

THE BIBLE IN MUSIC

THE Bible is known throughout the world. Translated into more than seven hundred languages, it has influenced the spirit of mankind to a greater degree than any other creation of the human mind. A larger number of pictures, plays and musical works have been based upon biblical themes than on any other source. The historical, philosophical and religious contents of the Bible,

the innumerable dramatic incidents described in it, have proved a great source of inspiration for poets, artists and musicians alike. Psalm settings, Oratorios on biblical themes, biblical Operas and music for the "Song of Songs" abound in the history of music from its earliest periods down to our own time, and some of the greatest masters of contemporary music have drawn inspiration from the Bible: take Honegger's "Roi David", "Judith" and "Song of Songs"; Ernest Bloch's "Schelomo"; Richard Strauss' "Salome"; Stravinsky's "Psalm Symphony"; Ralph Vaughan William's "Flos Campi"; William Walton's "Belshazzar's Feast"; Leonard Bernstein's "Jeremiah"; Lukas Foss' "Song of Songs"; and Willy Burkhard's "Vision of Isaiah", to mention a few.

It seems strange that Palestinian composers should have written so few works in this field, for who is nearer in space and spirit to the biblical atmosphere than the creative musician living in the very country that gave birth to the Book of Books? A very few great works have been contributed to biblical music by our composers — notably E. W. Sternberg's "Twelve Tribes of Israel" and "Joseph and his Brethren", Karl Salomon's "David and Goliath", P. Ben-Haim's "Joram" Oratorio (written before the composer came to this country), Marc Lavry's "Song of Songs", and Vardina Schlonsky's Symphonic Poem which is a biblical trilogy. Now, one of our foremost musicians has entered the scene with a large-scale symphonic work devoted to one of the most dramatic incidents told in the Bible, and enriched the world's music by an important and interesting composition: the Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra deserves credit for having brought this work — Josef Gruenthal's "Exodus" — to the attention of one of its conductors and presenting it in its subscription concerts.

"Exodus" is described as a Choreographic Poem, as its original version was written for the mimic dancer Deborah Bertonoff who created an arresting mimic drama to the music last year. In its symphonic form the work is written for large orchestra and baritone solo; relevant passages from the Bible are sung by the soloist to provide the background for the five sections of the musical work. A sombre mood prevails in the first part of the score, and not even the miracle of the Red Sea leads to immediate rejoicing; it is only with the Song of Miriam concluding the work that there enters a spirit of relief and happiness. The composer uses a few basic thematic ideas in the structure of his work, but he knows well how to provide variety and tension and to give his orchestra distinct colours. Though never archaic in expression and far remote from all folkloristic tendencies, the composition breathes something both of the spirit of the Bible and of the Orient. I don't think a work like this could have been written anywhere but here. The triumphant Dance provides a particularly happy example of stylised Orientalism indeed it is a rousing Finale.

Bernardino Molinari invested great labour into the preparation of the performance, and the Orchestra responded exceptionally well — special praise is due this time to the percussion section and to the brass. Karl Salomon was the authentic and reliable "narrator" in the baritone solo part.

MUSIC GOES ON IN TROUBLED PALESTINE

By **PETER GRADENWITZ**

TEL-AVIV.

THE riots provoked by the United Nations' decision in favor of partition and the establishment of a Jewish State have not deterred theatrical and musical organizations from fulfilling their schedule. The Palestine Philharmonic Orchestra continues to play to capacity halls, and its subscription concerts are now presented seven times each in succession. Conductors in 1947 have been Rosenstock, Molinari, Munch, Ansermet, Leonard Bernstein, and the local batonists, Singer and Taube.

Bernardino Molinari led the first performance anywhere of a major Palestinian composition, Joseph Gruenthal's "Exodus." The work is described as a "choreographic poem"—it was originally written for a dance performance—and is based on one of the most dramatic incidents in ancient Jewish history—Israel's deliverance from the serfdom of Egypt.

It is a composition deeply imbued with the Biblical spirit but interpreting the ancient texts in contemporary musical idiom. The six interlinked parts of the work are subtitled "Introduction," "Servitude," "Prayer," "Exodus," "The Passage of the Red Sea" and "Miriam's Dance," and the Biblical passages are assigned to a baritone soloist.

The work develops from somber



Kamenetzky, Jerusalem

Joseph Gruenthal.

beginnings to the triumphant song of Miriam; it is certainly one of the best contributions to Palestine symphonic music in a long time.

A choral and orchestral concert devoted solely to contemporary works was arranged by the local branch of the International Society for Contemporary Music under the baton of Otto Lusting. Compositions by Walton, Roussel, Casella and Milhaud were heard, and there was the first performance of a cycle for baritone and orchestra by E. W. Sternberg: "The Brave Soldier" (after poems of Heine); "Vanity of Vanities" by M. Sand-

berg and a choral work by P. Ben-Haim.

A visitor from the United States was Sidor Belarsky, the basso, who gave a number of recitals in the towns and settlements and also visited the Cyprus camps.

The Music Department of the Palestine Broadcasting Service, directed by Karl Salomon, presented a month of Jewish music from mid-November to mid-December. Works of the Eastern National School and by Palestinian composers were given a hearing, and first performances included a symphonic overture, "From Dan to Beersheba" by Marc Lavry, a Quartet for flute and strings by Y. Wohl, excerpts from a cantata, "The Vision of Israel," by Y. Gorohov, and chamber music by Staraminsky and Avkassaf Bernstein. A cycle of Schoenberg's Quartets was presented recently by the station.

The Tel-Aviv Museum Chamber Concerts have offered much interesting fare lately. Frank Pollak and Shulamith Men-Ur performed on two pianos the Hindemith sonata, a Scriabin fantasy and Morton Gould's "Boogie-Woogie Etude."

Music in the colonies and settlements continues and during the worst week-end of riots the Jordan Valley Orchestra, a forty-piece group of farm laborers, amateur most of them, gave two concert playing music by Bach, Beeth Schubert and Bartók.

ISRAELI CONCERT WAS MEMORABLE OCCASION

By MERVYN FRY

"Observer" Music Critic

FESTIVAL of Israeli music at the Albert Hall on Monday saw the first performance here of five works representing the main trends of music in Israel today. It was music, of mature artists, reared in the European traditions, attempting to find ways of writing which expressed their experience of Palestine and of the building of the young Zionist State.

Though widely differing styles were evident, there was a significant feeling of confidence and optimism about all of the music. Oriental influences were often obvious in rhythms and orchestral colouring.

Frank Pelleg was the soloist in the Piano Concerto by Paul Ben-Haim. Written in 1949, this is a vigorous and brilliant work. The sub-titles, "Vision," "Voices in the Night" and "Dance," give general indications of the moods of the three movements which are in normal concerto forms.

Three Hebrew Dances (Alexander Boscovitch) showed more markedly the effect of Eastern-Hebrew and Arabic folk culture. I think these dances and the Comedy Overture (Joseph Kaminsky) might well prove popular if only they can find their way into our concert programmes.

"Exodus," by Joseph Gruenthal, was inspired by the Biblical story of the Jews' deliverance from Egypt, and in each section the scene is described in Biblical quo-

tations sung in Hebrew by a baritone soloist. This is emotionally powerful music, holding the interest by its moving expression of easily-understood sentiments and moods.

Eduard van Beinum and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, with Martin Lawrence as soloist, gave a memorable performance which aroused prolonged applause for both the executants and the composer, who was present.

To hear five modern works for the first time in one concert seemed (beforehand) a somewhat exacting task, but they proved to be full of interest technically and aesthetically. No doubt further study would reveal new points of interest, but even at a first hearing, most of the music was readily enjoyable.

NEW MUSIC FROM ISRAEL

Mizrachi Concert at Albert Hall

The Mizrahi Organisation sponsored a festival of Israeli music at the Albert Hall on Monday last.

The first item was the Comedy Overture by Joseph Kaminsky, a work which did not reveal any musical development or show any perceptible Mediterranean colour. Indeed, it was with feelings of regret that one recalled the pleasing and well-balanced scoring of Hatikvah which, together with the National Anthem, opened the programme. Kaminsky has the reputation of being a "humorous" composer and made good use of the oboe towards this end. The sudden burst of orchestral wind which brought the Overture to an end, came as a surprise and left the audience wondering what was to tickle their musical palate in the works which followed.

Paul Ben-Haim was the next composer and Frank Pelleg coped magnificently with a monumental work, as soloist, in the Concerto for piano and orchestra. The whole work has bizarre moments especially with the opening Allegro sub-titled "Vision" which began with the soloist being accompanied by tympani. A rapid change of mood followed and this was evident in tempo and orchestral colouring throughout this forceful work.

A "chopstick" effect pervaded the concerto and the work as a whole was not worthy of the fame of the conductor, Eduard Van Beinum and the London Philharmonic Orchestra (leader David Wise). The piano was not truly interwoven with the score and as one watched Frank Pelleg racing up and down the keyboard one wondered what the composer's object was and whether he was achieving it. Technical skill was there, but the score could have been amended to produce effects of beauty

rather than of amazement and wonder. In fact, none of the composers developed their thematic material to any great extent. Paul Ben-Haim has tremendous power in his musical writing and it will be interesting to note what he may produce in the near future.

The work "Yiskor" played in memoriam to the late Mordechai Eliash was given quite a finished performance by the solo viola, Frederick Riddle. Oedoen Partos, the composer, has good material for the viola although he tends to be slightly monotonous. No doubt, the work would have received more appreciation from the audience, with the full orchestral score (which unfortunately had not arrived in time for the concert) for the piano did not give the authentic background. Musically there was good basic melody in "Yiskor" and, at times, the mellowness of the viola created an authentic mood of tragedy. This is a work which certainly deserves a further performance.

Exodus, a choreographic poem by Joseph Gruenthal, had as soloist — Martin Lawrence (baritone), and is based on biblical texts sung in Hebrew. There are interesting lower string effects mounting to a full orchestra to intensify the moods of the work. Martin Lawrence's voice was heard to good advantage, although each vocal passage was rather short and relied too much on the vigour of the words than on the actual music. In fact, even declamation is introduced as dramatic effect and one feels that Gruenthal is using all the musical material he can find at his disposal and by his very effort just fails, at times, to secure that grandeur which he is trying to achieve.

Possibly due to the love of religious singing which a Jewish gathering always displays, Exodus evoked a greater

response than any other work. The colour was there without efficient musical elaboration.

The final "Three Hebrew Dances" by Alexander Uriah Boscovitch was a happy choice for here the "dance" foundation was well brought out by the orchestral scoring which was unique and effective. As with the other composers a reliance on the flute section of the orchestra gave an Eastern flavour and Boscovitch has some good pizzicato effects by the strings which acted as a prelude to full orchestral scoring.

Mr. Eiseemann has great courage in presenting an entire Israeli programme especially when the programme was built on such novel lines. Whether the experiment is to develop into a precedent for the future has to be seen, for the musical tastes of the public can be fickle. In presenting the composers of the middle generation all born in various European countries, the results give an impression of native training and impression, with a too conscious striving after Israeli flavour. A future presentation of the new Israeli-born school of younger composers would be in the nature of a musical event. There is also much to be said for the inclusion of the work of composers of the calibre of Mendelssohn or Meyerbeer in a future programme. If musical art has no frontiers, then some kind of contrast in the form of past composers can have a useful place in programme building. Obviously Israel cannot produce enough great music to provide a yearly concert for London music lovers and works must also be tested by time. One can look at Israel's musical development with great interest, but realise at the same time that the tradition must be European to a large extent. However, if Israeli composers can stand on the shoulders of the past great masters and create something worth while and distinctive, they will be performing a great service to international art.

FESTIVAL OF ISRAELI MUSIC

By a Jewish Chronicle Reporter

A large and distinguished audience at the Albert Hall on Monday heard the first Festival of Israeli Music, celebrating the second anniversary of the State of Israel, sponsored by the Mizrahi Organisation of Great Britain and Ireland. The performance was in aid of the Mifal Hatorah Yeshivot in Israel.

A feature of the programme was the "Yiskor" of Oedoen Partos, played as

a tribute to the memory of the late Dr. M. Eliash, who was to have been a patron of the Festival.

Mr. Joseph Gruenthal, head of the Israel Conservatoire for Music and Dramatic Art in Jerusalem, whose work, "Exodus," was performed, was present and received an ovation.

A review of the Festival by THE JEWISH CHRONICLE music critic appears on page 13.



From left to right: Mr. Joseph Gruenthal, Mr. Eduard van Beinum, and Mr. Frank Pelleg.

ISRAEL MUSIC

Historic occasions have a trick of passing without making a great impression on many of those present. That may or may not be true of the first concert of Israel music, given at the Albert Hall on Monday evening, and sponsored by the Mizrahi Organisation. Certainly if anyone attended expecting world-shaking music instinct with the fire and fervour of the Prophets, and yet completely expressive of modern Israel, he was disappointed. But, assessing the evening objectively, we must consider the concert a decided success, if only because it showed that Israel composers are already making a not unworthy contribution to international music. Moreover, at least one of the compositions performed had that intense emotional impulse which is still for most of us a sign of genius.

Well-Balanced Programme

The programme, in which Eduard van Beinum conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra, was well balanced; it began with Joseph Kaminsky's "Comedy Overture," a work which would have been better for compression and greater economy, but lived up to its name. Paul Ben-Haim's piano concerto is a piece for the virtuoso pianist; the solo instrument gets very little rest throughout, and, as is so often the case in this type of work, the interest lies more in its craftsmanship and gesture than in its thematic material. But the second movement actually conveys a mood of poetic mystery. Frank Pelleg played the solo instrument with brilliant sureness. It was a pity that the orchestral parts of Oedoen Partos's "Yiskor" had not arrived—yet was it? One was able to listen undistractedly to the solo viola, played by Frederick Riddle, to realise perhaps more clearly that Jewish joy may take many different forms of musical expression, but Jewish grief turns inevitably to the traditional form, no matter how subtly, as in this case, that form is modulated and varied.

It was Gruenthal's "Exodus," however, that made the deepest impression of the evening. Scored for full orchestra, with baritone solo, it is an interpretation of five scenes from the time of the Deliverance, the solo baritone declaiming in liturgical style the key passages of "Exodus," and the orchestra illustrating them. Especially moving was the section illustrating "Servitude," a reiterated rhythmic figure conveying almost painfully the sense of "hard bondage"; also the section illustrating the overthrow of Pharaoh's hosts, treated as a matter for solemnity rather than exultation, and Miriam's Dance, not so much a dance as a triumphal procession. Martin Lawrence sang the soli with noble effect, and, despite the difficulties imposed by the formal problems involved, the entire work left an impression of majestic power. It was a pity Boscovich's "Three Hebrew Dances" followed; they seemed an intrusion. One did not want to dance so much as to meditate.

H.C.S.

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MUSICAL DIARY ^{7/1/1952}

IN Kol Yisrael's Sunday afternoon concert, George Singer demonstrated very strikingly how attractive even a 30-minute programme can be. Mr. Singer has recently returned from London, where he scored a success at the Albert Hall as conductor with the New Orleans

AFTER three years of preparation, Deborah Bertonoff has appeared in a new programme, a one-woman show: "The Ascent to Jerusalem (Recollection of a People)". The premiere, presented by the Israel Academy of Music, took place at the Y.M.C.A. on Monday.

History in Dance

The theme, by Zeev, covers the whole history of Israel until the present day, and has a slight resemblance to Franz Werfel's biblical play: "The Eternal Road." Deborah Bertonoff was captivating from the opening sequence of the first part: "By the River's Edge"—the discovery of the baby Moses. All her movements are expressive, yet perfectly controlled, and there was particular unity in the movements of her arms and fingers. Another highlight was her graceful portrayal of David, the Shepherd.

The whole of the first section was harmonious, exquisitely conceived, and left a haunting effect. True to history the theme of the second period, about the exile, had to be a decrescendo, and the third part, The Return: "She Who Sows Seed; She Who Wages War; She Who Goes Up To Jerusalem" seemed rather less clear. Paradoxically the first of the three sections contains the real climax, but the choreography was excellent. It was to Miss Bertonoff's advantage that she started her career as a mime-dancer. There was nothing amateurish nor presumptuous in the performance of this sympathetic artist. Before each of the twelve dances the narrator, Shlomo Bertonoff, recited from the Bible for parts

one and three, from Bialik for the second section. The lighting, like the costumes, were first-rate.

Musical Score

For the great success of the programme Josef Tal deserves particular praise. Earlier he had composed the music for Deborah Bertonoff's choreographic poem: "Exodus". His striking new score, using percussion instruments and the beating of brooms, gives the impression of theatrical noise effects—starting with a big crescendo and then followed by a diminuendo. Tal also used a new instrument, the "Tzkel-fon"—(constructed by R. Lehman), which was reminiscent of the Cuban *meracas*.

The unaccompanied song (based on a Sephardic theme), was beautifully sung by Tsiporah Pincuss. The flute-melody, the delicate use of the clarinet and of the viola and the composer's playing at the piano were especially impressive and the themes were skilfully developed. FRANGO