

THE POLITICS OF BEING A COMPOSER
 (ACC Mid-Winter Conclave
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by Jack Gottlieb

(FOUR CANDLE BLESSINGS performed)

Arthur Wolfson tells the story that once in Philadelphia, when he was working in a temple where Isadore Freed was the Music Director, he asked Freed why ~~he~~ did not program his music more frequently. Freed replied: "You know, it's no great honor to perform your own music; it's only an honor when someone else performs it." So, you may ask, why am I here today? Well, I suppose I have been waiting -- and waiting -- for the day to come when that honor, Freed alluded to, ~~might be~~ bestowed upon me. Folks, I've got news for you. It just does not happen that way. Honor is not heaped upon a composer like manna from heaven. A composer has to work at it, like any other professional works at his (or her) craft ~~and~~ ^{and} career.

Actually, I'm a composer who has built up a reputation on thin ice. Most of you know my name as having some standing in the Jewish music world, and yet you have heard very little, if anything at all, of my efforts. Just why that is the case has, I think, something to do with what I call the Politics of Being a Composer.

A month or so ago you will recall the problems of Griffin Bell, our new Attorney General, when he had to give up membership in certain exclusive country clubs. He had, to put it kindly, a conflict of interest.

Something like that operates in the composer's world. None of us, in Jewish music, at least, has ever been able to work off our pitiable royalties. You can be sure of that. And I include the Freedts, Fromms, Binders and the Blochs and the Milhauds and even old Solomon Sulzer, who, after all, got his wages from being a cantor. Therefore, we have had to turn to other sources for income: usually as Temple Music Directors or Choir Directors in the community, as pianists (accompanists or coaches) and as teachers.

And that's where the problem sets in. How do we manage to have our music heard in our jobs at the synagogue, school or concert hall without incurring accusations, of self-interest, without being made to feel guilty? In the past, it disturbed me to be told that I was only "out for myself," that I was ⁱⁿ sensitive to the needs of other composers who might not have the same forum I have had for exposure. I felt truly put down by such criticism with the result that I tried to retrench and do my best to have my music performed minimally, if at all.

But then, recently, I realized: "Hey, wait a minute! What's the name of this particular game? Here the years are rushing by and you are going to allow nothing to happen? It just does not make sense!" I decided then and there to get off my assets -- so to speak. Here I am, then, delighted to share my music with you. Let's get on with it.

MA TOVU

SHACHAR AVAKESCHA
ANIM ZEMIROT

III. R'TSEI
KEDUSHA
TSUR YISRAEL

4.

We all know of a certain composer whose initials stand for Israeli Music. We hear his music almost every Sunday afternoon on WQXR. It has amazed me how this person has continued to ~~XXXXXX~~ ~~XXXX~~ be given such a wide forum ^{for} music of such little intrinsic worth. That is a personal view, of course; but, nevertheless, I have to admire this person for getting away with it. It really has to be applauded as ~~X~~ an achievement in this day and age.

Take another case. Some of us have downgraded a certain Chicago composer with the standard phrase: "all you ever get to hear in his synagogue is his stuff, no one else's." To that I reply: if his congregation allows him to do it, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ they must like it that way. And even if they do not, all the more power to him. It's a tough business!

There are ~~other~~ composers we could mention, those we regard as self-serving, as well as those of ~~more~~ modest demeanor, ^{sometimes} ~~almost~~ like ^a Bontche Schweigl. But ~~it is~~ ^{the} ~~first group that is serving itself that delicious buttered roll have and now; the other~~ ^{there is no need to belabour the point.} ^{leave it to heaven.}

I shall return to ~~these thoughts~~ ^{these thoughts} later on. For now, let's hear some pieces written on texts that are exclusive to the GOP. Please follow along in the prayerbooks.

SHEHASHALOM SHELO
EICHA ASHIR
ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT
MAY WE LIE DOWN

5.

I ~~mentioned~~ earlier about the difficulties we composers have.

Let me be more specific. The fact is that on the faculties of

our cantorial schools there is only a token kind of composer

^{representation} reputation. I ^{would guess} suppose that ~~is because~~ qualified composers ^{would} ~~are~~ ^{he} simply not ^{even} interested in such work ^{if} it were offered to them.

The fact is that, as far as I know, there is not one composition

student at any of the ~~cantorial~~ schools. I doubt very much that

there are any Jewish liturgically minded composers at the secular

conservatories either. Where are the new composers coming from? And

if those of us now working have so little reward ^{is this} something to emulate?

The fact is that the last so-called "public" publisher (Transcontinental)

has been gobbled up into the bureaucracy of the UAHC, an institution

that thus far has no experience in the music business. All other

publishers of Jewish music are, apparently, ~~sole~~ endeavours undertaken

by ^{composers themselves} ~~individuals~~ out of ~~a kind of~~ desperation -- or, at the least,

frustration, with conventional publishing houses.

The fact is that our few professional societies ^(Music Council, Amer. Soc. for Jewish Music) ~~are~~ made up of

senior citizens, with no new composer blood being pumped in. The

fact is that all Jewish music ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ functionaries continue

to use the Xerox machine to the detriment of composers. And, to

put myself right on the firing line, the ~~fact~~ fact is that ~~XXXXX~~

working organizations, such as ^{this} the ACC, rather than incorporating

the very few composers who are around into the mainstream of their

groups -- chos v'cholileh! -- choose, instead, to sponsor for them

a weak Guild of Temple Musicians, in reality a pale attempt to meet

composer's needs. We can argue "fun heint biz morgen" the pros and

cons of a separate but equal group. But we all know that they are

are not equal, and never will be, given the tiny number of potential and actual members.

What do all these facts amount to? ^{That} There is very little opportunity and few outlets for the composer. So he has to bite into the bullet himself. That is the hard, cold reality. The life of Max Helfman, of blessed memory, has been cited to me as the ideal personage ~~for~~ ^{after which} other composers ^{might} ~~to~~ model themselves, ~~after~~ ^{after} Certainly Max was unique in his inherent beauty and lovingkindness towards others. But I am of the opinion that his music ~~suffered~~ ^{Did} as a result. ~~Perhaps~~ he tried ~~to~~ spread himself too thin? I really don't know. But ~~too~~ often his music has a slap-dash, sketchy quality that would have benefitted ^{greatly} ~~from~~ more ~~composing time~~ ^{compositional thought on his part.}

Perhaps I speak for ~~xxx~~ other composers, perhaps not. But I, for one, do not have the energy, time and -- most important -- the ability to be a quasi-saint. I'll leave that mission to the clergy who should, by commitment, be that kind of enabler.

I will have a few closing remarks towards the end of the program. Now let's continue.

Sections V, VI, VII & VIII

Adonai, Adonai - after Lewandowsky

Ana Adonai - last Hodev relates to first "mot."

Ladies and gentlemen, you are dealing with a rather fragile, thin-skinned commodity when you have personal contact with the creature called composer. I do not say by ~~such a~~ ~~XXXX~~ description that you should accept everything a composer writes without reservation. Of course not. It's always been the listener's privilege to like or dislike works of music either in part or in toto. ~~Indeed~~ [✓] Indeed it your privilege also to ignore a composer all together.

But it is not, I submit, your right to turn a composer into a public ~~servant~~, one who has not campaigned or made promises, who has ~~not~~ been elected and put into the job of appeasing others -- and by that I mean k'lal Yisrael. The truth is that a composer is not a politician but a creative artist with all the genuine and, ^{Contradiction that it is, with all the} ~~indeed, legitimate~~ selfishness the ^{"creative artist"} term ^{connotes}. It is not a composer's ~~XXXXXXXXX~~ ^{duty} ~~concern~~ to play the diplomat or to foster the careers of others, although he may opt to do so. I realize that this opinion will not sit well with some of you; but so be it. If we are going to be ~~accused~~ of being pushers of our own "nickle bags", I remind you that it was said a long time ago: "Im ayn ani li, mi li? V'im lo achshav, ei-matai?"

Let's listen to some fun music now.