

spaces" of post-Webernian music.

Israel's foremost electronic composer, Joseph Tal, was born near Poznan in 1910 but came to Berlin as an infant, and it was in the capital of the Weimar Republic, buzzing with musical ventures of all kinds, that he received his musical training and general orientation. A graduate of the Berlin Hochschule in both composition and musical pedagogy, Tal is also an excellent pianist, plays the harp, and has a solid background as a conductor. It was this thorough academic training, as well as his notable creative achievement, that moved the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1951 to give him an appointment as Israel's first, and until a year ago only, university lecturer in music. Tal arrived in Palestine in 1934, a year after Ben-Haim. But instead of seeking to pursue a musical career at once, he decided to do his share in the physical rebuilding of the land by joining a rural settlement, kibbutz *Gesher*. Somehow, this initial gesture characterizes the whole man, whose entire career mirrors an uncompromising singlemindedness and dedication to principle. After a year and a half of kibbutz labor he was invited to join the faculty of the Jerusalem conservatory and later became director of the Israel Academy of Music, a post he held until 1954. Since then Tal, perhaps the least academic of Israel's older composers, has steered clear of anything that might involve him in the petty struggles for position characteristic of musical politics anywhere, and especially in a very small country. Aside from part-time teaching at the University and at Oranim, a teachers' institute near Haifa, he has devoted himself with singular energy to the Center for Electronic Music in Israel, an institution now located on the campus of the Hebrew University, but which he built from scratch, beginning with a single tape recorder in his own home.

Tal's numerous works for traditional media defy classification as part of any "school." No doubt Schoenberg had an early influence on the Berlin composition student. But neither his widely played First Symphony (1952) nor his exceedingly well-wrought String Quartet in one movement, nor, for that matter, his subsequent Cello Concerto is in any structural sense dodecaphonically conceived. While row materials are freely used, the method of composing with twelve tones is nowhere strictly applied, not even in as recent and completely atonal a piece as the *Structure* for solo harp. Similarly, oriental materials are employed sparingly and with the greatest caution. Whereas the Symphony is actually based on a Persian-Jewish lament as notated by A. Z. Idelsohn, the Quartet no longer goes beyond the use of a few character-

istic motifs. And if the Symphony still features a dance section in accordance with the then prevailing tenets of the Mediterranean School, such sacrifices to popular taste, however subtle, have been conspicuously missing in recent years. Tal continues to draw much inspiration from the Bible. But the references are almost entirely of a textual nature. This holds true not only for the short operas *Saul at Endor* and *Amnon and Tamar* but for the electronic music as well. His first work for the new medium was called *Exodus II* (an earlier ballet, *Exodus*, originated during the immediate post-war years); an electronic opera deals with *The Tower of Babel*. Even his seemingly "abstract" Concerto for Piano and Tape Recorder reaches its climax with the dramatically whispered mention of "the One who is in the heavens and the earth."

It takes a man of Tal's persistence and integrity to overcome the enormous material handicaps and outright suspicion facing the new and expensive field of electronic music in a small, economically struggling, musically conservative country like Israel. With the exception of a token government subsidy, his Center depends entirely on private funds, secured for the most part by an enthusiastic and equally tenacious young physicist, Shalhevet Freier. Mr. Freier's mother, in turn, founded the Israel Composers Fund, a private agency that issues numerous commissions every year to the most deserving of Israeli composers. Without the selfless help of such dedicated individuals Israel's discovery of "the new music" could hardly have proceeded as rapidly as it did.

As might be expected from a man of his candor, Tal is completely undoctrinaire about electronic music and broaches its problems with the same healthy skepticism that has marked his approach to the twelve-tone method or the issue of a "national" Israeli style. Thus, he declared several years ago: "We can make a religion of the purity of the sine-tone, we can use white noise as a counterpart, but we cannot shut our ears to the fact that compared with conventional tone material, as the bearer of sound content, electronic tone material is inherently narrower and more rigid; indeed it has the characteristics of the synthetic . . ." He then proceeded to condemn originality *à tout prix* and concluded with an appeal for concentration on "the possibility of controlling the individual components with financially feasible and aesthetically satisfying projects."<sup>2</sup> Imbued with the kind of realism found only in the true idealist, Tal is indeed a liberal in a realm of artistic endeavor where extremism often goes on a rampage. Combining a

<sup>2</sup> *The Modern Composer and His World*, ed. by John Beckwith and Udo Kasemets, Toronto, 1961, p. 119.

good deal of modesty with a strong sense of personal value, he impresses even those who find his music rather forbidding and exerts a far more powerful influence on the younger generation than some of his more "successful" colleagues who intoxicate a gullible public with their facile "Mediterranean" orientalism.