

## Miriam Sings Anew

*In this, the last of two articles, Lilian Blum Koval concludes her discussion of modern Jewish music and those who compose it.*

**Joseph Tal**

"I feel convinced that musical expression based on history will always be more reliable, for history, unlike folklore, is always more exact, more factual."

By these principles, Joseph Tal, living through the siege of Jerusalem, composed a symphonic work for orchestra, piano, choir and soprano. Going back to a parallel situation in ancient biblical times, he compares the willingness of Hannah to sacrifice her seven sons rather than deny their faith in God, with the determination of Jerusalem's men and women today to die rather than give up their homeland. Tal says, "I am sure I could never have written this music in a similar way in any other place. It is hard to prove it by analysis, but history will decide about the truth in the work."

Another composition of Tal's is his choreographic poem for orchestra and baritone, "Exodus." The municipality of Tel Aviv awarded him the Yoel Engel prize for this work, successfully performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra last year on tour at Royal Albert Hall, London, under Edouard van Beinum.

**In Cleveland**

And we of Cleveland who were privileged to hear Israel's orchestra last January could not fail to have felt how Ben Chaim's "Psalm" made the Bible more alive for us. In the solemn, pastoral gentleness of its music I saw olive trees against a brilliant sky, the browns, grays and violet tintings of the ground as against the bright green verdure of our own landscapes. I seemed to breathe the hot, sun-baked air,

**By LILIAN BLUM KOVAL**

heavy with Oriental languor.

But even more thrilling was my encounter early next morning with another outstanding composer of modern Israel. The door of a kitchenette apartment of the Commodore, at which I knocked, was opened by a slender, dark-haired man. And then I saw him moving toward me, Oedeon Partos, violinist and celebrated composer. He was tall, fortyish, serious faced and walked with a decided limp. Both of us being of Hungarian extraction, I quickly exhausted the dozen or so Hungarian words which comprise my vocabulary in my greeting.

It was through madam, his wife, who speaks French fluently, that our chat was conducted. The air was fragrant with the savory fumes of a goulash that she was preparing for "mittagsessen." She graciously accepted a jar of my own cherry preserves which I had brought with me for dessert and brought me "a coffee." I enjoyed it as thoroughly as I did my visit with her gifted husband.

**Oedeon Partos**

Partos, like all the truly great, was extremely modest and self-effacing. He was hesitant to speak about himself, steered all questions I put to him regarding his compositions away from reply toward expression of appreciation of my interest in Israeli music. We parted after he had graciously offered to send me some of his music upon his return to Israel.

Below, in the lobby, I found groups of musicians of the orchestra. If they had been seared by Hitler's holocaust there was no evidence of it in their manner. I found them calm and cheerful, their eyes turned resolutely toward the future. Among them were the three Bor brothers of Tel Aviv, Chaim, Shlomo and

Abraham, all of whom were very proud at having been privileged to attend the classes of Dr. Engel, up to the day of his death in 1928. For Engel was indeed the chaluz, the pioneer of the renaissance of national Jewish music and did for it what Bela Bartok accomplished for Hungarian music.

I enjoyed chatting with young Grunschlag, one of the concert masters of the orchestra, about Menahem Mahler-Kalkstein, composer of David symphony recently performed in this country. We exchanged comments about Alexander Uriah Boscovich whose compositions for piano are especially interesting since Boscovich so cleverly produces from the piano exotic, Oriental sounds seldom created by anything but percussion instruments.

**Ernest Bloch**

But it is to Ernest Bloch who lives among us here in America, whose great Israel symphony will be performed by the Cleveland Orchestra during March within the Jewish music festival period, that we owe even a more profound answer to the question, "What is Jewish music?" In his compositions Bloch has expressed the 5,000-year-old Jewish heritage. He has made the Jew come alive in his music. We feel his joys, his agonizing frustrations. We actually hear the sharp staccato in his speech, the inflection of his voice. To quote Bloch's own words as printed by Dr. Pete Gradenwitz in his book, "Music of Israel," "I have listened to an inner voice, deep, secret, insistent, ardent, an instinct much more than cold, dry reason, a voice which seemed to come from far beyond myself, far beyond my parents—a voice which surged up in me on reading certain passages in the Bible, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, the Prophets."

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NEVER before have we listened to such a superabundance of Israel music as during the Conquest of the Desert Music Festival. Tuesday night's programme consisted of no less than six *premieres*, and we are led to wonder how the audience could digest such a multitude of varied dishes.

The curtain raiser, Haim Alexander's 'Artza' overture performed by the Kol Yisrael Orchestra under Heinz Freudenthal, is bucolic in mood; the wind and the brass sections give this somewhat long piece a rustic atmosphere. Yedida Admon's three songs for mezzo soprano and orchestra are warm and well contrived. Naomi Zuri, the soloist, has decidedly improved since she studied abroad; her rendering was cultured and resonant. The main merit of Hanoeh Jacobi's Israel Capriccio is the transparency of orchestration and clever counterpoint. The theme is idyllic but he repeats himself too frequently.

Kol Zion Lagolah's choir joined the orchestra for the second part of the programme. Emanuel Amiran's Cantata, 'Comfort ye my People,' is conventional throughout, with some dull Oriental echoes.

By far the most interesting and remarkable offering of the evening was Joseph Tal's Symphonic Cantata 'The Mother Rejoices.' Here is strong contemporary music *par excellence*, and it is not flattering to add that it could hold its own as part of—say—Honegger's magnificent 'Le Roi David'. Meir Harnik performed the piano solo, and Sara Lash and Ephraim Wagner interpreted the vocal parts.

Karel Salomon's Cantata 'Adon Olam', especially composed for the opening of the Exhibition, where it was conducted by George Singer, is an expert opus in its setting for voices; it is never dull, full of lyrical feeling and well-shaped. Leo Rosenblueth was a brilliant soloist.

It seems a pity that the programmes are always stencilled, often illegible, and never carry either the lyrics of the songs

performed or explanatory notes of new works.

The same night the Croatian Ballet Company made its *debut* at the Edison. As this *ensemble* has already been reviewed from Tel Aviv, we will just add that it seems a handicap to perform such gay and colourful dances against a curtain of austere black, and that the accompaniment, confined to a piano, produces the atmosphere of a rehearsal.

# MUSICAL DIARY

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JOSEF Tal's symphonic cantata "The Mother Rejoices," based on "Hannah and her Seven Sons" (from Bialik's "Books of Legends") in a recording from Kol Zion Lagola, for soloists, chorus and orchestra, created during the War of Independence, is a 15 minute composition of utmost concentration. There is a striking contrast between pagan praise and the Jews' Hallelujah choirs. This exciting piece of music is dramatic in its rhythmic restlessness and modern in the best sense of the word. Never before have we heard so inspired and moving a work by this extremely gifted composer.

FRANCO