

**RUSSIAN AND SOVIET INFLUENCE ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI SONG
TRADITION OF *SHIREY ERETZ-YISRAEL***

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	4
CHAPTER I, THE “OUTSIDE” ASPECT	8
The First Period	9
From the beginning of <i>First Aliyah</i> until early 1930s	
The Second Period	14
From early 30s until the establishment of the State of Israel	
Song genres; examples and stories of songs	18
“Dugit” – Music Analyses	24
CHAPTER II, THE “ART MUSIC” ASPECT	25
The influence of the non Jewish Russian composers on the emergence of Jewish national movement in music.	25
The St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music	27
Joel Engel – Biography	31
Engel – The Pioneer of Jewish Music	33
Music in Palestine	36
“ <i>Numi, Numi</i> ” – music analyses	40
CHAPTER III, THE “FOLK” ASPECT	42
Alexander (Sahsa) Argov: biography	42
Sasha Argov’s work and his role in the culture of Hebrew Song	46
Argov’s <i>Shirei Eretz Yisrael</i> as the Index of “Israeliness”	48
Russian Influences in Argov’s Music	50
<i>Shir Eretz</i> – Music Analyses	51
Conclusion	57
Appendix	60
Bibliography	70

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Introduction

Shortly after immigrating to Israel in 1990, I have realized that much of the Israeli song-culture, the so called *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, was largely influenced by Russian and Soviet music. Moreover, many of the songs that are now considered as the Hebrew song classics are, in fact, Russian and Soviet melodies with new Hebrew words. Since both the Russian and the *Eretz-Yisraeli* cultures are the two main components of my identity, I have decided to write my thesis about the influence of Russian music on the development of the Israeli song. My research covers a period from the first *Alyia* of Eastern European Jews in 1882 and until early 1950s.

Being a young country, *Eretz Yisrael* lacked the tradition of a secular folk song, which thus had to be created by the immigrants. As the immigrants were largely influenced by the musical heritage of their homeland, the music they introduced inevitably reflected this heritage. Due to the fact that a big part of the immigrants were originally from Russia, *Eretz Yisrael's* musical tradition of the time echoed the one of Russia and Soviet Union.

My thesis reflects three different aspects of this Russian/Soviet influence:

The "Outside" Aspect; songs written in Russia/Soviet Union and brought to Israel.

The Art Music Aspect; the impact of the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music on the emergence of Israeli art music. *The Folk Aspect*; the influence of Russian born composers on the creation of Israeli folk-song tradition.

The development of a folk song tradition is a dynamic and ongoing process which continues in Israel till today. My research, nevertheless, mostly deals with the first stages of this process, when Russian influence was the greatest. How can a secular folk tradition emerge in a new settlement? How do we define *Shirei Eretz Israel*? Before going any further, it is important to define the terms I am employing in my research. According to Talila Eliram,¹ musicologists define Israeli song tradition in different ways: Edwin Seroussi calls it “Shir Eretz Yisraeli”, “Zemer Yivri “, and “a folk song.” Jenoach Hirshberg defines it as a “Folk Hebrew Song” in one source, and as an “Original Eretz-Yisraeli Song” in another. Cohen and Katz talk about “Folk Israeli Song”, “Israeli Song”, and “Hebrew Song”, etc.² Although the common academic definition—*Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, still remains controversial, that is the term I chose to use in my research.

Some of the common features of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* are: accessible, not complicated, “singable” melodies, simple harmonies, songs that have clear melodic flow. According to Nurit Hirsh, *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* have fast harmonic rhythm. For example, Sasha Argov’s songs set a great example of rapid harmonic changes. Naomi Shemer defines *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* as “minor”. Shemer claims that everything that is written in minor is “ours”, while everything in major is “not ours”.³ Personally, I find these notions very interesting, as the majority of Russian and Soviet songs that were adapted in Israel are written in minor. They have broad melodic phrases, and in general, match many of the features discussed above. Moti Regev views *Shirei Eretz Israel* as folk music that

¹ All the translations from Hebrew and Russian in this paper are made by me.

² Talila Eliram, *Bo Shir Ivri*, (Haifa University Publishing, 2006), 15.

³ Ibid.

mostly originates in: “Russian ballads and East-European rhythms brought to Israel by the founders of Israeli society in the first half of this century.”⁴

Another question is, whether *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* is a folk or popular genre. Folk song is usually defined as a song that is orally transmitted from generation to generation, while its authors, often not professional composers, are unknown. Popular music, on the other hand, is intended for mass audience as it is created by non anonymous professionals. The problem with defining *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* as folk songs is that their authors are not anonymous. Edwin Seroussi tries to solve this dilemma by saying that *Shir Eretz Yisraeli* is somewhere between folk and popular song.⁵

Regev and Seroussi define *Shir Eretz Yisraeli* as an “invented folk song”:
“Among scholars, the term “Israeli song” refers to the corpus of composed songs kept in written form, mobilized by the establishment to serve the development of the new Hebrew culture, and having distinctive modal, melodic, and rhythmic patterns.”⁶ The authors conclude with a notion that: “in the early period, the term *Shir Eretz Yisraeli* bridged composed and real folk songs and added other layers of light music, to constitute a particular category of contemporary popular music in Israel, once a formal recording industry began to operate in Israel in the late 1940.”⁷

My thesis attempts to show that Russian music played an essential role in the formulation of the “Invented Folk Song” tradition that gradually became *Shirei Eretz*

4 Motti Regev, The Field of Popular Music in Israel, (New York, Manchester University Press, 1989), 143-44.

5 Eliram, 21-22.

6 Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, Popular Music and National Culture in Israel, (University of California Press, 2004), 56.

7 Ibid., 56.

Israel. Each of the three chapters comes to illuminate a certain aspect of this influence and impact.

PART I – THE “OUTSIDE” ASPECT –

Russian and Soviet Songs in Eretz-Yisrael – their adaptation and amalgamation within the culture of the Yashuv.

Russian songs of different kinds have become an integral part of the Israeli reality. These songs entered Israeli culture in such a profound way that people started to view them as the classics of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* tradition, when often forgetting about their Russian origin. The first part of my research deals with Russian and Soviet songs that were brought to Palestine by the first immigrants from Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century. These songs, mostly of folk origin, were adapted in the Land of Israel in order to provide some sort of “raw material” which the *olim* used for creating a new model of a secular Palestinian song. Later, in the 30s and 40s, during the PALMACH time and the War of Independence, a vast wave of Soviet songs arrived to Palestine, as a response to the idealistic-heroic perception of Soviet Union in the Hebrew settlement of Palestine of the time. Many of these songs were well-known Soviet patriotic and World War II songs that after their absorption in *Eretz-Yisrael* and translation to Hebrew gained popularity in the *Kibbutzim* and among the members of the PALMACH. Others were sung in the Tel-Aviv’s cafes and theaters. These songs became an integral part of the Israeli culture and are still very popular.

According to Dr. Natan Shachar and Mr. Eliyahu Ha-Kohen, we can make a rough division to four periods of Russian songs in Israel:⁸

1. From the beginning of the first *Alyia* in 1882 until the early 1930s
2. From the 1930s until the early 1950s

⁸ This information derives from interviews with Dr. Natan Shachar and Mr. Eliyahu Ha-Kohen in Israel, January 2006.

3. The *Aliya* from Soviet Union in the 1970s – 1980s

4. From the beginning of the great *Aliya* from Soviet Union in the 1990s until today.

This research, however, mostly concentrates on the songs that were adapted in Palestine during the first and the second periods.

The First Period: From the beginning of *First Aliyah* until early 1930s

Reasons for the arrival of the songs and the ways they were accepted in the early *Yishuv*

The first wave of Russian songs reached Palestine with the arrival of immigrants from Eastern Europe in 1882. First *Aliyah* (1882 – 1903) brought to Palestine mostly observant people, who hoped that the Land of Israel would be rebuilt in the religious traditions of Torah. During that period, more than twenty five thousand Jews from Eastern Europe immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*. A second wave of immigration (1904 – 1914) was provoked by severe pogroms in Tsarist Russia (especially, by the horrific *Kishinev Pogrom* in 1903), as well as by the first unsuccessful attempt of Russian Revolution in 1905. This *Aliyah* brought to Palestine idealistic secular Zionists from Eastern Europe, who were eager to create new agricultural opportunities that would allow them to rebuild the land of Israel. At that time more than 35,000 Jews came to Palestine. These immigrants started borrowing folk songs of their homeland and fit them with new words relevant to the *Eretz Yisraeli* reality of the time. The *Third Aliyah* between the years 1919 – 1923, brought to Palestine even bigger number of immigrants, who decided to leave Russia mainly as a result of the Great Russian Revolution of 1917 and a severe civil war that occurred as a result of it. First poets and composers came to Palestine with

the *Forth Aliyah* (1924 – 1928). That is when the emergence of *Eretz-Yisraeli* art music has begun.

Some of the reasons for the wide acceptance of Russian songs in the early *Yeshuv* are:

The Need for a Secular Folk Song

At the time of the first *Aliyot*, Palestine completely lacked the tradition of a secular folk song that in other cultures was usually transmitted from generation to generation. By the end of the 19th century, the *Chedder*, the synagogue and the *Yieshivah* were the ultimate centers of culture and education of the *Yishuv*, which musical life was limited to religious chant, cantorial music, and *Niggunim*. New settlers from Eastern Europe provoked a real cultural revolution that could be seen in numerous aspects of Palestinian life, such as revival of the Hebrew language by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, establishment of Hebrew schools in Jewish settlements, etc. These changes could be seen in music as well. Due to the lack of local secular songs, immigrants started to introduce folk melodies of their homeland, while often replacing the original texts with new words relevant to the ideals of their new country. The themes that the songs of the time dealt with were: nature, agriculture, cultivation of the land, *Aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*, Zionism, etc. It is important to mention that the lyrics of some of the songs were composed in Diaspora, prior to the immigration of their authors, while in other cases they were written in Palestine. As these folk melodies originated not only in Russia but also in other Eastern-European countries, it was, at times, difficult to track where exactly the songs came from. Thus, till this day, we often consider a song to be of a Russian origin, when in fact, its real origin is unknown.

The Lack of Composers

The new settlers wished to create a new tradition of a Zionist song. As a result of the lack of composers, the immigrants could not write melodies of their own. Therefore, they used songs they brought from home. In other words, as culture cannot be created in a moment, the settlers did not have another choice but to use some elements of their own musical heritage in order to produce music suitable for a new country. Nationalistic Zionist texts gained extreme popularity, as at that idealistic time of the first pioneers, an increasing need for national *Eretz-Yisraeli* Hebrew song arose.⁹

During the Second and the Third *Aliyot*, along with Russian folk songs, some songs composed by Russian composers and translated to Hebrew became popular as well. For example, “*M’churati Nof Molad’ti*” – a song by a Russian composer Grechaninov, to the lyrics of Tolstoy, this song was translated to Hebrew by Itzhak Livni.¹⁰

The practice of fitting folk melodies to new texts became so common that often it was hard to say, who was responsible for putting the words and the melody together. Moreover, people frequently did not know, who wrote the new, Hebrew words. After the songs became widely sung, the Russian origin was often forgotten, when only the melody with a new text remained and evolved to a new thing.

At the time of the Third *Aliyah*, numerous songs were devoted to the death of Trumpeldor in 1920. After the heroic death of Trumpeldor in *Tel-Chai*, many people felt the need to write songs and poetry in his honor. A good example of such song is “*Kadru P’nei ha-Shamaim*” – (“*The Sky Darkened*”). This song came to Palestine sometime during the 1920s. The Hebrew text was written by Yeoshuah Proshansky – a book

⁹ For a more explicit list of song examples see appendix for Chapter I.

¹⁰ Natan Shahr, *Shir Shir Ale-Na*, (Modan Publishing House, Moshav Ben-Shemen, 2008), 132.

keeper, who was familiar with the original text and melody. He wrote new words after the death of Trumpeldor. It is important to mention that the Russian original of this song deals with a burglar that was killed, when his friends accompany him to his last way – “*Oh, Nucha, Nucha, Chavereinu v'shkav la-Netzach Sham*” (*Oh, our friend, rest there forever*”) The last two lines of the Hebrew version say, however: “*Kamocha gam chaeinu niten b'ad ha-Am*” (“*As you did, we will give our lives for the sake of the people*”).¹¹ Thus, we can see how, originally, a song about a burglar turned in Israel to a national-heroic-patriotic song that dealt with the death of a national hero – a surprisingly common tendency that we will discuss in greater detail further on. In general, when talking about Russian folk songs, the original words did not always interest the pioneers. What they did find more important were the singable Slavic melodies which the *Olim* loved and which they introduced in *Eretz-Yisrael*.

Nostalgia

Another reason for the usage of Russian melodies in Palestine was that familiar songs provided some sort of comfort to the first settlers, who had difficulties to adjust to the unfamiliar environment, and made easier their absorption to the new country. In a lecture in July 1994, an Israeli musicologist Jehoash Hirshberg mentioned that familiar Russian tunes helped to heal the trauma of immigration and the nostalgia that the *Olim* faced in the new country. Along with translating Russian songs to Hebrew, the pioneers sought to create new composed Israeli songs. They tried to replace Russian melodies with more “eastern” sounds in order to form a new local style. Hirshberg mentions, though, that it was not so easy to let go of the Russian style and tradition. Songs that sound

¹¹ From an interview with Mr. Eliyahu Ha-Cohen, Israel, January 2006.

“Russian” continue to be written in Israel until today. Interestingly, Hirshberg claims that songs about “work” sounded “Eastern”, while “love songs” sounded “Russian”.¹²

Melodic and Harmonic Accessibility

Another reason for the popularity of Russian songs in the *Eretz-Yisraeli* culture is their musical features. According to Natan Shachar, Russian songs tend to have a relatively limited range; singable, not complicated melodies which are suitable for both, *Shirah b'Tzibur* and for solo singing. The melodies are often written in a minor key, which makes them a bit sad and nostalgic. They also do not have big leaps or many melodic embellishments. The melodies are usually symmetrical, clear and simple while the harmonies are mostly basic and functional. The songs often consist of two parts. In the second part, the harmony usually moves to the relative major. Russian songs easily allow adjustments of harmonies in thirds and sixths.¹³ In my opinion, Shachar’s definition of Russian folk songs and the Israeli musicologists’ view of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* have much in common.

12 Eliram, 25.

13 Shachar, 134.

The Second Period - *T'kufat ha-Palmach*

From early 30s until the establishment of the State of Israel

By the early thirties, Russian and Soviet songs literally started to “flood” the country— so numerous they were. Several reasons led to the increasing popularity of Russian songs: the development of mass-media, the strong pro-communistic spirit that reached its pick during the PALMACH time, and the victory over the Nazi forces. In the 1930s, the Russian/Soviet culture presented a significant part of the social environment in Palestine and largely impacted the development of the *Eretz Yisraeli* culture. It is important to notice that the amount of songs that entered Israel at that time was extraordinarily large, and as we speak about “Russian songs” in Israel we usually mean these songs.¹⁴

During that period, the pioneers continued to use Russian melodies as a base to which they composed new lyrics. Nonetheless, a new kind of songs started to appear – songs that were quite accurately translated to Hebrew. Many songs had several sets of texts; one was accurately translated while others did not necessarily follow the original lyrics. Songs brought from Russia in the first *Alyiot* were often folk, when many songs in the thirties and forties were composed by prominent Soviet composers. Some Soviet songs that arrived to Palestine at the time were translated by Hebrew poets such as Natan Yonatan, Chaim Chefer, Chaim Guri, Natan Alterman, Shmuel Fisher, etc. Others were appropriated by members of youth movements and *Kibbutzim*. Often these “semi-professional” translations were not extremely accurate, and their poetic value could not

¹⁴ From an interview with Mr. Elihahu Ha-Cohen, Israel, January 2006.

be compared to that of the known Hebrew poets.¹⁵ Gradually, original composers started to appear in Palestine. Interestingly, many of them continued to compose melodies in Russian style which, at times, made it challenging to distinguish between original Russian songs to pseudo-Russian melodies.

Reasons for the increasing popularity of Soviet Songs:

The Socialistic Spirit of the Pioneers

The PALMACH period - the 30^s and the 40^s of the 20th century was a time of a struggle for national independence. At that time, numerous youth and working movements were active. Jews in Palestine considered themselves as working, proletarian people, and socialism was their supreme value. Soviet songs that became an integral part of the pioneer's life stressed and supported these socialistic principles. In the first *Kibbutzim* and youth movements people were singing Soviet songs, which eventually led to their great popularization. Although nowadays these pioneer songs are widely known in the Israeli society, in the 30^s they were sung only by the proletarian left, when the right wing *Beitars* did not accept them as a part of their culture.

The Influence of Mass Media

The great popularity that Soviet songs gained during the *Palmach* times, was directly linked to the rapid development of the mass-media. Some aspects of this influence could be seen in the appearance of talking cinema, radio and records. Starting from the early 1930s, numerous Soviet movies started to reach Palestine, where they were translated to Hebrew and became widely popular. During that time, Soviet musical

¹⁵ Shahr, 133.

movies became popular as well. One of these movies—a musical comedy of 1934 (In English translation, “*Happy folks*”) was shown in Palestine. Its songs were warmly accepted by the Tel-Aviv’s crowd. One of these songs was called in Russian “*Serditze*” (“a *Heart*”), in Hebrew translation “*Romance al ha-Safsal*”, also known in Israel as “*Rina*”. The music was composed by a prominent Jewish Soviet composer Isaak Dunaievsky while the Hebrew words were written by Natan Alterman. Although, this song did not reflect the patriotic spirit of the PALMACH songs, it strongly entered the *Eretz-Yisraeli* folklore. This love song in its Hebrew version belongs to the “*Tel-Aviv ha-K’tana*” – a popular theater show. Many other songs from Soviet movies found their way to the *Eretz Yisraeli* theatre stage.¹⁶

In 1938, a Tel-Aviv’s movie theater *Mugrabi* translated a movie about a concert of the Red Army’s choir in Paris. The choir was conducted by Jewish composer Alexander Alexandrov. This movie, that was shown in numerous Palestinian cities and towns became so popular that many watched it several times (probably, in order to learn Russian melodies better). An Israeli newspaper *Davar* claimed in 1938 that: “the performance of this greatly organized group as a national demonstration is very imposing and appealing. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to see it as a symbol of national art. Why? It’s all politics.”¹⁷ Although, the critique was probably right, this movie enriched the repertoire of *Hazemer Ha-Yivri* with many Russian songs.

An interesting fact is that for some reason, most of the Soviet composers whose songs gained popularity in *Eretz-Yisrael*, were actually Jewish. My explanation of this phenomenon is that probably the leading Soviet composers of the time happened to be

¹⁶ For a more explicit list of song examples see appendix for chapter 1.

¹⁷ Shahar, 134-136.

Jewish. Thus, Jews in Israel often adapted music of Jewish composers in Diaspora, probably without being aware of this fact. Natan Shachar claims that the Jewish origin of Soviet composers might have been one of the factors that provoked great popularity of Russian songs in *Eretz Yisrael*.¹⁸ Consequently, while discussing Russian/Soviet influence on the Israeli musical life, we in fact, discuss Jewish/Soviet influence on the Israeli musical life.

Soviet Victories during World War II

During World War II, Soviet Union was considered a great hero as it fought the Nazi and saved Jews from their extermination in the Holocaust. The victories of the Red Army were perceived by the Palestinian Jews as the most heroic acts. As I have already mentioned, the atmosphere in *Eretz Yisrael* and then in *Medinat Yisrael* was very idealistic and pro-Soviet. Even Josef Stalin was considered a hero. When, after his death in 1953, his horrible crimes became known, people in Israel refused to believe it.

World War II let the Jews in *Eretz Yisrael* express their respect and sympathy to the Russian people. Numerous songs that entered Palestine at the time were translated to Hebrew quite accurately. When there were several versions of the same song, usually at least one of them was an exact translation of the Soviet equivalent.

Soviet poets and composers tried to create a new national style of writing. Thus, Soviet songs of the war period reflected various styles: heroic war songs, partisans' songs, and marches, as well as more lyrical, sentimental, mellow songs that dealt with love and longing for home. These war songs gained extreme popularity in the Soviet Union, as they entered Soviet movies, and were played in dance clubs, etc. To Soviet

¹⁸ Shachar, 135.

citizens, as well as to Palestinian Jews, these songs represented hope for a better future, where there would be no war. Soviet songs of World War II still did not lose their appeal. Even now, they are counted among most popular songs in Russia. It seems to me that citizens of the Former Soviet Union see these songs as an expression of the same sense of nostalgia, as people in today's Israel perceive Russian Songs of the early pioneers.

Song genres; examples and stories of songs

Songs of World War II

Among the songs that were brought to Israel during World War II was "*Laila Bahir*" ("*a Bright Night*")¹⁹ composed by a Jewish Soviet composer Nikita Bogoslawski to the lyrics of V. Agatov. The song was borrowed from a Soviet movie "*Two Warriors*", the Hebrew text was written by Shmuel Fisher. "*Laila Bahir*" is still counted as one of the most popular songs in Russia. In Russian, this song is called "*Dark Night*", while it was translated to Hebrew as "*Bright Night*". Other two songs with the same melody are called in Hebrew "*Laila Afel*" and "*Leil Afela*" ("*Dark Night*"). "*Laila Bahir*" became very popular in Israel despite the fact that its text slightly differs from the Russian original. Another famous song of that period is "*Livlevu Agas v'gam Tapuach*" (in Russian: "*Katiusha*"). This song, written in 1936 by the composer Mordechai Matwei Blanter and the poet Michael Isakowski, became one of the most famed songs not only in the Soviet Union, but also worldwide. In Italy it even became an anthem of the Partisans during the war. This song reached *Eretz Yisrael* in 1941, when it was already translated to Hebrew by Noach Faniel. The Hebrew translation of the song is similar to the Russian

¹⁹ The research of the discussed songs was done by me, while comparing Hebrew versions of the songs with their Russian original. The main source I used was: Rafi Pesahzon and Telma Eligon, 1000 Zemer V'Od Zemer: Shirim Rusiim, (Kineret Publishing House, Tel-Aviv, 1981).

original. This is a love song sung by a Russian girl Katiusha to her beloved, who is at the front fighting the Germans. In Palestine, Rika Zarai was singing the Hebrew version at youth movements. In the 1960s, the singer left Israel and settled in France, where she recorded "*Katiusha*" that soon became an international hit, this time in French. Thus, the song "*Katiusha*" "immigrated" from Soviet Union to Palestine, gained popularity and moved to France where it became even more popular.²⁰

Hebrew translations of Soviet songs of the war usually were accurate, probably to manifest respect to the Soviet warriors that fought against the Nazi forces. It seems that then the words were sometimes more important than the melody. For example, the text of "*At Chaki Li v'Achzor*" – ("*Wait for me, and I will return*") was translated to Hebrew but the original melody was lost. This song was composed by the known Jewish Soviet composer Mordechai Matwei Blanter to the lyrics of Konstantin Simonov. Unfortunately, Blanter's melody is unknown today in Israel. The words, however, reached the country during World War II and were translated to Hebrew by Arik Lavi. The new melody was composed by Shlomo D'rori.²¹ In my opinion, the emerging practice of keeping the words while changing the melody may be because, at that time, the content of the songs became much more significant and important to the settlers than it was before.

The Genre of "Salon songs"

Another genre that became popular in the 1940s was "Salon" songs. They were not sung in youth movements and *Kibbutim* but in Tel-Aviv's cafés. Tel-Aviv of the time was not strongly affected by the pioneer's activity. The pioneers were "working the land"

²⁰ Machanaimi, *Li Kol Gal Nose Mazkeret: Shirim Rusiim*, (Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1988), 11.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

in *Kibbutzim*, while Tel-Aviv's elite was dancing and singing songs of a completely different style. Jaffa Yarkoni, a young and popular singer, used to sing sentimental tango or waltz-like love songs in Tel-Aviv. "*Hagidu Hevraya Madua*" ("*Friends, tell me why*") to the Hebrew lyrics of Shmuel Fisher, and Russian text of Ivan Kuzmin, is a good example of this genre. Although the Russian words of "Salon" songs were translated at times, usually only the original melody with new text was used. This kind of lyrical and romantic love songs, drastically differed from the patriotic pioneer songs.

Soviet jail folklore in the Hebrew song tradition; Criminal Songs

"*Mangina Nishkachat*"²² ("*a Forgotten Melody*") that was sung by Yaffa Yarkoni belongs to the "Salon" songs genre. The Hebrew version resembles many other songs of that style, and therefore is not outstandingly interesting on its own terms. The Hebrew words, written by Shmuel Fisher, are lyrical and romantic. A song "*Ha-Nigun Atik Hu*" by Natan Yonatan uses the same melody as well. After examining the original melody, I discovered that this is actually an extremely popular Soviet jail song, widely known in Russia as "*Murka*". Among the numerous genres of Soviet/Russian songs, there is one that gained great popularity especially among Russian criminals and released prisoners. It is a "chanson" like song style, some sort of a jail folklore filled with jail-jargon language. For some reason, criminal life was somehow perceived by the Russian people as romantic and enigmatic. Despite their cruelty, the criminals were often depicted as charismatic, strong, bold, and charming people. The city of Odessa that produced this "musical and verbal style" was also a big Jewish center. Some even claim that a big part

²² My perception of some of the songs in their Russian versions may be subjective, while I see them through the prism of my personal experience as a former Soviet citizen.

of criminal jargon, actually originates from Yiddish. Perhaps, the reason for this phenomenon is that as, Jews in Russia felt imprisoned, singing prison songs in a new context was liberating. “*Murka*” can be seen as an anthem of this style. It is a folk song that has numerous variations and was translated to many languages. This is a story of a woman who sold her parties in crime, and therefore is about to be murdered.

How can that be? Romantic words affiliated with a melody with such dreadful connotation? Obviously, Yaffa Yarkoni performed this song differently than Odessa's criminals. Maybe the “tango-like” melody appealed to the authors of the Hebrew texts to such an extent that they forgot about the original content. Personally, I cannot imagine a Russian born person who would be able to disconnect from the associations this melody provokes, even in its Hebrew versions.

This was not the only criminal Russian song used in *Eretz-Yisrael*. Immigrants from Russia “enriched” the Hebrew repertoire with many songs like that. For example, a Russian folk song “*Volga, Wolga*”, also known as “*Sten’ka Razin*” (to the same melody Ehud Manor wrote another set of words—“*Ha-Karnaval*”). Stenka Razin was a *Kazak* from the river Don as well as a famous commander of the rebellious *Kazaks* in the Tsar’s Russia of the 17th century. Despite his outstanding cruelty, Razin became a symbol of the struggle for freedom, and a hero of numerous folk songs and stories. This song tells a story about a beautiful princess thrown to a river by Razin, and it is translated to Hebrew quite accurately. How did Kozak songs enter Israeli culture despite the fact that Kozaks were famous for their outstanding cruelty toward the Jews? In my opinion, it could be explained by the great sense of nostalgia, Russophilia and longing for the homeland that made the settlers forget some of the hardships of their past. In addition, the melodies of

these songs are so melodic, mellow, and beautiful that they, at times, may have caused them to forget the essence of the original text.

Songs that were translated first to Yiddish, and then to Hebrew

After World War II ended, another wave of Russian/Soviet songs reached Palestine. Many of them were partisan songs that prior to their translation to Hebrew went through an additional stage—they were translated to Yiddish. A good example of such song is “*Shir ha-Partizanim*” – (“*Partisan’s song*”, “*Zog nit Keimol*”). The melody was composed by two Jewish-Soviet composers – brothers Daniel and D’mitry Pokras for a 1938 Soviet movie—“*Sons of the Working Nation*”. In 1943, Hirsh Glik wrote an Yiddish version of this song – “*a Song of Jewish Partizans*”, when a few years later, Avraham Shlonski translated it to Hebrew. Consequently, this song that originally did not relate to the Jewish partisans’ resistance was translated to Yiddish, Hebrew, and some other languages and became popular throughout the world.²³ Apparently, brothers Pokras later admitted that the song was composed under the influence of “*Oifn Pripetchek*” by Mark Warshawski, one of the most prominent Jewish songs.²⁴ Probably, “*Oifn Pripetchek*” became such an integral part of the composers’ daily life that they unintentionally used some of its features in their Partisan Song. The fact, that this song was popular in Soviet Union, only straightens my assertion that when Russian songs influenced Israeli music, songs written by Jews influenced Soviet music as well.

After the Independence War, Russian songs continued to reach Israel, as they continued to represent certain nostalgia for the past days. In the 1950s, Russian songs

²³ Shahar, 135

²⁴ From an interview with Prof. Eliyahu Shleifer, Jerusalem, December, 2006.

translated to Hebrew were widely sung by the chorus “Ron”, conducted by Conrad Man. Russian songs were also printed in song collections – *Shironim*, published by the Musical Department of the *Histadrut*. During the Cold War, a few Soviet folk ensembles and choruses, including the Red Army Choir, visited Israel. These visits always provoked the revival of the Russian songs in Israel, and resulted in several Russian programs. In the 1980s, the *Givatron* produced a program which entirely consisted of Russian songs. This program gained great success. Until today, in the Israeli song groups, as well as in the gatherings of old members of the youth groups, people are always willing to sing nostalgic Russian songs of their youth.²⁵

“Dugit” – Music Analyses²⁶

The melody of “*Dugit Nosaat*” (“*A Boat*”) was composed by the Soviet-Jewish composer Lev Schwartz for a movie “*Childhood*”, a movie-trilogy based on the book of Maxim Gorky. The Hebrew version that was written in 1942 by Natan Yonatan does not have any connection to the Russian original. “*Dugit*” is considered to be the first song that Natan Yonatan based on Russian melodies. It does not have an additional set of words in Hebrew, and the Russian text has been forgotten. “*Dugit*” is often considered as the quintessence of Russian songs in Israel. Although, it is not a folk song²⁷, its melody follows the characteristics of Russian folk songs that we discussed previously. The melody of “*Dugit*” is singable, lyrical and simple. It is written in 4/4 meter and is divided into two parts, when the second part repeats twice. Each part is divided into two

²⁵ Shahr, 136

²⁶ See appendix I

²⁷ In the book *1000 Zemer V’Od Zemer: Shirim Rusiim*, the melody of the song incorrectly appears as “Folk”. (*1000 Zemer V’Od Zemer: Shirim Rusiim* by Rafi Pesahzon and Telma Eligon, 1981, 63)

symmetrical phrases of four measures each. The second phrase of the first part is similar to the first phrase but rises up an octave in the last measure. The first phrase of the second part is in a higher range, while it is the climax of the song. The second phrase of the second part is the same as the two phrases of the first part. First time it ends on the higher tonic, when the second, down an octave. The melodic range of this song is relatively limited – one octave, while simple rhythmical patterns create a flow of half, quarter, and whole notes without breaks and syncopations. The harmonies of the song are simple and functional. In the second part there is an excursion to the relative major. The harmonies are: I-IV-V-I; I-IV-V-I; I-VII-III-IV-V-I; I-IV-V-I. I have decided to analyze this song as it clearly shows the elements common to a Russian folk song which I will try to apply later to other a bit more complicated choices of my analyses.

CHAPTER II – THE “ART MUSIC” ASPECT:

The influence of the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music on the development of Israeli song culture through the contributions of Joel Engel.

We have already discussed the phenomenon of Russian and Soviet songs that were brought to *Eretz Yisrael* by the first immigrants. These songs that were often composed by Jewish Soviet composers entered the core of the *Eretz Yisraeli* folk song tradition which we call today *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*. However, Russian impact on the development of Palestinian/Israeli art music was also immense. The formation of Jewish national school of composition in Russia in 1908 largely influenced the emergence of Jewish art music not only in Palestine, but also in the United States of America, and in Europe. This chapter concentrates on the reasons that provoked the awakening of Jewish national movement in music, as well as on the work of the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music and on its influence on the art music in Palestine. One of the most central figures in the Society of Folk Jewish Music was Joel Engel, who is also the subject of this research.

The influence of the non Jewish Russian composers on the emergence of Jewish national movement in music.

Jewish musical nationalism in Russia was directly influenced by the Russian national musical school that emerged in the first half of the 19th century. The work of the “Mighty Five”²⁸ strongly impacted the national consciousness of Jewish musicians. This

²⁸ A group of Russian composers that was formed in St. Petersburg by Mily Balakirev and was active between the years 1856-1870. Other four members of the Mighty Five were: Cesar Cui, Modest Musorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin. The group’s goal was to develop a specifically Russian style of art music, instead of imitating Western-European style.

national Renaissance in Russian music consequently resulted in the appearance of the Society of Folk Jewish Music in 1908.

Russian composers who sought to create a tradition of authentic Russian music often turned to “eastern” motives, which in fact were often influenced by Jewish melodies. Russian critic Vladimir Stassov²⁹ defines the features of National Russian School of music: “Along with the Russian folk song element there is another one, which distinguishes the new Russian school of composition. This is the Oriental element. Nowhere in Europe does it play such a prominent role as it does in the work of our composers.”³⁰ In his memoirs, Michail Glinka³¹ writes about the connection between the Russian and the Eastern folk song: “There is no doubt, that the Russian song is a child of the North, but it has been affected somewhat by the denizens of the East”.³² Russian composers intentionally turned to Jewish motives. For example, Glinka wrote a “*Jewish Song*”, and Mily Balakirev, the establisher of the Mighty five, a “*Hebrew Song*”. Modest Musorgsky incorporated in his work numerous Jewish melodies. Although, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov also wrote a “*Hebrew Song*”, his main contribution to the Jewish music was through his teaching. He constantly stressed the importance of national musical inheritance and encouraged his students of different nationalities to arrange their folk melodies. Once, a student brought Rimsky-Korsakov his arrangements of songs that he called “*Eastern Melodies*”. “Very lovely works” said Rimsky-Korsakov after

²⁹ Vladimir Vasilievich Stassov (1824 – 1906) - one of the most prominent Russian critics of the 19th century.

³⁰ V. Stassov, *Twenty five Years of Russian Art: Our Music*, Vestnik Evropi, 1883, as cited in Joachim Braun, *Jews and Jewish Elements in Soviet Music*, (Israeli Music Publication limited, Tel-Aviv, 1978), 24.

³¹ Michail Glinka (1804 – 1857) – a prominent Russian Composer, who was considered as the father of Russian national music.

³² M. Glinka, *Zapiski*, Leningrad, 1953:98, as cited in Joachim Braun, 25

listening to the music, “but why did you call them “Eastern melodies?” These are typical Jewish melodies! You can’t confuse them with others.”³³

Another episode took place when E. I. Skliar brought Rimski-Korsakow his arrangement of a Jewish song. Rimsky-Korsakov looked at it and said: “Well, write another thirty songs and you will found a new school....Why do you imitate European and Russian composers? The Jews possess tremendous folk treasures. I myself have heard your religious songs, and they have made a deep impression upon me. Think about it. Yes, Jewish music awaits its Glinka.”³⁴

Joel Engel was the first who started the process of collecting and arranging Jewish Folk Songs in 1894. He was probably the catalyst of the emergence of a national movement of Jewish folk music, while Rimsky-Korsakov made the idea legitimate from the non-Jewish point of view. The Jewish students of Rimsky-Korsakov maybe needed someone to push them towards discovering their national music, as sometimes it is easier to follow advises of someone from outside the community. Lazar Saminsky wrote: “Is it now awful, that only the great Russian composers from Glinka to Rimsky-Korsakov appreciated the Jewish strain, that all of them created *shef d’ouevres* in this style, and only Jewish composers did not do so?”³⁵

The St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music

In November 1900 Engel and P.S. Marek, a folklore scholar, organized a lecture-recital of Jewish folk songs. The event took place at the Moscow Polytechnic Museum

³³ M. Gnessin, Misli I Wospominaniya o Rimskom-Korsakove, Moscow, 1956, 208, as cited in Joachim Braun, 1978, 36

³⁴ A quote of Solomon Rosowsky in conversation with Albert Weisser, Jan 2., 1950 as cited in Albert Weisser, The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music, (Bloch Publishing Company, Inc., NY, 1983), 44.

³⁵ Leonid Saminsky, Jevreiskaya muzika, St. Petersburg, 1914, 7.

and was sponsored by the Imperial Society for Lovers of the Natural Sciences, Anthropology and Ethnography. The First Concert of Jewish Music provoked the idea of creating a Jewish musical organization and was one of the stimulators for the further establishment of the Society of Jewish Music. At first a Jewish chorus “*Hatikvo*” was created. Then, Jewish musicians decided to establish a more organized and formal musical group.

In 1908 a few Jewish composers finally decided to request a permission to form an official Jewish music institution. The establishers were: Ephraim Skliar, Lazar Saminsky, Solomon Rozowski, Leo Nesviski, Michail Gnessin, Pesach Lvov, Alexander M. Zhitomirski, Moshe Shalit, and L. Streicher.³⁶ Six of the initiators were students of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Although, almost all of them graduated from the conservatory after the death of the composer, they still perceived him as an inspiration that led to the creation of the Society of Jewish Folk Music.³⁷

The composers applied to the Governor of St. Petersburg. According to Solomon Rosowski, during the negotiation, the Governor wondered if there is such a thing as Jewish music. The answer was that “Jewish Music existed as a distinct entity, independent of usage by Jewish musicians”³⁸ and that it was created “not only by Jews like Rubenstein, Halevy, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Goldmark, but also by non-Jews: Glinka, Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky, and that on Mussorgski’s tombstone is engraved a Hebrew tune which the late composer has used in his wonderful cantata *Joshua*.” “Yes”, replied the governor, “I also recall a Jewish tune which I have

³⁶ For the more explicit list of the members of the Society, see Albert Weisser, 1983, 41-65.

³⁷ Galina Kopitova, *Obshestvo Evreiskoi Musiki v Peterburge Petrograde*, (St. Petersburg, Ezro Publishing House, 1977), 11.

³⁸ Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine*, 1995:78.

heard at a Jewish wedding in Odessa, but this was a folk tune. I think you should name your project the Society for Jewish Folk Music.”³⁹ Thus, the organization was renamed from the St. Petersburg Society of Jewish Music to the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music.

The Society of Folk Jewish Music followed the model of the Mighty Five. The members have set a few goals, while one of the most essential ones was collecting and harmonizing Jewish folk songs, as well as researching and developing Jewish Folk Music. The society was also responsible for organizing concerts, musical lectures and meetings, helping to print musical compositions and research papers on Jewish music. In addition, the members of the Society had to form their own orchestra and choir, to establish a library of Jewish music, to give prizes and make contests for Jewish music compositions. The work of the Society was not limited for St. Petersburg as it also spread all over Russia. Several branches appeared; the Moscow’s chapter was opened in 1913, followed by chapters in Kiev and Kharkow. In 1914 the Society opened a publishing-house. The recognition of non-Jewish scholars and musicians activated the work of the Society. In addition to professional composers, many representatives of other professions supported its activity. Leonid Sabaneyev discusses the formation of the Society of Folk Jewish Music:

All preconditions for a further development of this spirit exist: musical talent, a number of Jewish musicians, the artistic temperament of a nation, suitability to musical activity, an interest in national art, the example of past musicians – all this justifies the assumption that the Jewish people will enrich world music literature with a stream of fresh and original works. We can justifiably assume that the blossoming of the Jewish people’s musical culture has announced itself.⁴⁰

³⁹ Rosowsky, “The Twentieth Anniversary, I” *Ketuvim*, 3 (20 dec. 1928) as cited in J. Hirshberg, 1995,78.

⁴⁰ Leonid Sabaneyev, *Die Nationale Judische Shule in der Music*, (Vienna: 1927), 24-25. As cited in Joachim Braun, *Jews and Jewish Elements in Soviet Music*, 66.

Despite the common support and responsiveness, the Society of Folk Jewish Music faced major opposition; assimilated Jews disvalued the tunes the Society arranged, Orthodox Jews did not like the fact that the composers arranged sacred texts, intellectuals claimed that the Society should deal with research and not with practical musicianship.

After the revolution, some composers, as Michael Gnessin, for example, strongly believed in bright future at the new communistic country that will give them new artistic expression. Others, on the other hand, were not as hopeful and left Russia. The Society of Folk Jewish Music ceased to exist in 1918. Lasar Saminsky and Joseph Achron immigrated to the United States, Solomon Rosowsly and Jakob Weinberg moved first to Palestine and then to America, Leo Nivitsky immigrated to Switzerland. Alexander Krein and Michael Gnessin stayed in Soviet Union, which affected the eventual loss of Jewish character of their work.

The formation of the Society of the Folk Jewish Music in 1908 was a turning point in the modern history of Jewish Music. The influence of the Society soon spread from Russia to Europe, Palestine, and the United States. Although, the society only lasted a little more than a decade, its impact on the formation of a Jewish national school of music was immense. It counted 389 active members throughout Russia. In addition, the Society organized about 150 concerts and lectures per year, published great amount of music and collected large amount of folk Jewish songs.

Joel Engel – Biography

Joel (Julius) Engel was born in 1868 in the small Crimean town of Berdyansk in the Ukraine. Crimean Peninsula that was located outside of the Pale of Settlement⁴¹ had a small, mostly assimilated Jewish population. Engel attended the local gymnasium and then studied law in the University of Kharkov. During his studies he, who already played the piano, started to compose music. P. I. Tchaikowsky encouraged Engel to enroll in the Moscow Imperial Conservatory after he saw the young composer's works. After graduating from law school, Engel entered the Conservatory in 1882, where he studied under Tanieiev, Arensky, and Ippolitov-Ivanov. Following his graduation in 1887, Engel took a position as a music critic in the known magazine *Russkiiye Vedomosti*, where he continued to work until 1918. That year, he also married the pianist Anna Heifetz. At the *Russkiiye Vedomosti*, Engel wrote a musical dictionary and a book about the history of music. Despite of Engel's young age, he rapidly gained recognition in artistic and cultural circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg. His articles became highly acclaimed by the greatest Russian musical authorities, such as Rimsky-Korsakov, Taneyev, Cesar Cui and Vladimir Stassov, who encouraged his interest in Jewish folk song.

Engel's first attempt to arrange Jewish melodies was in his opera "*Esther*" which he wrote in 1894, shortly after being accepted into the Moscow's conservatory of music. In 1898 he was asked by two folk Jewish song collectors, Pesach Marek and Saul Ginsburg to edit a collection of folk Jewish tunes that they intended to publish. This eventually led to the First Concert of Jewish Music, which Engel held with Pesach Marek in 1900, and to the further formation of the St. Peterburg Society of Folk Jewish Music. From the formation of the Society and until his immigration to Berlin in 1922, Engel was

⁴¹ At the Tsarist Russia the Pale of Settlement was the area where Jews were allowed to settle.

fully devoted to the research and arrangement of folk Jewish melodies. In 1905 he, along with Marek published the *First Album of Ten Jewish Songs*. In 1916 and 1920 he published two additional volumes of Jewish folk tunes, while in 1918 Engel's collection of children's songs was published.

After the Great Russian Revolution in 1917 and the consequent closing of *Ruskiiye Vedomosti*, Engel tried to incorporate his work into the new system. During a meeting with Rosowsky in Riga in 1922 he said: "I bless the Russian Revolution, because the Bolsheviks have shut down all the newspapers and thank God, I have no place to work as a critic."⁴² Following the revolution, he became active in popular educational work; lecturing in factories and folk universities. In 1920, Engel took positions as a lecturer at the Moscow Conservatoire and as a choral director and music appreciation teacher in a Jewish colony for Jewish Orphans in Malachovka near Moscow. In addition, Engel organized several concert tours of Jewish music. Despite these activities, Engel felt that his work in Russia had no future. In 1922 Engel left to Berlin, where he organized a series of concerts and lectures. There, he also established and edited the *Yuval* publishing house. As an editor, Engel was mostly involved in reprinting the publications of the Society for Jewish Folk Music and of his own compositions.

Nevertheless, in Germany Engel could not express himself in the field of Jewish music as he wished. As a result, in November 1924, the composer made an *Alyiah* to Palestine, where he could fully devote himself to the development of Jewish music. He soon became actively involved in the Palestinian music life. He conducted choruses, taught in a seminary for teachers, instructed theory at the *Shulamit Conservatory*, wrote articles for newspapers and magazines, gave private lessons in composition and harmony,

⁴² Albert Weisser, 72.

and composed music of his own. In February 1927, however, two years after arriving to Palestine, Engel passed away from a severe flue. Overall, it seems that Engel could not fulfill himself in Palestine. He did not get the respect he deserved, and the pressures of the new land were too much for him to bear.

Engel – The Pioneer of Jewish Music:

Engel's input into the revival of contemporary Jewish Music and the reasons that brought him to this field.

For some reason, critics and musicologists often stress the notion that Engel's compositor's skills were rather limited.⁴³ Nonetheless, all of them agree that Engel's pioneer input into the revival of contemporary Jewish Music was immense. Albert Weisser writes that: "Joel Engel was a man possessed of the very rarest refinement and cultural attainments and given to a vast musical outlook which was as much at ease with Bach and Scriabin. His was a personality which mirrored all which was best in the Haskalah and the Russian liberal tradition of the late nineteenth century."⁴⁴

Engel promoted the creation of a national school of art Jewish music. He was incredibly active as a composer, music critic, editor, publisher, and collector of Jewish folk songs. Despite the fact that Engel lived in Moscow and was not among the original founders of the Society of Folk Jewish Music, musicologists often consider him as its establisher, its driving force and the inspiration behind it. Menachem Ravina writes: "His continuous activity in the field of Jewish music turned all eyes towards him. Both Christian and Jewish musicians saw in him the defender of Jewish music – and rightly so.

⁴³ This notion is stressed by Joachim Stuchevski , Galina Kopitova, and Albert Weisser and other critics.

⁴⁴ Albert Weisser, 71.

Engel fought for his new idea with all the strength, with words and music, with lectures and concerts.”⁴⁵

In addition to Engel’s great achievements as music critic and editor, he was also the one, who brought a fundamental shift to the perception of Jewish folk Music at the turn of the twentieth century. Engel basically revived the interest towards the hidden assets of folk song tradition of Eastern European Diaspora. Joachim Stuchewski writes:⁴⁶

Engel was one of the first to realize how valuable the folk Jewish tunes were to the development of Jewish art music. He assumed that the desire of national Jewish renaissance has to be combined with the development of an original musical style. From Russian composers, Engel learned that folk melodies and dances are new and essential power for the creation of such a style. Jewish religious chants and folk songs could be used as a basis for renewed art music. The musicians would arrange folk melodies, while developing them melodically, harmonically, and rhythmically and, thus, create the desired original music.⁴⁷

Before Engel, “Jewish composers of the period did not recognize Jewish music written before their own time, nor did they believe in the possibility of its revival.”⁴⁸

Engel was a product of a secular, mostly assimilated world. Thus, the question is what impacted him to such an extent that he became so enthusiastically engaged in the revival of folk tunes of the Yiddish *Shtetl* tradition. Engel was exposed to Jewish folk melodies by his father, who was an amateur guitarist. Nonetheless, a meeting with Vladimir Stassov in 1897 deeply affected his perception of Jewish folk music. Jacob Weinberg writes about this meeting:

Engel met a friend of his, the sculptor Antokolsky for the purpose of introducing Engel to the eminent Vladimir Stassov. Stassov started a vigorous attack on both as Jews who used Russian first names instead of their Hebrew ones... “I simply

⁴⁵ Menasheh Ravina, *Joel Engel: V'hamusika ha-yehudit*, (Tel-Aviv, *Hamosad l'Musikat ha-Am*, 1947), 47.

⁴⁶ The translation from Hebrew is made by me.

⁴⁷ Joachim Stuchewski, *Bamaagalei ha-musika ha-hehudit*, (Hotzaat ha-Kibbutz ha-Miyuhad, Tel-Aviv, 1988), 42.

⁴⁸ Menasheh Ravina, 30

cannot understand it. Where is your national pride of being a Jew?” ... The young Engel was overwhelmed, bewildered... His words struck Engel’s imagination like lightning, and the Jew awoke in him. This was indeed the greatest moment in Engel’s life, as well as a big event for the whole of Israel. For this was the memorable night when Jewish art-music was born.⁴⁹

Apparently, the transition in Engel’s perception of his national heritage was gradual. At first, his interest in Jewish Folk tunes could be called more anthropologically academic than “personal Jewish”. Engel admitted that “It is not that I collected, arranged, and studied the tunes because I was a Jew, but on the contrary: the more I studied and loved them, the more Jewish I became.”⁵⁰ And indeed, being raised in an assimilated secular family, he learned Yiddish only after he started to collect Jewish folklore. Leonid Sabaneev claimed that this view from the outside was necessary for the establishment of a national school, as “so long as a man is wholly immersed in the nationality... To become alive to it he must get away from that state of existence... only then one is capable of artistic transformation.”⁵¹

And yet, the return to national roots was not an easy process. In 1913 Engel wrote, declining an invitation to take part in a creation of a book about Rimski-Korsakov.⁵²

What is most important is the inner process, in a certain switch of my spiritual core, in relating to my Jewish roots as the source of my national being. Of course I still have the right and the ability to speak about Rimski-Korsakov, but to speak in what way? Before, I spoke as Russian, and I was right, since Russia is my homeland, the homeland that I dearly love, Russian are my language and my culture. Now, it seems like all this remained the same, but something else was added – something important and imperative that reminds me of the fact that I am Jewish, and this brings me to certain conclusions. Nevertheless, as a Jew I cannot

⁴⁹ Jacob Weinberg, “Joel Engel, A Pioneer in Jewish Musical Renaissance (Personal Recollections, 1902-1927)”, *The Jewish Music Forum* 7, 1947, 34-35.

⁵⁰ Engel, “The First Concert of Jewish Music, 1900”, *Theatre and Art*, 6-7 (1926-7), 9.

⁵¹ Leonid Sabaneyev, *The Jewish National School of Music* (1924), 15 (1929), 452.

⁵² The translation from Russian is made by me.

... speak about many important things, and I don't know if I will ever gain this capability – I just don't have enough spiritual skills for that. Perhaps, all this will balance and I will be able to consciously speak as Russian and as Jewish, but right now all this is very painful and difficult.⁵³

Music in Palestine; the impact of the Society in general and that of Joel Engel in particular on the development of art and folk music in Palestine

As I have mentioned in my previous chapter, the folk tradition of Diaspora became very popular in Palestine of the first *Aliyot* due to the arrival of successive waves of immigrants who brought with them the songs of their homeland. Thus, folk tunes of Diaspora communities have found their way into numerous Israeli works and eastern European folklore largely affected music in Palestine. In the beginning, Palestine was not one of the main concerns of the Society of Folk Jewish Music. Nonetheless, three members, David Schor, Leo Nesvitzky, and Michael Gnessin, did establish connections with Palestine during visits and concert tours. The links with Palestine, as well as other countries of the Western world were strengthened as a result of the immigration of several members of the Society due to the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. Joel Engel's work in collecting and arranging Jewish folk songs of Russia was considered as a pioneering effort that had a great impact on the development of Israeli art music. His ideas were inherited by numerous Israeli composers. Joel Engel highly advocated the usage of folk melodies in Jewish art music, as opposed to another member of the St. Petersburg Society Shlomo Rosowski, who argued in favor of the Biblical Cantillation motives.

By the 1920s, the musical scene in Palestine was almost exclusively dominated by the members of the Society of Jewish Folk Music. The foundation of *Eretz-Yisraeli* art

⁵³ A letter Engel wrote in 1913, as it is cited in G. Kopitova, 1997, 8.

music was in large formed by them as well. Music critic Menashe Rabinowitz claims that the creation of art music is the “the third and the last stage in the evolutionary process of national music, following the initial and compilation ... In the particular case of the migrant members of the Society, an abnormal situation ensued, since they commenced their work in Palestine directly with the third stage, detached from the soil which gave rise to their work.”⁵⁴ Jehoash Hirshberg indicates that:

The massive presence of the Society members was overwhelming in the small musical community, and the concert of Jewish music soon became synonymous with theirs. In addition to entire concerts of their works it became a recurrent gesture to include a work by one of them in heterogeneous programs, such as a recital by Judith and Verdina Shlonsky which included a song by Engel alongside works by Pergolesi, Rimski-Korsakow, and Chopin.⁵⁵

Soon after arriving to Palestine Leo Nisvitzky, one of the former members of the Society formed a committee that tried to bring Engel to Palestine. The committee’s vision was that this acknowledged activist and composer would gradually turn Palestine into the essential centre for the research and the publication of Jewish music. Engel’s arrival provoked a great resonance in the Palestinian cultural circles. Engel sought to establish a conservatory which could serve as a world centre for the creation of Jewish music, as well as for Jewish musical life. He accepted a position at the *Shulamit* high school and within a few months transferred the *Yuval* Publishing House to Palestine. “Engel’s arrival was publicly announced as a major national and cultural event. The festive Spirit of Engel’s arrival was further enhanced by Salomon Rosowski’s immigration in April 1925 and by the astounding success of Joseph Achron’s concert tour in May, when the brilliant violinist stirred our hearts with his works in the realm of Hebrew folk music, in which he

⁵⁴ Leonid Sabaneev, *The Jewish National School of Music*, 448-68, as cited in J. Hirshberg, 1995, 86.

⁵⁵ Hirshberg, 82.

revealed himself as the savior of a great genre of national art work.”⁵⁶ Zionism found indirect expression with the immigration of the musicians. Engel writes: “I am no Zionist, but I regard the national element in general and in human creation in particular as of supreme importance, and this brings me closer to Zionism.”⁵⁷

In April 1925, Engel became a musical director of the socialist-oriented workers’ *Ohel* theatre. He also published several reviews and essays and was active in the magazine *Theatre and Art*. Despite all of these preoccupations, Engel’s fees in Palestine were minimal and he was struggling to make a living and to pay his rent. After Engel’s death the Society in Palestine faced another loss: in 1926, Jacob Weinberg,⁵⁸ who made an *Aliyah* in 1923 had to immigrate to the United States as a result of inability to publish his music in Palestine.

After Engel’s death, his project was not lost. Engel’s publishing house *Yuval* was revived. Due to the lack of appropriate music printing facilities in *Eretz Yisrael*, most of the publishing work was done in Berlin and Vienna. M. Rosenstein – the Berlin’s representative of *Yuval*, took charge of the publishing house which worked in coordination with the Universal Edition in Vienna. In addition, a great *Yuval* Festive Concert took place in Berlin. The works by Achron, Milner, Engel, Gnessin, Weinberg, Krein, and Rosowsky were performed along with the music of Ernst Bloch.⁵⁹

Jehoash Hirshberg claims that:

The inclusion of Hebrew music within the category of Eastern music marked the conceptual shift of the centre to Palestine, although for all practical purposes the

⁵⁶ Hirshberg, 82.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 87.

⁵⁸ Jacob Weinberg (1879 – 1958) a member of a St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music; was a composer, a critic, a piano teacher, and a chamber pianist.

⁵⁹ Hirshberg, 83.

repertory of the Russian group retained its prominent position in concerts and publications. The new society differed from the original Society for Jewish Music and from Engel's *Yuval* not in substance but in its quest to turn Palestine into the centre of international activities in Jewish music.⁶⁰

Although, being deeply devoted to the development of Jewish art music in *Eretz Yisrael*, Engel did not underestimate the importance of more accessible songs written in the folk style. In Palestine, Engel sought to connect with the local community. Songs that the composer wrote after the *Aliyah* were mainly intended for children and their teachers,⁶¹ as well as for pioneers of the second and the third *Aliyah*. Stuchevski writes⁶²:

A big part of Engel's work created in his last years, after the immigration to *Eretz Yisrael*, were influenced by the nature and the liberating spirit of the native land. By using simple songs, Engel managed to reach his main goal – to be closer to the people. In *Eretz-Yisrael*, Engel managed to become a folk composer in the fullest sense of the word. Maybe in the future the name of the composer of the songs will be forgotten and they will be fully counted as folk songs. In the work on the scene of Hebrew folk music in Palestine, Engel saw the goal of his life. ⁶³

Engel's input in the Palestinian art music was undeniably immense, both from musical and ideological points of view. Nonetheless, what he did in the field of the “invented folk song tradition”⁶⁴ of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* was no less crucial. Not many in Israel today remember the name of the composer, who wrote music for one of the most famous Israeli lullabies *Numi-Numi Yaldati* or for a well-known children's song *Ha-Yore*. These songs are now considered as the classics of a Hebrew folk song. Thus, Engel's goal was fulfilled – the composer's name was forgotten, while his songs became folk *Eretz-Yisraeli* classics in the fullest sense of the word.

⁶⁰ Hirshberg, 84.

⁶¹ One of Engel's main achievements was at the field of children songs. Among 130 songs written by the composer more than 90 were intended for children.

⁶² The translation from Hebrew is made by me.

⁶³ Joachim Stuchewski, *Bamaagalei ha-musika ha-hehudit*, 44.

⁶⁴ See Introduction.

“Numi, Numi” – music analyses⁶⁵

At first, I had an intention to analyze one of Engel’s art songs which would represent his input into the Palestinian art song culture. However, considering the fact that my thesis’s main focus is dealing with the Russian influence on *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, I chose to concentrate on a song that became a part of the Hebrew folk song repertoire. Musicologists say that Engel’s most significant composer’s achievements were at the field of children’s songs. Only after starting researching Engel’s work, I have realized that one of my daughter’s favorite lullabies “*Numi-Numi*” was composed by him. The words of this song were written by Yehiel Helperin.

“*Numi, Numi*” follows many of the elements that I discussed in my analyses of “*Dugit*”. Similarly to “*Dugit*” this song is written in minor and is divided into two parts, which, in turn, have divisions for two symmetric phrases of four measures each. The second part is written in a higher range than the first one and is more dynamic. Like in “*Dugit*”, the first two measures of the phrases of each part are the same, while the remaining two measures, change. The song is written in 4/4 and the rhythmical pattern of the first part is largely based on steady quarter notes. The second part begins on the up-beat. It follows the same rhythmical flow, when the only change is featured by dotted quarter notes followed by eighth notes. In my opinion, this repetitiveness of rhythmical and melodic elements creates, especially in the second part of the song, a sense of a rocking crib. It seems to me that the most unique element of this melody is the combination of the seventh, the third, and the lowered second scale degrees in the last two measures of the first part:

⁶⁵ See appendix II.



This is not an example of the *Ahava Raba*, as there is no augmented second, but probably some kind of a Phrygian mode. Engel also uses a minor VII chord in harmony. Thus, with only a few notes, the composer manages to create an unusual “Jewish” or maybe even a bit “mystical” flavor.

The harmonic structure of the song emphasizes the subdominant. The harmonies of the first part of the song are: I-IV-I-IV(II)-I-V(7); I-IV-I-VII^m (7)-I. The second part is almost entirely based on the subdominant, when only at the end there are VII and III chords – the transition to the relative major that we saw in “*Dugit*” and that we will see later in Sasha Argov’s “*Shir Eretz*”. The second part ends on the dominant.

CHAPTER III -- THE “FOLK” ASPECT:

Sasha Argov

So far, we have examined two aspects of Russian music that influenced the development of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* tradition in Palestine/Israel. We have discussed Russian and Soviet songs that were artificially brought to Palestine by the first immigrants, as well as by Russian and Soviet mass-media. We also talked about the emergence of Palestinian art school of composition that begun with the immigration of Joel Engel and other members of the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music. The following chapter deals with the activity of Russian born folk song composers after their arrival in Palestine. These songwriters usually were not “professional” composers in a sense that music was not their only occupation and they usually did not have formal music education. Some of these Palestinian-Israeli songwriters, whom Natan Shachar calls “The fathers of the Hebrew song”, are: Alexander (Sasha) Argov, Mordechai Zeira, Yedidia Admon-Gorochoy, Nachum Nardi, Yehuda Sharet, and others.⁶⁶ Similarly to the art song writers influenced by the Russian Five, these folk composers also absorbed many of the Russian musical influences. These influences could be seen in many of the works of Alexander (Sasha) Argov who is the subject of this study.

Alexander (Sasha) Argov: biography

Sasha Argov is definitely counted among the most important Israeli song composers. He is the author of many of the classics of the *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* repertoire.

⁶⁶ For more explicit information about these composers, see Natan Shachar, *Shir-Shir Ale-Na*, (Modan Publishing House, Ben Shemen, 2006), 98 – 100.

“Original, accomplished, non-compromising, productive and popular, he was an inseparable part of the Israeli collective but paved an individual and unique path in it.”⁶⁷

Alexander (Sasha) Argov, originally Alexander Abramovich, was born in Belyastok of Poland in 1914. Soon after Sasha's birth, his family moved to Moscow, Russia. Argov started to learn music at a very young age, as he was exposed to it by his mother, who was a professional pianist. When he was three, Argov started to demonstrate an unusual musical talent at the piano. He began to harmonize melodies and to compose songs at the age of five. “His connection to the piano was so great that when he was ill and could not play, he suffered from the inability to play more than from the actual illness.”⁶⁸ As soon as he started to play the piano he used both hands, as he was harmonizing the accompaniment in an intuitive way. Apparently, the distinctive uniqueness of Argov's music is related to the fact that he was born with unusual harmonical thinking. He himself used to say “I was born with harmonies”.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, his musical skills were different from the ones needed to become a professional classical pianist. Although, Argov had good piano technique and great musical memory, he concentrated more on improvising than on practicing given music. However, classical music that was introduced to him by his mother, affected Sasha's formation as a musician and a song writer. Another thing that influenced his perception of music was the music of the synagogue. Sasha was exposed to it by his father, as they used to attend Shabbat and holidays services.

⁶⁷ Ilana Ivtsan, Musical Elements in the Songs of Sasha Argov, a doctoral dissertation, Tel-Aviv University, 2004:I.

⁶⁸ Tzippi Shchori, Sasha Argov: a Conversation with a Price Israel Winner”, Gittit, 1987:8. The translation from Hebrew is made by me.

⁶⁹ Dr. Talila Eliram, Sasha Argov's Biography, an article for Zamereshet: Proyeck Cherum l'hatzalat Zemer Yivri Mukdam, 2007 <http://www.zemereshet.co.il/artist.asp?id=291> The translation from Hebrew is made by me.

Argov's family belonged to the bourgeoisie class, which allowed them to lead a comfortable lifestyle. This condition continued for a while even after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Nevertheless, due to his bourgeois background, the Bolsheviks prevented Argov from receiving a formal music education.⁷⁰ In the early thirties, the family faced several hardships which were inevitable considering their wealthy position at the communistic country. When the communistic oppression was too much for them to bear, Argov's family decided to leave Russia to Palestine. As Sasha's parents were born in Poland, the Soviet government eventually allowed them to return there. After some additional misfortunes, the family left Moscow for Warsaw in 1932. Shortly after, Sasha's parents and his younger brother immigrated to Palestine. Sasha, on the other hand, was too old to be included in his parents' visa, and thus could make an *Alyah* only about two years after his family's departure. He came to Palestine in 1934, at the age of 20.

In Palestine, Argov's musical activities were devoted mostly to song composition and accompanying ballet groups. He soon became popular as a ballet accompanist due to his extraordinary improvising abilities. However, the lack of proper training highly affected Argov's musical career as, he could not devote himself to preoccupation with music only. Consequently, he had to give up his dream to become a professional pianist and composer. Ilana Ivtsan says that: "In the absence of methodological musical training, Argov's compositional process was primarily intuitive, his primary guide being his own musical imagination."⁷¹ Thus, in addition to his musical activities, Argov earned his living as a clerk at one of Tel-Aviv's banks. Argov enjoyed the freedom of not depended

⁷⁰ In the Bolshevik Russia only the working class had privileges to attend high musical institutions.

⁷¹ Ilana Ivtsan, II.

on the unstable income of a musician. One of his principles was not to make a living from music. Sasha believed that music should be separated from the need to financially support oneself, as he considered music to be too pure to involve it with money.⁷²

In 1940, following an advise of Moshe Sharet – the Prime Minister of Israel, Argov changed his Eastern-European-Diasporal name from Abramovich to Argov. In 1946, Alexander Argov married Nussia Ables, a *Shoah* survival, who shared Argov's love for music and played the piano herself. Nussia soon became her husband's main consultant in his musical work; Argov took her critique extremely seriously. Sasha and Nussia had two children – Itamar and Tali that also became musicians. In 1957, Argov resigned from the bank. Then, in 1959, he and his wife opened a bookstore "Buleslavsky" located at the Alenby street in Tel-Aviv. There, they sold the gems of Russian literature. This store that was active for more than two decades became very popular among the Russian speaking literary circles. In 1988, Argov received one the most significant Israeli honors – *Pras Yisrael (Price Israel)*, which was given to him for his achievements at the field of the Hebrew Song. In summer 1995, at the age of eighty one, Alexander Argov had a stroke. After two months of unconsciousness, the composer passed away in September 27, 1995. The song that he started to compose a few hours before the tragic event remained unfinished. Many viewed Argov's death as the end of an important period at the tradition of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*.

⁷² Tsippi Shchori, "Sasha Argov: a Conversation with a Price Israel Winner", Gittit, 1987, 9.

Sasha Argov's work and his role in the culture of Hebrew Song

The main body of Argov's music consists of his works for voice and piano. Non-vocal music such as instrumental compositions for theater and cinema was not a significant part of his activity. Argov used to compose while improvising at the piano and thus his music is tightly connected with this instrument. The different arrangements and orchestrations of his works were for the most part done by other musicians. Ilana Ivtsan says that: "Simultaneity of melody and accompaniment is a basic principle in his compositional process and a pervasive characteristic of his music."⁷³

Argov was active as a composer for over 60 years from his arrival to Palestine in 1934, and until his death in 1995. He composed about 1200 songs of different styles, while many of them were songs for the Israeli military ensembles and for civil entertainment groups. Much of his work was written for the ensemble *Ha-Tzizbatron*⁷⁴ as well as for the military ensemble of the *Nachal*. Among the songs written for the *Tzizbatron* are "*Ha-Shichrur*" to the words of Chaim Chefer and *Ha-Reut* composed to the text by Chaim Guri. For the *Nachal* ensemble he wrote "*Ballada l'Itschak Sade*", also to the text of Chaim Guri. In addition to the songs that are considered *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, Argov's music possessed some blues and jazz influences which could be noticed in songs like "*Lo Yadati Ma*" and "*Laila Tov*". A big part of Argov's work was devoted to theater songs that often showed a slightly grotesque-cabaret like character. An example of a theatrical song is "*Bereshit*" to the words of Chaim Chefer. Argov's most famous musical is "*Shlomo ha-Melech v'Shlomi ha-Sandler*" which was based on a play written

⁷³ Ivtsan, Il.

⁷⁴ *Ha-Tzizbatron* - a vocal ensemble of the *PALMACH* that was established during the War of Independence in 1948. *Ha-Tzizbatron* is considered as the first Israeli military ensemble.

by Sami Groniman. Natan Alterman wrote the lyrics of the songs. In addition, Argov also composed more complicated art songs, such as “*M’Ever l’Tchelet*” to the lyrics of Rachel Shapira, performed by Matti Kaspi.

Doctor Ilana Ivtsan divides Alexander Argov’s work into three periods: the early period from approximately 1934 and until 1948. During this time much of Argov’s work was devoted to music for *Kibbutzim*. The second period, when Argov’s most famous songs were written, started at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel and the War of Independence. This period was devoted to compositions for Israeli military ensembles, theater, motion pictures, radio, children, etc. During the last period, which started around the mid-1970, Argov used to accompany on the piano singers who performed his songs.⁷⁵ Throughout his composition career, Sasha was very careful in picking the texts of his songs. Talila Eliram says that: “His biggest skill was translating the words to sounds. Not to make them richer or more diverse but to make them sound right. When the words disturbed him, he did not agree to accept the text until it was changed.”⁷⁶ Argov admitted:

I hear not only the rhythm or the phonetics, but also the expression of the word. I cannot write an upbeat phrase to words that do not fit. I “live” the words, and therefore, even if the melody sounds beautiful but it does not express the words I have to keep working on it. I always intended to write music in a way that it will fit to the text like a glove. I could make the work process much easier if my main concern was the melody, but as I wanted the melody and the text to come together, I had to do different combinations and to make the melody more complicated in order to be loyal to the word.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ivtsan, II.

⁷⁶ Eliram, 2007, the translation from Hebrew is made by me.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Argov's style of composition is unique and extremely diverse, and thus it is difficult to label, as it presents a mixture of different styles and influences. Ilana Ivtsan maintains that: "Until the mid -1970s, Argov's songs were at the center of Israeli mainstream popular music. Later on, his music sidelined, taking a narrower elitist path detached from the popular trends that carried Israeli songs in new directions."⁷⁸ And indeed, many of Argov's later songs are quite sophisticated and complex, both for performers and listeners. The question is, however, why Argov's music does not fall into a category of art songs? While working on my research, I have realized that Argov's name is missing from most of the studies done about the art-music of Israeli composers. His work is mainly mentioned in regard of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*. It seems like Argov's songs exist somewhere in-between the art, the folk, and the pop song. He masterfully combined the folk/pop and the classical genres, and composed music that accommodated high quality texts. Almost every Argov's song has a surprising "twist" in it. He used syncopated and complicated rhythms and unusual sophisticated harmonies. His arrangements of simple melodies were also surprising and complex. "Sasha Argov's music is among the most sophisticated and heterogenic in the realm of the Israeli song. His originality places him in a highly respected position, and he stands out as one of the architects of Israeli culture in the 20th century. His mark on younger contemporaries and future generations is indelible."⁷⁹

Argov's *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* as the Index of "Israeliness"

Despite the difficulty in defining Argov's style of composition, his musical impact on the development of the national consciousness of the people of Israel was

⁷⁸ Ivtsan, IV

⁷⁹ Ibid, XIX

immense. Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi begin the chapter about *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*⁸⁰ with the citation of *Shir Ha-Reut (Song of Camaraderie)* written by Sasha Argov to the lyrics of Chaim Guri. This is how the former Minister of Absorption, Yael (Yuli) Tamir discussed “new multicultural Israel”⁸¹:

It’s true that when I toured the country, lectured, and organized political meetings, I developed a kind of index which I called the “Shir Ha-Reut index”. When I walked into the meeting halls, I asked myself, “To how many people in this room does “Shir Ha-Reut” say something?” Some people say that this is an elitist index. But I say “No.” It is just an index of social change. Because the number of Israelis who shiver when they hear “Shir Ha-Reut” is decreasing. The song does not move *charedi*, Russians [immigrants from the former Soviet Union]⁸², Arabs, some of the Oriental Jews and a large number of youngsters... When I hear “Shir Ha-Reut” [on Memorial Day]... my heart skips a beat. Because this song is me. So I am aware that today my kind of Israeliness is only one kind within a more general Israeliness, which we cannot yet define. And I know that my Israeliness which ones was a community experience is today the private experience of a minority.⁸³

Shir Ha-Reut was written during the War of Independence and it addressed the sad memories of the war that had just ended. In my opinion, Tamir could not find a better indicator of “Israeliness” than *Shir Ha-Reut*. First performed by the *Tzizbatron* and the *Nachal*⁸⁴ Ensemble, this song represents the nostalgia and the sweet sadness that goes back to the first years after the War of Independence. It would be difficult to imagine the Israeli Memorial Day (*Yom ha-Zikaron*) without hearing this song. Regev and Seroussi refer to *Shir Ha-Reut* as:

one of the most canonic songs of the repertory known today as “Songs of the Land of Israel... It became an index of Israeliness because of its poignant content and the somber, lugubrious melody that changes to a patriotic marchlike tune in the refrain that effectively expressed the mixed feelings of pain and joy that

⁸⁰ Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, (London, University of California Press, 2004) chapter III, *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*, pp. 49 – 70

⁸¹ Ibid., 49

⁸² Tamir refers to Russian immigrants who came to Israel during the last *Aliyah* in 1990s.

⁸³ Interview with Yael [Yuli] Tamir, Minister of Absorption and former leader of the Peace Now movement, by Ari Shavit, *Haaretz*, August 13, 1999, as cited in Regev and Seroussi, 2004:50.

⁸⁴ Nachal is an Elite division in the Israeli Military Force.

Israelis felt in the aftermath of the 1948 war. However what established its canonic status as a symbol of the ethos of an entire generation of Jewish Israelis was its frequent broadcast and performance on state occasions and holidays, in schools, and by youth movements. This mechanism of canonization enabled Tamir to establish familiarity with this song as a measure of Israeliness...⁸⁵

However, I disagree with Yuli Tamir, who claims that lately this song lost its iconic value. Although, I was not born in Israel, this song awakes in me the same sense of nostalgia and deep and proud “Israeliness” that Tamir mentions. In the 1990s, after the assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Itshak Rabin “*Shir ha-Reut*” gained great popularity once again and was performed in several Rabin’s commemorations by Shoshanna Dammari and other Israeli singers. The reason for this renewed popularity is the fact that Rabin always referred to “*Reut*” as to his favorite song.

Russian Influences in Argov’s Music

Doctor Ilana Ivtsan mentioned in a phone interview conducted by me on August 5th, 2009 that she does not see much Russian influence in Argov’s work. In her dissertation, Ivtsan speaks about the “Israeli Mediterranean style” in Argov’s music, as well as about him being influenced by “blues, jazz, and pop music.”⁸⁶ While agreeing with all of the above, I find it difficult to agree with the notion that Alexander Argov was not influenced by Russian music. Not only can I use my personal familiarity with Russian song style to view Russian influence in many of Argov’s songs, but I also believe that one’s style of composition cannot emerge in a minute, as it is a product of a long and gradual process that relies on different factors. After coming to Palestine, Argov, similarly to many other composers tried to find a more “Mediterranean” “local”

⁸⁵ Regev and Seroussi, 50.

⁸⁶ Ivtsan, IV.

style of composition. Nonetheless, I believe that it is not easy for a composer to immediately disconnect from the old while adapting the new. As a child, Argov was exposed to the German *Lieder*, as well as to the art of the Russian Romances. Various musicians, his mother's friends, introduced him to this musical genre. Professor Eliyahu Shleifer claims that:

Russian influences can, indeed, be seen in Sasha Argov's songs. His music is impacted by Russian and sometimes Soviet Songs that he was exposed to in his childhood. While speaking about Russian songs, I mean both: Russian folk songs and classical romances composed by prominent Russian composers, such as for example by Sergey Rachmaninov. This influence, however, could be seen only in the early periods of Argov's work. In the sixties, his music started to develop a much more "modernistic" -contemporary-pop character, as it absorbed some of the features of French Chansons and American music.

Eventually, Sasha Argov managed to merge all his various musical influences to an individualistic very distinct style which is probably the secret of his success. "The eclectic collection of musical sources built up Argov's musical imagination. He integrated, combined, and mixed different ideas to create a personal style that was meticulously suited to the texts' contents and atmosphere."⁸⁷

***Shir Eretz* – Music Analyses⁸⁸**

As I have already mentioned, Argov eventually managed to form a very unique compositor's language which was based on different styles and influences. In my analyses, I will attempt to show the elements of Argov's music that could be influenced by Russian songs and romances. "*Shir Eretz*" – (*Song of the Land*) was composed by Argov in 1984 to the lyrics of Natan Yonatan. This song belongs to the "national" songs

⁸⁷ Ilana Ivtsan, XVII.

⁸⁸ See appendix III.

Am Dm7 Dm6
A A

e - rets she - yosh-ve - ha hi o - khe - let
e - rets she - mat-ku la re - ga - ve - ha

“*Shir Eretz*” is divided into two parts with the same symmetric structure of two four measure phrases in each part that we saw earlier in “*Dugit*” and “*Numi, Numi*”. As in the other analyzed songs, in the second part of “*Shir Eretz*” there is an excursion to the relative major. As we can see, the model of two distinct sections, where the second modulates or excurses to relative major is very common to Russian Romances and Russian songs. “*Shir Eretz*” is originally composed in Am and the most widely used harmonies are I-IV-V(7)-VII-III-I with an emphasis on the subdominant. In a few places,

52

Argov uses descending and ascending chromatic moves in the bass line. In other times, he changes harmonies when staying on the same bass. These moves that add Argov's harmonies some urgency could be also seen in numerous Russian Romances.

In order to straighten my assertion that "*Shir Eretz*" was influenced by Russian music, I have decided to compare its piano accompaniment with the one of a Russian romance. Although, I chose to concentrate on one particular piece, the features that I am discussing could be seen in many classical Russian romances. A good comparison model may be a known romance by Michail Glinka, whom I mentioned in the second chapter of this research, "*Somnenie*"⁹⁰ ("*Doubt*"). The accompaniment of "*Somnenie*", which is also written in 4/4 and is divided into two parts, shows arpeggio of steady eight notes in the right hand with a strong beat in the left. In the measure 9 of "*Somnenie*", as well as in measures 5 and 6 of "*Shir Eretz*", the same harmonic moves are used: I – V7/1 with the bass that remains on the tonic:

"*Somnenie*":



"*Shir Eretz*":



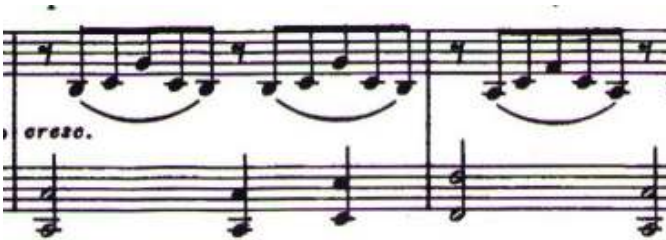
⁹⁰ See appendix IV.

In measures 11 and 12 of “*Shir Eretz*” and in measures 14 and 15 of “*Somnenie*”, a similar harmonic move of Am(C#) – A7/C# - Dm can be seen. Then, the second part of “*Shir Eretz*” and the second part of “*Somnenie*” show excursions to the relative major:

“*Shir Eretz*” excurses from Am to C major:



“*Somnenie*” excurses from Dm to F major:



To summarize, in this research I examined four musical examples. The first was brought to Palestine and translated to Hebrew, the second and the third were composed in *Eretz-Yisrael* by different authors, and the last one presented an example of a classical Russian romance and did not have any connection to the Hebrew song. We may see that all the analyzed songs have many similarities: they are all written in a minor key in a 4/4 meter. They have singable lyrical melodies, relatively limited range, and functional conventional harmonies. In addition, they are all divided into two parts, when the second is usually more dynamic and excurses to the relative major.

However, although clearly influenced by Russian songs, *Shir Eretz*, which similarly to *Ha-Reut* became a symbol of “Israelness”, manages to bring the controversial “Israeli” mixture of restlessness, sincerity, and gentleness. The melody of *Shir Eretz* is

quite repetitive, with dotted rhythm and limited melodic movement. The melodic line of the first part could be divided into two main elements. The first one can be featured as “swinging” that moves half a step up and returns to the same note. The second element is a three note leap – first to the fifth and then to the sixth:



These two figures repeat several times. In my opinion, the ongoing repetition of this fifth to sixth leap, in a contrast with a very limited melodic movement create a sense of certain unease and come to stress the intensity of the words. The second part, which may be also called the “chorus”, also contains the dotted rhythm and the “swinging” up and down a step. While using these elements, the melody gradually builds up until it reaches a sort of climax on the dominant. This conveys the melody of the second section a more “open” character with a bit more “optimistic” feeling. The climax on the dominant is followed by the repetition of the first part (the “verse”) that begins on the tonic.

Despite the fact that *Shir Eretz* does not include many exciting or surprising harmonies, Sasha Argov still manages to spice it up: the chords that fall on a down beat in the right hand add some sort of a syncopated feeling which in combination with dotted quarter notes in the melody creates a sense of intensity:

Am A

1. e - rets she - yosh-ve - ha hi o-khe - let
2. e - rets she - mat-ku la re-ga-ve - ha

The sense of intensity and urgency is also added by the chromatic motion in the bass line.

The words of the song are:

A land that consumes its settlers
And flows with milk and honey and blue
Sometimes it itself plunders
The sheep of the poor

A land sweetened by its clods
and all its shores are salty as weeping
that its lovers gave it
all that they could give.

The white single squill comes back
to bloom there on the road
and the jasmine will bring back the scent
of its lost fields of time.

All of spring its ragworts return
to cover all the wrinkles of its face
the summer wind will be stroke its rocks' sadness
in the light.

The autumn returns with the weight of its clouds
to cover in gray all of its gardens
and the winter will close all those whom

The beautiful poetry of Natan Yonatan leaves us with a certain sense of grief, sadness and a trace of bitterness as it transmits the bitter-sweet longing of the Israeli people for their land – so difficult, controversial and complex, but so deeply loved. In his interpretation of “*Shir Eretz*” Argov uses laconic but powerful and extremely personal musical language to convey this feeling of controversy and intensity. “*Shir Eretz*” that was performed by Ora Zitner and Chava Alberstein is today one of the most nostalgic and loved songs in the repertoire of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to show different ways Russian and Soviet music influenced the emergence of the Hebrew song culture in Palestine. From the first *Aliyah* in 1882 and until early 1950s, thousands of Russian and Soviet songs were adapted in Palestine along with original art and folk songs that were composed in Israel by the Russian immigrants. During the years, these songs amalgamated within the Israeli culture, as they became deeply and integrally connected to the reality of Israeli life. Today, not many know that their favorite songs of the *Second Aliyah* or of the War of Independence originate from Russia. Moreover, not many know who wrote the lullaby “*Numi, Numi*”, or “*Shir Eretz*” – these songs were “separated” from their authors and became the true folk classics of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*. The art songs of Engel and his colleagues from the St. Petersburg Society of Folk Jewish Music mixed with “invented folk songs” of Sasha Argov, as well as with Soviet songs composed by mostly Jewish composers in Soviet Union. They all became a part of the rich and diverse Israeli song tradition that we refer to as *Shirei Eretz Yisrael*.

Eventually, the immigrant composers managed to develop a new “Israeli” style of compositions but this did not happen at once. The lack of local composers at the time of the first *Aliyot*, was one of the main reasons for the great popularity of Russian and Soviet songs. Moreover, Russian-Jewish composers immigrated to Palestine could not momentarily disconnect from the rich musical tradition of their homeland. The Russian-Jewish art music composers were influenced by the style of composition of Rimsky-Korsakov and other members of the Russian Five. This influence can be clearly seen in their music. Russian influences can be also seen in many of the songs of Mordechai

Zeira, Sasha Argov, and other folk composers. In my opinion, this eclectic range of different influences is inevitable when speaking about immigrants. Moreover, I believe that these influences could sometimes be utilized in an unconscious way, as we tend to use the “vocabulary” from our own personal cultural baggage. In the case of Russian immigrants, this baggage was, obviously, based in large on the Russian musical “vocabulary”.

The Russian/Jewish influence is reciprocal: we cannot ignore the fact that the vast majority of the prominent Soviet composers of the first half of the 20th century was Jewish. Furthermore, Rimsky-Korsakov and the composers who provoked the establishment of the first national Jewish school of composition often turned to Jewish and “oriental” motives in their music. It seems to me, however, that the most interesting mutual influence started to occur in mid 1990s, after the beginning of the great *Aliyah* from the former Soviet Union.⁹¹ If before, the immigrants were eager to learn Hebrew and to adjust to the Israeli culture and way of life, Jews that came from Russia in the last two decades sought to keep their Russian identity, language, and culture. Russian immigrants often refused to learn Hebrew and while rejecting Israeli music preserved the tradition of contemporary Russian songs. Probably, due to the great number of immigrants and the great accessibility of the mass-media, Russian influence on the Israeli society became so powerful that many young Israelis started to listen to Russian pop, as well as attended yearly grandiose concerts of Russian pop-music called “From Russia with Love”. Moreover, due to the friendship between an Israeli pop star Dana International and a Russian pop icon Phillip Kirkorov, many Israeli songs were translated

⁹¹ This notion is based entirely on my personal research and on my knowledge of the relationship between the two cultures in the last twenty years.

to Russian and became big hits in the countries of the Former Soviet Union. Then, other Israeli pop stars such as a famous *mizrachi* singer Sarit Hadad gained great popularity in the former Soviet Union. Personally, I experienced a few surprising encounters with Israeli music in Russia. I happened to hear Israeli pop in Russian discothèques, restaurants and coffee houses not only in Moscow, but also in the province. Contemporary Israeli songs were at times translated to Russian, while sometimes remained as is. Therefore, we can see that not only Russian music affected Palestine and Israel, but also Jewish and Israeli music influenced Russian music in different ways.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER I

Some of the additional examples of songs that were brought to Palestine from Russia and Soviet Union during the first *Aliyot*:

Songs that entered Palestine in the First and second *Aliyot*:

- “*Sachaki, sachaki*”: Hebrew text fitted by Shaul Chernichovski back in Russia;
- “*Tachzekna Yad Kol Acheinu*” by Ch. N. Bialik. Became an anthem of the work movement in *Eretz Yisrael*.
- “*Achz’ekna Chazak’na*”. A revolt song of the first Russian revolution of 1905. The original words speak about the Tsar’s throne that is about to fall. In *Eretz Yisrael* this song became an expression of Jewish struggle for independence and was very popular in the first decade of the 20th century.

Songs that were brought to Palestine with Soviet Movies:

- “*Yal’dey ha-Efker*”. From the Soviet movie “*New Life*”. Hebrew words were composed by Natan Alterman for the theatre “*Ha-M’tate*”.

Examples of lyrical songs that entered *Eretz-Yisrael* during World War II:

- “*T’chol ha-Mitpachat*” (“*Blue Shawl*”). The Russian text by M. Maximov accurately translated to Hebrew by Avraham Shlonski.
- “*T’havhev la ha-Esh B’Kira*” (“*The fire blinks in a stove*”), another version: “*Shavui*” (“*Prisoner*” to the lyrics by Josef Goldberg;
- “*Shalom Yiri N’chama*” (“*Farwell, my beloved town*”), another version: “*Lashir al Shalom*” (“*to sing of peace*”)

APPENDIX I

דוגית

63

מלים: נתן יונתן
לחן: עמנואל רוסי

דוגית נוסעת, מפרשיה שנים
ומלחיה נרדמו כלם.
רוח נושבת על פני המים,
ילד פוסע על החוף דומם.

2 x

ילד פועט הוא ועגום עינים.
שוטפים המים למרחק אין סוף...
אם לא יעורו כל מלחיה -
איכה תגיע הדוגית לחוף?...

2 x



APPENDIX II⁹²

NUMI, NUMI

YECHIEL HALPERIN SOEL ENGEL
TRANSCRIBED BY NARA DOBINSKY

Lento ♩ = 60

nu - mi nu - mi yal - da - ti nu - mi nu - mi nim

nu - mi nu - mi kta - na - ti nu - mi nu - mi nim a -

ba ha - lach - la - a - vo - da ha - lach - ha - lach - a - ba - ya -

shuv el tzet - ha - le - va - na ya - vi - lach - ma - ta - na -

nu - mi nu - mi yal - da - ti nu - mi nu - mi nim

nu - mi nu - mi kta - na - ti nu - mi nu - mi nim

⁹² As I could not reach an original copy of Engel's "Numi, Nimi", I transcribed it from a track 15 of a DVD: *Shirim K'tanim: Ima Yakara Li*, (MCI Records, Ltd., Or Yehuda, 1993), and from a track 22 of a DVD: *Shirim Rishonim, Shirei ha-Yaldut shel Kulanu*, (JCS and Iguana productions, 2006)

APPENDIX III

שיר ארץ

SHIR ERETS

מילים: נתן יונתן
LYRICS: NATHAN YONATHAN

ALLEGRO MODERATO ♩ = 104

Am Dm Am

E7 Am E7/A

Am Dm7 A Dm6 Am

1. e - rets she - yosh-ve - ha hi o-khe - let v - za - vat u -
2. e - rets she - mat-ku la re-ga- ve - ha u - mlu-khim ka -

257

Chords: Dm7, A, Dm6, A, Am, A7/C#, Dm

Lyrics:
 - jvash u - tkhe - - let lif' - a - mim gam hi ats - ma go - ze - lei
 - be - khl kol kho - pe - ha she - nat - nu la o - ha - ve - ha kol a -

Chords: E7, Am, E7 \flat 9, E7, Am

Lyrics:
 et klv - sat ha - rash sher yakh - lu la - tet

Chords: Dm, G7, C, Em, A7

Lyrics:
 shav he - kha - tsav la - van lif - ro - akh sham ba - de - rekh ye - khi -

Chords: Dm, Dm/C, Dm6/B, G7, C

Lyrics:
 - di ve - ha - yas - min ya - ahiv ni - kho - akh sdot ha -

Dm6 B7 E E7 Am
 - zman she-la ha-a-vu - dim kol a- viv sha-

Dm Dm6 Am Dm Dm6
 -vim la sav-yo-ne - ha le - kha-sot et kol kim-tey pa- ne - ha

Am A7 Dm E7 Am
 ru - akh ka - its e - tsev a- va-ne-ha ye - la- tef ba- or

אֶרֶץ שְׁיוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הִיא אוֹכֵלֶת
וְזֹבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבֵשׁ וּתְכַלֶּת
לִפְעָמִים גַּם הִיא עֲצָמָה גּוֹזֵלֶת
אֶת כְּבֹשֶׁת הָרֶשׁ.

אֶרֶץ שְׁמַתְקוֹ לָהּ רִגְבִּיהָ
וּמְלוּחִים כְּכִי כָּל חוֹפִיָּהּ
שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָהּ אוֹהֲבֶיהָ
כָּל אֲשֶׁר יָכְלוּ לַתֵּת.

שֶׁב הַחֶצֶב לָבוּ לִפְרֹחַ
שֶׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ יַחֲדֵי
וְהַיִּסְמִין יָשִׁיב נִיחוּחַ
שְׁדוֹת הַזֶּמֶן שְׁלֵה הָאֲבוֹדִים.

כָּל אֲבִיב שָׁבִים לָהּ סְבִיוֹנִיהָ
לְכִסּוֹת אֶת כָּל קִמְטֵי פָּנֶיהָ
רוּחַ קִיץ עֶצֶב-אֲבָנִיהָ
יִלְטֹף בְּאוֹר.

שֶׁב הַסֶּתֶן עִם כְּבֹד עֲנִיָּהּ
לְעֹטֹף אֶפֶר אֶת כָּל גְּנִיהָ
וְהַחֲרֹף אֶת שְׁמוֹרוֹת עֵינֶיהָ
הַבּוֹכּוֹת יִסְגֹּר.

שֶׁב הַחֶצֶב לָבוּ לִפְרֹחַ
שֶׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ יַחֲדֵי
גַם הַיִּסְמִין יָשִׁיב נִיחוּחַ
שְׁדוֹת הַזֶּמֶן שְׁלֵה הָאֲבוֹדִים.

אֶרֶץ שְׁמַתְקוֹ לָהּ רִגְבִּיהָ
וּמְלוּחִים כְּכִי כָּל חוֹפִיָּהּ
שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָהּ אוֹהֲבֶיהָ
כָּל אֲשֶׁר יָכְלוּ לַתֵּת.

APPENDIX IV

12

СОМНЕНИЕ

Слова Н. КУКОЛЬНИКА

Andante mosso $\text{♩} = 88$

1. Уй - ми - тесь, волне - ни - я стра - сти, за -
оми не - от - ступ - ный и гроз - ный, мне

- она, без - на - деж - но - е серд - це, я пла - чу, и
- сит - ся со - пер - ник счаст - ли - вый, и тай - но, и

6616

страж - ду, ду - ша у - то - ми - лась в раз - лу - ке! И
злб - но ки - па - ща - я рев - ность пы - ла - ет! И

сгesso.

страж - ду, я пла - чу, но ны - пла - нуть го - ря сле -
тай - но, и злб - но о - ру - жи - я и шет ру -

- зах. На - прас - но на - деж - да мне
- ка. На - прас - но из - ме - ну мне

pp e poco a poco sгesso.

оча - стье га - да - ет, - не ве - рю, не
рев - ность га - да - ет, - не ве - рю, не

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