inevitable blending (Orgad n.d.: 23).

The hold that the melting pot concept had even on prominent music thinkers such as Orgad is easy to discern here. Like others, he seems to be indifferent to the loss of the “unique tonal character of each community”.<sup>18</sup> As an ardent believer in the melting pot ideology, Orgad found it important to dissociate it from the trendy adoption of Eastern elements by Western composers whose escape to exoticism was part of their constant search for new expressive means (Orgad n.d.: 54):

It is clear that with us this process of blending and joining together of different stylistic currents is activated by the pressure of the reality of our life and the force of typical ethnic and social factors. This is why the music created here is deep-rooted and its expression is authentic and genuine (Ibid.).

In an effort to assist in the absorption of immigrant children, the music education establishment devised several programs designed to acculturate newly arrived immigrant children to Israeli folk music. In one of those, called

---

<sup>18</sup> A contrasting voice was uttered in 1966 by Ovadya Tuvya, a noted musician of Yemenite origin and the director of the State Music Teachers College in Tel Aviv. In a letter to the general manager of the Ministry of Education, Tuvya protested that an Oriental music student, whether in elementary or high school, is forced “to strip down his entire musical heritage”; even the odd Oriental song taught to him in school “has been distorted, castrated and equalized to the tonality common in European songs” (Tuvya 1966: 70).





Figure 10: Folk composer Mordechai Zeira leading immigrant oriental children in singing (mid 1950s). Photo: Israeli music archive, Tel Aviv University.

“Composer’s Stage for Immigrant Settlements”, noted song composers were sent to meet immigrant children, lead them in community singing and teach them some of their own composed songs (Fig. 10).<sup>19</sup>

Extant documents shed light on the wide scope and organizational efficacy of this operation. The 1958 itinerary shown in Fig. 11 itemizes the settlements to be visited on the specified dates.<sup>20</sup>

Most ingenious was the development of what was in effect a mobile music center: Several station wagons equipped with listening equipment, loudspeakers and microphones were sent to the periphery, where most new immigrants were settled after leaving the temporary tent camps. The writing on the van in Fig. 12 announces the arrival of the “mobile music club”.

<sup>19</sup> The project was a joint venture of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Israel Composers’ League and the Committee for Musical Activities in Immigrant Settlements (a branch of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation). The latter organization also issued individual song sheets to assist music instructors in teaching Israeli songs to immigrant children. The song sheets were printed in batches of 500 copies and were expressly meant for internal use rather than for sale. For correspondence between the organizing organs and the composers, see the files of E. Amiran and D. Sambursky in the Israeli Music Archive at Tel Aviv University.

<sup>20</sup> D. Sambursky’s file, Israeli Music Archive, Tel Aviv University.





Figure 12: Mobile music club (1959).<sup>22</sup>



Figure 13: Music counselor teaching a Hebrew song to Oriental immigrant children.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the mobile music van about to leave for the periphery and make musical contact with disadvantaged Oriental immigrant children is parked in front of the Tel Aviv Mann auditorium, the home of the Israeli Philharmonic orchestra and a symbol of the Western orientation of Israeli culture.

<sup>23</sup> The young music counselor is Mordechai Mizrahi, by now a retired music teacher and an M.A. graduate of the Department of Musicology at Tel Aviv University. I thank Mr. Mizrahi for Figs. 12 and 13.

Save perhaps for songs composed in the new pseudo-Oriental idiom, in this and similar musical encounters, Oriental immigrant children had no choice but to come to terms with the songs they were taught in school and heard on the radio. Most of these were Hebrew national songs conceived in Western, largely Slavic style. They were, in fact, forced to re-educate their internalized mental schemata to embrace, i.e. to make sense, of an entirely new musical style.

The fallacious premises behind the activities of the absorbing music education leadership are accentuated by E.M.Gombrich's profound observation that "as soon as a familiar sequence of impressions is triggered we take the rest as read and only probe the environment perfunctorily for confirmation of our hypothesis" (Gombrich 1979: 171). Because the internalized cultural musical schemata of the immigrant children were based on fundamentally different premises, these schemata could not function properly by being "modified or corrected by matching [them] against reality" (Ibid.: 5).<sup>24</sup>

As already explained, the music education activities just described were specific and integral facets of the general melting pot policy (Shiloah and Cohen 1983: 234). In retrospect, both must be criticized as essentially misguided efforts to turn immigrant children away from their "primitive" culture and to indoctrinate them into the supposedly superior Israeli culture.<sup>25</sup> Over six decades after these events, there is hardly any need to elaborate on the patronizing, essentially arrogant attitude that has motivated these efforts.

Professor **Shai Burstyn** was a faculty member of the Department of Musicology at Tel Aviv University. Since earning his PhD. in Historical Musicology at Columbia University in New York (1972), he has published extensively on various aspects of late medieval and early Renaissance music. His interest in oral musical practices led him to research the early Israeli folksong, especially from the perspective of the manifold complex ways it reflects Israeli society in the pre-Statehood era.

---

<sup>24</sup> Although Gombrich is concerned with visual art, his insights, *mutatis mutandis*, have great value for elucidating processes of music perception.

<sup>25</sup> Various aspects of the indoctrinating role of formal and informal education in forming Israeli national consciousness have been investigated by several researchers. See Sitton 1998, Bar-Gal 1999, Dror 2008, Tadmor-Shimony 2010.

## References

- Admon-Gorochov, Yedidya. 1973. Sh'demati. *Selected Songs*. Tel Aviv: Education and Culture Center of the Federation of Labour – Histadrut.
- Alroey, Gur. 2004. *Immigrants. Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century*. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press.
- Amir, Eli. 1987. *Scapegoat*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publ. [First published in 1983 in Hebrew under the title *Tanegol Kaparot*.]
- Bar-Gal, Yoram. 1999. *An Agent of Zionist Propaganda. The Jewish National Fund 1924–1947*. Haifa: Haifa University Press.
- Bar David, Rachel. 2006. *The Reflection of Musical Schemata on Improvising an Answer to a Given Musical Opening. The Influence of Culture, Age, Knowledge and Creativity*. Doctoral Dissertation, Tel Aviv University.
- Barth, Efrat. 2014. “Hebrew Songwriters’ Encounter with the East.” Pp. 362–376 in Friling, Tuvia, Gideon Katz, and Michael Wolpe (eds.). *Music in Israel*. Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev.
- Bartal, Israel (ed.). 1997. *The Second Aliya. Studies*. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press.
- Bayer, Batja. 1968. “The Formation of ‘Maqam’ in the Israeli Song”. Pp. 74–84 in Zmora, Michal (ed.). *Eastern and Western Elements in Music in Israel*. Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute.
- Burstyn, Shai. 2008. “‘Old-New Song’: The Legacy of Abraham Zvi Idelsohn and ‘Roots’ Songs”. *Cathedra*, 128: 113–144.
- Dror, Yuval. 2008. *National Education through Mutually Supportive Devices: The Zionist Story*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.
- Gelblum, Aryeh. 1949. “The Yemenite Immigration wave and the African Problem.” *Haaretz* 22. 4. 1949.
- Gombrich, E. H. 1979. *The Sense of Order*. Oxford: Phaidon Press.
- Gregory, Andrew, and Nicholas Varney. 1996. “Cross-Cultural Comparisons in the Affective Response to Music.” *Psychology of Music*, 24 (1): 47–52.
- Hacohen, Dvora (ed.). 1998. *Ingathering of Exiles. Aliya to the Land of Israel. Myth and Reality*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History.
- Hacohen, Eliyahu. 1981. “A soul to David”. Pp. 8–12 in Zehavi, David. *Let it Endure Forever. Selected Songs*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publ.
- Hakak, Herzl and Balfour. 1980. “Integration – A National Interest.” *Haolam Haze* [online]. Available at: <http://www.hakak-twins.com/articles/article30.asp> [accessed 2015–05–12].
- Halperin, Yehiel, and Joel Engel. 1927. *In the Corner*. Tel Aviv: Hagina Publ.
- Herzl, Theodor. 1896. *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*. Vienna: MidEastWeb PDF Edition [online]. Available at: <http://www.mideastweb.org> [accessed 2015–05–12].
- Jauss, Hans Robert. 1982. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Katinka, Tirza. 1933. “Memories from the Distant Past”. *Pesiot*, vol. III: 55.
- Lissak, Moshe. 1999. *The Mass Immigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Melting Pot Policy*. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute.

- Lissak, Moshe. 2003. "The demographic-social revolution in Israel in the 1950s: The absorption of the great Aliya." *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, 22 (2): 1–31.
- Morrison, Steven, Steven Demorest, and Laura Stambaugh. 2008. "Enculturation Effects in Music Cognition. The Role of Age and Music Complexity." *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 56 (2): 118–129.
- Naor, Mordechai. 1984. *The Second Aliya 1903–1914*. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press.
- Orgad, Ben-Zion. n.d. *Methodical Guide to Choral Songs of Israel*. Tel Aviv: The Nissimov Music Library, No. 111.
- Press, Andrea L. 1994. "The Sociology of Cultural Reception: notes toward an emerging paradigm." Pp. 221–245 in Crane, Diana (ed.). *The Sociology of Culture*. Blackwell.
- Ravina, Menashe. 1943. *Songs for the People in Erez Yisrael*. Tel Aviv.
- Ravina, Menashe. 1947. *Joel Engel and Jewish Music*. Tel Aviv.
- Ravina, Menashe. 1971. "The Music to Rachel's Poems." Pp. 300–305 in Snir, M., and S. Kushnir (eds.). *Rachel and her Poetry*. Tel Aviv: Davar Publ.
- Schönberg, Jakob (ed.). 1935. *Shirej Eretz Israel*. Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag.
- Shefi, Naama. 2006. "A German Space in the Hebrew Culture". Pp. 102–105 in Zimmermann, Moshe, and Yotam Hotam (eds.). *Between Two Homelands. The "Yekkes"*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History.
- Shiloah, Amnon, and Erik Cohen. 1983. "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel". *Ethnomusicology*, 27 (2): 227–257.
- Sitton, Shoshana. 1998. 'Education in the Spirit of the Homeland'. *The Curriculum of the Teachers' Council for the Keren Kayemet (1925–1953)*. Tel Aviv: Dor Ledor XIV.
- Tadmor-Shimony, Tali. 2010. *National Education and Formation of State in Israel*. Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.
- Tuvya, Ovadya. 1975. "On the Problem of the Integration of the Diasporas." Pp. 70–71 in *The Musical Education. Selected Articles*. Tel Aviv.
- Zalmona, Yigal. 2010. *A Century of Israeli Art*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum.
- Zameret, Zvi. 2002. *The Melting Pot In Israel: The Commission of Inquiry Concerning Education in the Immigrant Camps During the Early Years of the State*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Zangwill, Israel. 1908. *The Melting Pot* [online]. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23893/23893-h/23893-h.htm> [accessed 2015–05–12].