

## MUSIC, OLD AND NEW, IN PALESTINE

STEFAN WOLPE

**P**ALESTINE is an aggregate of peoples belonging to many nations and races and representing the diverse cultures of the world. The Jews now entering the country are the persecuted and political idealists of far-flung lands. They bring with them music that has the form, manner, and expression of the countries of their birth. Here they meet the indigenous and much narrower Jewish-Oriental communities of the Yemenites, Persians, Bokharans, Kurds, and also the new generation of native-born Jews with no European memories but with an intimate knowledge of every corner in Palestine. The intensity of these sorrow-haunted people engenders emotional vigor. They need music to celebrate their festivals, to dance, to love, to resist suffering and to sing in praise of heroism.

The Arabs of Palestine have of course their own many-hundred-year-old music culture. This is a magnificent heritage of folk-lore, which has not been as yet vitally affected by the music of Europe. No Arab schools of the Western type have been established. The few Arabs who first attended the Jewish conservatories in Palestine have, since the riots, completely disappeared. Some pseudo-modern influences have been introduced through popular dance-forms of the West and a kind of deteriorated hybrid style can be heard occasionally in the Arab cafes, chiefly in the cities of Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria. But the Mohammedan Arab apparently has little comprehension of the European music tradition. His own native music still exists in the songs of peasants and is heard in Arabic broadcasts over the Jerusalem radio. No Arab composer of art-music has yet utilized this wonderful material and it still remains a complete enigma to the average Jew.

But the musicians who have poured into Palestine from all parts of the world have established a system of modern urban musical culture through orchestras, operas, chamber-music ensembles, choruses, conservatories and clubs. The daily musical offering in Tel-Aviv, a city of one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants is enormous. The Palestine Symphony Orchestra founded by Bronislaw Huberman has established a very high standard of musicianship. Its brilliant instrumentalists are an important contribution to the staffs of the high-ranking conservatories in the country. The Jewish radio programs broadcast under the direction of Carl Salomon offer a great deal of the world's best music literature as part of their daily routine. The chorus and small orchestra used for these broadcasts also give performances to encourage the production of new music.

As a result of Jewish activity in the musical life of each city new forms of production in keeping with the social function of the composer are stimulated. One night each week many hundreds of people gather in the halls of the labor unions. Every one receives a text and someone sings to it. In this way new songs are learned measure by measure, a Palestinian custom that everyone likes. On trains, in the cooperatives, in the country—everywhere, there are groups collecting songs.

The working people have an overwhelming desire for a popular musical culture. They hear a simple piece of music, enjoy it, demand a repetition, and so exert pressure upon the composers to repeat certain characteristic expressions, to preserve certain scale patterns. The communal farms invite the composer to the country and commission him to write for their festivals, give lectures, and work with the choruses and instrumental groups. As a result of his close association they gain a better appreciation of the making of music and so realize the connection between the writer's creative fantasy and the artistic requirements of the community.

In the communal developments the professional meets a specific Palestinian type, the amateur-composer. He may be a herder, a peasant, or a teacher, who is so obsessed by music that he becomes the artistic soul of the community. With different social advan-

tages he might perhaps have been a professional. As it is, he just composes little songs, small pieces for violin or flute, and dance music and so gives to the community a treasure of music constructed after the manner of folk-tunes in his homeland. Working under the influence of the neighboring Arab villages he creates the Palestine folksong—a synthetic product. Certain elementary tetrachords, pentatonic scales in their simplest treatment, cantilations of church modes, syncopations of the most ordinary kind, the most primitive themes, matter-of-fact oppositions of different melodies, normal divisions of the simple song-form—these are the characteristics which combine to give the new Palestinian song its typical aspect. Young as it is, this Palestinian song-form is already a rigid convention. It hampers the professional composer who is sympathetic to the desire for a popular culture and wishes to play an active part therein. His creative sense urges him to dissolve this narrow form, but because he respects and also inherently likes it he begins to treat it as a musical axiom.



I have often wondered why so many musicians, after living in Palestine for some time, are converted to an acceptance of the country's musical mannerisms. They cannot be in sympathy with those idealists who believe that a national style should be deliberately created along the lines of a chemical formula. The reasons are perhaps more subtle and complex.

To the amateur composer who comes to this country with an inheritance of Russian or Balkan folk tunes, the absorption of the Oriental Jewish and Arabian music is a gain. The traditionalism of his original country receives a new accent. To the professional composer whose material is the European art-music, the Jewish and Arab Palestinian folklore opens up a fertile and rejuvenating world. A few will attach certain flourishes, some popular syllables to the iron structure of the modern art-language; in other words they write a kind of "quotation-music" with wrong notes. Such an adaptation is of course very superficial. But others dissolve the Asiatic East-European mixture and neatly separate the different elements of the compound. This I believe is in the right direction.

The modern composer finds great satisfaction in the analogies he discovers between his own and the Oriental art forms. Quarter-tone music is familiar to the Orientals. There is also a wonderful sense for rhythmical form and for infinite differentiations of dynamics. Rich and varied are their ways of using the voice, the drums, the guitar. Their art of improvisation and range of musical memory are fascinating. Profoundly moving is the character of the ever-undulating never-changing native music which holds one state in suspense without desire to move into another; which flows ahead without the dramatic emphasis of the European. The modern Palestinian musicians who can respond to this world will surely live to see their music absorbed into it.

Today the composers of the country are banded together in several groups. The amateurs have their center in a periodical, *Einoth* (Melodies), which is edited by Jehuda Shertok, and which publishes their songs.

Of the professionals a number last year founded the "World Center of Jewish Music" electing Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud as presidents. Their goal is the creation of a national Jewish music, their ways are conservative, they wish to stimulate the creation of a traditional music.

Another group is assembled around the Palestine section of the International Society for Contemporary Music. This is an extremely important element, contributing to the intense activity of musical life by championing the cause of modern music at a moment when the conservative tradition threatens to curtail future development.

Here in one small country there are many opposing fronts of musical culture. To assure the fruition of a style there is needed a composition technic rich and flexible enough to convert the static folk-song into a living medium. The modern group possesses this technic. But the process is only in its first stages. Some already fear it will bring about the estrangement of the folk-song, while others foresee the capitulation of modern music to the old heritage. In either case it is well not to retreat from inevitable historical development. To me the outlook appears rich and promising; the future offers great hope to the Palestine composers.