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Standard Awards Panel  
American Society of Composers,  
Authors and Publishers  
575 Madison Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10022

A Position Paper by Jack Gottlieb

Dear Sirs:

The three works I am submitting for your examination all in some way reflect my present and primary concern as a composer: to develop an individual approach to liturgical (specifically, Jewish) music. This is a specialized field which accomplished composers would generally prefer to leave to second-raters or amateurs mainly because they find it inhibiting and outmoded (which, nevertheless, is a kind of challenge), because it has little room for the new (not necessarily the experimental or novel), and gives little reward, financially or otherwise, to the creative artist. Indeed, choir leaders, for instance, think nothing of pirating photo-copies of liturgical music without offering any return, direct or not, to the composer. Somehow, they and their superiors feel it is excused in the name of God, that there is a larger end that justifies a lesser means -- a dubious conclusion.

I have experienced this practice most vividly. The recording of my Sacred Service "Love Songs for Sabbath" (one of the works submitted) was made without my knowledge or permission. I had no legal recourse since, as my lawyer stated it, "you cannot sue Nuns." Yet I am grateful that this recording exists for its historic value. For the first time in history (May 1967) -- as far as can be determined -- a complete Jewish service was given

under Catholic auspices. Performed in a church, sung by a choir of Catholic students and a Jewish cantor, conducted by a Sister, with readings by Lutheran and Greek Orthodox actors -- it was, to make an understatement, a unique event. But to go into its colorful history would be too extensive at this time. That this took place at all is indicative of one of my pet projects: involvement with so-called ecumenical happenings, particularly those that cut across Jewish-Christian lines. The reasons for this attitude are not at all noble. They serve, instead, pragmatic goals. As a composer I firmly believe that involvement with religious music other than my own faith helps to illuminate and enhance my own craft. One is forced by circumstance to investigate the primary source-materials of his religious persuasion, and there are lessons to be learned by emulation and imitation of other practices.

Another composition of mine offered for your consideration illustrates this to some extent. It is called "Shout for Joy," and subtitled Church or Synagogue Psalms. By not limiting myself to one or the other institution, I have been able to accomplish, obviously, greater circulation for the music. More important, these Psalm settings are representative of my general theory about the composition of new liturgical music. It may be described as: words should always dictate the spirit and shape of music, not only in terms of prosody (too often sacred music bears no relation whatsoever to the words and vice versa), but as theater.

Apparently this word "theater" is a stumbling block for those who determine the content of services. They equate it with the unholy concert-hall, which is anathema and the antithesis, they feel of the synagogue. I quote Cantor David Putterman of the Park Avenue

Synagogue, N.Y.C. (New York Times, July 20, 1969):

"The pulpit is not a stage, a service is not a performance."\* Although I admire Cantor Putterman, having worked with him on several occasions, I cannot accept this tired, over-used thesis, which is imprecise and not universally applicable. Who is <sup>to</sup> judge if and when a service has, indeed, "degenerated" into a performance?

Item) It is forgotten that the original source of all western liturgy is in theater (or the reverse: the original source of theater is liturgy).

Item) There are "captive audiences" in both a church-synagogue and a theater. Sometimes it is even a paying audience (e.g. High Holy Days for Jews or collection plates for Christians.)

Item) To a degree, a service might be regarded as a form of entertainment. Undoubtedly this will be criticised as a heretical assertion. However, when, for example, evangelists exploit an exaggerated form of worship in such places as a drive-in "church," this is surrogate entertainment. Any service, for that matter, has panoply and ceremonial rites, and these are visually and aurally entertaining. Tacit admission of its musical entertainment is made when jazz and folk elements are introduced, for this desire to reach a larger and/or younger crowd is intended to give them pleasure as well as to lure them.

Item) Like theater, services can be a moving experience, a catharsis. The most vivid examples of this are, of course, memorial occasions.

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\* This is not a new complaint. A.Z. Idelsohn in his book Jewish Music (p. 210) quotes a European 1778 statement: "We hear in the sanctuary concerts, symphonies and arias which belong in the dance hall and the theater. They call forth in the heart of the congregation profane sentiments instead of religious."



## 4.

Item) A sermon is like a soliloquy. It exhorts, it tries to persuade the listener to a specific point of view as much as a monologue does. Thus, services can be instructive, as well as "entertaining" and moving.

Item) There are tragic and comic overtones in prayers, if we equate comic with celebration, joy and praise, and tragic with mourning, petition and contrition.

Item) There is even a kind of star system involved. The synagogue, for example, with the more spectacular cantor always attracts a bigger congregation. A preacher known for his television appearances no doubt commands a higher salary from his parishioners than those who do not.

Item) Both the theater and the church-synagogue create artificial situations; or, at best, they are only as natural as herd instinct. Why else does the populace cram itself together on uncomfortable seats, stand too much, have too much or too little light, or, for many, read a language that is barely understood? Theater, similarly, is artificial. That is, it is not found in nature because it is an art form, calculated, in the finest dramas, to inspire the observer. Yet, as soon as artistic hands get involved in liturgy, the professional religious-folk tend to panic. Why is this? Usually, the traditionalists use the subjective formula-response of "a service is not a concert" when they find that the music is either:

- A. too difficult,
- B. too far removed from traditional sources,
- C. simply not understood.

This protest, methinks, is just so much camouflage. Such objections, furthermore, are insidious since they claim righteous indignation under the cloak of piety.

If I am writing music to order, then I gear it accordingly. But it does not necessarily mean that I am interested in meeting such requests. Why can't those who place such orders gear their programs to fit the result? Why is it that those synagogues which do not seem interested in a broad music program will spend enormous sums on visual arts for their sanctuaries? Why will some church boards try to get away with the least expense when it comes time to commission a composer? Is it the same old problem that many people have: you cannot hang a cantata on the wall? - that music evaporates in thin air? - what tangible evidence is there for one's investment? (recordings are an answer to that).

Despite such discouragements, I am still a believer -- perhaps not so much in organized religion as much as in the need to help REorganize religion. I would like to believe that my work is and can be of sufficient merit to stimulate others towards new directions. Many Jewish congregations are bored with services and find them repetitious. The language is often incomprehensible (whether it be Hebrew or stilted English) and the musical speech is over-ripe. Jewish music does not have to be just "mittel-Europa": the exotic cantorial styles of Polish-Russian origin that find such favor in Orthodoxy. Nor is it just based on the German 19th. century pens of a Sulzer or a Lewandowsky or their 20th century heirs, a Binder or a Rinder -- so loved by Reform Judaism. Of course there are notable contemporary services, but such exceptions are outside the mainstream of the establishment. They are not the "meat and potatoes" of Sabbath ritual.

It is curious that by liturgy standards, my music is considered to be "advanced;" but by present-day standards of the rest of the composition world, it is quite the contrary: old-fashioned, not "with it." Be that as it may, I am American born and trained, first generation, and I am not favorably disposed nor conditioned toward European traditional Jewish modes (nussach). In fact, I find them mostly alien.. Nevertheless, I regard my work as having "Jewish identity," but as seen through the eyes of an American. It is ironic that many beloved synagogue tunes stem from 19th. century Germany where they were originally written in imitation of the Burger-Protestant middle-class music. Therefore, much that is deemed necessary to preserve today is itself a product of assimilation from yesterday.

Sadly, I see little signs of encouragement for myself or my peers (very few in number) by Jewish organizations. Does this not frighten them? Are they not concerned as to where future synagogue music is coming from? The Catholics have opened up flood-gates since the Vatican II council, and although some of their new music (what I would call "guitar pap") has already drowned, they are still making efforts to be more in step with the times. What have the Jews done for their music? Very little, as far as I can discern.

I am hoping that the last work I am showing you will summarize my philosophical and musical positions when completed. It is a work-in-progress, using the entire **Biblical** "Song of Songs" and set for soloists, narrator (my words) women's chorus and chamber orchestra. As far as I know, no one has ever attempted a composition based on the full text, although there have been many settings utilizing parts of it.

I have subtitled it as an Allegory for the Synagogue. This means that it is primarily (though not exclusively) intended to be performed in a sanctuary, despite its "concert-hall" trappings. Although the approach is theatrical (even a la Broadway), the allusions to Jewish ideas (musical and otherwise) place it somewhere between an opera and an oratorio category -- making it, I believe, a new synagogue experience. It is not meant for purposes of worship, and neither is it pure entertainment. Of course I am expectant that the Awards Panel will react favorably to my music and to my views. Since there is little willingness on the part of synagogues to rock (or to roll) the liturgical boat, perhaps only interested bystanders, such as ASCAP, can and will act as enlightened agencies. I have no ready answers; (new hymnals, for example, are vitally needed, but new poetry must come first); but I do know that no matter what, I must continue in this way.

Respectfully yours,

*Jack Gottlieb*

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