

Radio Review

Electronic Music for Israel

THE premiere of Yoseph Tal's electronic choreographic ballet was an important radio occasion representing a pioneering achievement. The composer himself added a lucid and succinct preface on the subject of electronic music.

Busoni once pointed out that the symphony orchestra could never provide more than a tiny fraction of the great range of sound in the universe, and this is the basis of the creed of electronic music. Two main schools have already grown up. The French school of *musique concrète* starts with an existing sound — the whistle of a locomotive, the slam of a door, the dropping of a tea tray as well as a human voice — and the piece of tape on which this is recorded is the concrete starting point, the theme, of the composition. It is then up to the composer, assisted by the technicians, to adapt this basic sound into any pattern he wishes, with the aid of the tape recorder. He can play it backward or forward, slow or fast, chop it up, pass it through filters, and out of all this come his patterns of tone and rhythm. The result is the discovery of new sound colours, for the first time at the composer's disposal.

The German and Italian school is more abstract and philosophical. It refuses to admit the introduction of any recording of existing sounds. The Germans systematically analyse the sounds they wish to recreate in terms of frequencies and then recreate these vibrations on electronic machines. Composition becomes a mathematical equation, and even if they wanted the effect of blowing a whistle, they would never think of anything so simple as blowing a whistle — the whole sound has to be created synthetically.

Fortunately, Mr. Tal has adopted the common-sense attitude of taking the best of both possible worlds. As La Fontaine (I believe it was) commented on exchanging mistresses "*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve*," so Mr. Tal has endeavoured to combine the more acceptable characteristics of both schools. However, he would be the first to admit that he is only at the beginning of the way and that his work, "The Exodus," is a first empirical effort, a long way behind the achievements of other countries which have been working on electronic music for years.

What is the future of electronic music? This medium puts music in the same fascinating stage of experimentation in which other arts were to be found earlier in the century. The work of Joyce and Picasso could offer instructive parallels. Joyce too broke down his sounds and pursued his analysis to a logical conclusion, but it turned out to be a dead end. After "Finnegan's Wake," there was nothing to say. Indeed in literature, Joyce's experiments have been far less influential than the more modest innovations of Hemingway. The 20th century art revolution, on the other hand, escaped from the potential blind alleys into which certain schools nearly led it and found its way back to reunite with the main stream and leave a permanent impress. The break-down of light by the Impressionists and of form by the Cubists have been major revolutions.

It is too early to predict whether synthetic music will be lasting. I think the parallel may be more with the new concepts of art (which like music speaks in abstracts) than with literature (which has to contend with the inevitable distraction of meaning, and cannot abandon itself solely to form). Perhaps, as in art, we will eventually see a rapprochement between electronic and traditional concepts (think what Stravinsky could have done by introducing electronic effects into his "Rites of Spring"). In any event, it is an exciting experiment which we in Israel are privileged to be witnessing.

MUSICAL DIARY

"The Exodus from Egypt" — Electronic Ballet by Yosef Tal, presented by Kol Yisrael (at the Y.M.C.A., Jerusalem March 19) and executed by Avraham Gat and Avner Levy.

THE world premiere of Yosef Tal's first electronic work was introduced by the composer's short but illuminating explanations of this new branch of music or technique, if you like, the characteristics of *musique concrète* and the hitherto widely unexplored possibilities of sound production by oscillators and other devices which remain to be invented.

There was a conspicuous absence of photographers, who usually pester an innocent public as during the performances of Shanta Rao, the University Orchestra and similar occasions. The "stage" presented the "New Look" of the Future: instead of an orchestra or instruments, human beings and other accessories, only an austere loudspeaker occupied the centre. It also served as pulpit for the composer who looked like a preacher delivering a sermon on a new creed.

The composition itself employs a male voice (Yehoshua Zohar) and a soprano (Antonia Lavanne) almost always in their normal quality. Most effective use of a second loudspeaker across the Auditorium is occasionally made. The structure of the work is clear, quite conservative and the "score" transparent, as Tal and his technicians tread cautiously on new ground. The *sinus-tones* (tones without their natural overtones), enriched by passing them through resonators, which add colour and individuality, are of a similar quality as the tones produced by electric organs (without the Hollywood *vibrato*), and very often one was reminded of

the musical noises a busy harbour emits in a deep fog (although Yosef Tal begged the audience not to be influenced by similarities with the noises of our everyday world, one cannot help registering them and questioning the advisability of their use in musical compositions).

The composition contains many highly dramatic moments; the four-part fugue, with its rhythmical pattern, is most interesting. After the composer's analysis and a repeat performance, the work presented no difficulty to understanding.

There remains the question of its aesthetic value as music of the future. It may well be only an experiment in technical ingenuity which will run its course until its synthesis with the traditional or its rejection by audiences. Meanwhile, Yosef Tal has promised more elaborate electronic works, to which one looks forward with the greatest interest. His patient and efficient collaborators, Avraham Gat and Avner Levy, deserve special praise for their laboratory work of a high order.