THE MAGNIFICENT MAX HELFMAN:

AN INFLUENTIAL CORNERSTONE OF 20th CENTURY AMERICAN JEWISH MUSIC

BY

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Introduction

Max Helfman was a fascinating contradiction. He wrote beautiful, deep music for the synagogue but was not traditionally observant. His music incorporated traditional Jewish elements, but also showcased modern, musical influences. His pieces have clear structure of form but as a person Helfman had an artist's mentality and he was quoted as saying, "My feet are planted firmly in the clouds." Max Helfman was also a Universalist but became a dedicated Zionist. These apparent contrasts did not detract but rather they added more depth to his music.

My interest in Max Helfman began during my first year of Cantorial school in Israel. I was assigned to learn Max Helfman's "*Shma Koleinu*." I was struck by how awesome and majestic his setting of the text was. As I furthered my Cantorial studies I encountered other pieces which I fell in love with such as Helfman's "*Hashkiveinu*," "*Kaddish*," "*Y'varech'cha*," "Grant us Peace," and "*Ahavat Olam*." I wanted to learn more about this composer. As I researched him, I discovered how influential he was as a mentor through the Brandeis Bardin Camps. Furthermore, I discovered how instrumental he was acting as a link in the chain of great synagogue composers. Max Helfman, the person, was as incredible as Max Helfman the composer.

I was not the first person to have this opinion. Due to his popularity other Hebrew Union College students have wanted to explore Max Helfman further through a thesis. Susan Berkson wrote a thesis in 1989 titled "Max Helfman: A Study of His Music." In this thesis she looked at Helfman through the lens of his students and colleagues. She focused on him as a person and then studied his music through analysis.

In 1998 Gabrielle Jochnowitz Clissold took a different look at Max Helfman. Her thesis, "A Different Side of Max Helfman," focused on his lesser known and unpublished works. Her thesis is split into Helfman's time living on the East Coast and the West Coast. Her thesis focuses in particular on the music of the Brandeis Bardin Institute.

My thesis differs from the previous two theses because what I am interested in is placing Helfman's music within the musical and historical context of his time period. Is his music the same or different from other similar composers? I am also interested in looking at Max Helfman's long term impact. I want to show how his mentoring and teaching had a strong, lasting influence on current synagogue composers.

Max Helfman was unique during his time period because his music was able to combine traditional Jewish music as well as Western harmony and modern, musical styles. In addition, he was unique due to his strong interest and success in mentoring. His influence on the next generation of composers cannot be overstated. He was driven to help others. He left a good position as music director at the prestigious B'nai Abraham synagogue in Newark, New Jersey in order to move across the country. He moved from the East Coast to California in order to influence and inspire Jewish youth. He was a tireless and passionate teacher and worked at the Brandeis-Bardin Camp for seventeen years. Max Helfman was the most influential composer of his era due to his ability to write incredibly original compositions using Jewish traditional music as a foundation and also due to his mentoring of so many of the next generation of synagogue composers.

In the following pages I will be exploring Max Helfman as a person and as a composer. Then I will place him within a framework of the context of his time and look

at how he influenced contemporary synagogue composers. In chapter 1 I will be writing about Max Helfman's life. Who is he and where did he come from? What were his interests and did they change as he got older? In Chapter 2 there are two sections. Firstly, I will be looking in depth at one of Max Helfman's liturgical pieces, "*Adonai, Adonai*." This majestic setting is from his Torah service titled *The Holy Ark or Aron Ha-Kodesh.* I will be explaining how the music resonates with the text and builds drama through his use of dynamics and chord selection. In the second section of Chapter 2 I will be going into more depth of the stylistic tendencies of Max Helfman. This section will explain different stylistic facets of Max Helfman's work including his use of form, accompaniment, imitation, word painting, nusach and cantillation. In Chapter 3 I will be exploring the context in which Max Helfman lived. I will open with a description of synagogue music and trends in American Jewish life from 1930-1960. These were the main years when Max Helfman was composing. I will then go on to investigate three of Max Helfman's contemporaries: A.W. Binder, Herbert Fromm, and Max Janowski. I will compare their life journeys, their views on Jewish music, and their compositions with those of Max Helfman. I will compare one setting of each composer to a setting of Max Helfman's that utilizes the same text. These comparisons will illustrate differences in compositional style and pinpoint Max Helfman's own style. In Chapter 4 I will be exploring the context of American synagogue music from 1960 until today. How has music changed? What has happened in society that had a major impact on music in the synagogue? I will then investigate three of Max Helfman's protégés: Jack Gottlieb, Charles Davidson, and Gershon Kingsley. I will show how their interactions with Max Helfman influenced them and how it influenced their compositional styles. I will look at

three settings to explore these composer's compositional styles. In Chapter 5 I write my concluding thoughts and what I believe this thesis means for the future of synagogue music.

Chapter 1: Max Helfman, a Biography

> Many and diverse are the elements that make up the music-fabric of the synagogue service. Most of our prayers have their musical as well as liturgical tradition: their own mode, melodic idiom, form and character. Naturally, these traditions vary substantially in their historic importance and in their artistic value. But--ancient or comparatively recent, lofty or commonplace, subtle or naïve—they all form part of the gradually evolving music—language of our prayers; they constitute the recognizable sound-mosaic of our divine worship and cannot be lightly ignored by those who write for the living synagogue.[1]
>
> –Max Helfman

Max Helfman (1901-1963), was a Jewish composer who wrote music in a variety of styles, usually on Jewish themes. When he composed liturgical music for the synagogue he was influenced by traditional Jewish elements such as the nusach and the Jewish modes while at the same time he was also influenced by the current musical trends occurring in America. Besides composing, Helfman was also a choral conductor and a teacher. Both of these are professions that he was passionate about.

Helfman was born in Radzin (Radzyn), Poland just after the turn of the century in 1901. He was steeped in the music of the synagogue from a young age. Max Helfman's father was a local teacher and a cantor. Max sang in his choir in Poland. The family, including Max and his parents immigrated to America in 1909 when Max was eight years old. Once the family settled in New York's Lower East Side, Max became a sought after

[1] Max Helfman, *The Holy Ark (Aron Ha-Kodesh):* Torah Service for Sabbath and Festivals (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1950), Preface.

boy alto in the local synagogue choirs. Besides singing in choirs, Max was educated at the Rabbi Jacob Joseph Yeshiva School receiving a traditional religious education.

Max was musical from a young age. He began to start choral conducting and composing while he was still a teen. He studied at Mannes College of Music in New York briefly but he never graduated from college. Despite this fact, Max was quite intellectually curious and was self-taught in a vast variety of subjects that were both Jewish and secular. In 1928 Helfman began working at Temple Israel in Manhattan as their organist and choir conductor. Max had no previous organ training and he was taking over the position from Zavel Zilberts, a well known conductor and composer. Max gained the skills to play organ through private lessons very quickly but his acceptance of this position shows his capacity to take risks, a trait that eventually led him to move to California.

This job started a lifelong relationship with the cantor at Temple Israel, Cantor David Putterman. Max Helfman wrote compositions and arrangements for Cantor Putterman until Putterman left in 1929 to take a position at Park Avenue Synagogue. Helfman would later compose pieces for Park Avenue Synagogue's special annual services of new music. Max left Temple Israel shortly after Cantor Putterman switched congregations.

At the same time that Max Helfman began working at Temple Israel he was granted a three year fellowship at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. While he was there he studied piano with Ralph Leopold, composition with Rosario Scalero, and conducting with Fritz Reiner. These classes were very important in creating the foundation for

Helfman's music career. Eventually, Helfman's lasting influence came from his compositions, especially those that he wrote for the synagogue. According to Helfman, "Originality is the most important quality of a composer. It is not achieved by breaking with the past, but by building on it and using it as a foundation."[2]

Max continued with choral conducting as well. He started working as the choir director at Temple Emanuel in Paterson, New Jersey. His amateur choir became a respected and well known secular concert chorus in addition to their regular singing during the religious services that were held at the temple. Besides this choir, Max Helfman also became the music director of the Peterson branch choir of the Arbeter Ring (Workman's Circle). This group specialized in secular Yiddish songs and songs related to social action and the working people's orientation.

This involvement in secular music was not outside of Helfman's comfort zone. While he was always involved with Jewish organizations, and worked for synagogues during much of his life, Max Helfman was not traditionally observant. He greatly enjoyed Jewish culture and this led to his later work with the Brandeis-Bardin Institute. In addition to the Workman's Circle, Helfman began directing the Freiheit Gezang Farein in 1937. This was New York's largest leftist Yiddish chorus. Originally conducted by Lazar Weiner, this chorus in addition to smaller choral groups combined to become the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus. This chorus was originally founded by Jacob Shaefer in the 1920's after he had established one chorus already in Chicago. It was recognized as "left wing Yiddishist," which made it more left leaning than the

[2] Neil W Levin, "Max Helfman," Milken Archive of Jewish Music. www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/514/Max+Helfman (Accessed 12 March 2013).

Workman's Circle or the Labor Zionist Farband. It is unclear whether or not Helfman himself was extremely left leaning, or possibly even Communist. However, his association with this group did negatively influence some people's views on Helfman and his music.

In 1938 Helfman became the head of the Jewish Workers Musical Alliance. In this capacity he supervised all of their branches, wrote for them, edited music publications, and conducted its Jewish Folks Choir in Newark, one of its branches. He published a serial music compilation between 1937 and 1940 called *Gezang un kamf* (Song and Struggle). This compilation contained the repertoire of the Freheits chorus, including choral arrangements of labor movement songs, songs of international proletarian class struggle, and popular folksongs.

In 1938 Helfman also premiered his choral pantomime, Benjamin the Third at Carnegie Hall. This premiere took place on May 7. The plot of Benjamin the Third was based on a story that was written by a famous Yiddish author, Mendele Moykher Sforim. Max Helfman was developing a reputation as a composer and a conductor in New York at this time. According to an article in *The New York Times* reviewing the People's Philharmonic Chorus concert, June 30, 1940, Helfman is "an exceptionally sensitive musician with a genius for making people sing." He was described as a "highly gifted composer." It goes on to say that the People's Philharmonic Chorus owes its "artistic triumphs to the remarkable man who serves as teacher and conductor."[3]

[3] William Schuman, "Writing for Amateurs and Pros," *The New York Times*, 30 June 1940.

In addition to the premiere of Benjamin the Third at Carnegie Hall, Max Helfman premiered his complete Sabbath service, *Shabbat Kodesh* (Holy Sabbath) there in 1942. This service was part of a program called *Hebraica*. It was a festival of the Jewish arts and was extremely well attended with two thousand one hundred people in the audience. This "cantata was based on traditional music sung in the synagogue."[4] Helfman's Jewish themed non-liturgical music also was well received. In 1946 Max Helfman's presentation of *Hag Habikkurim* conducted by him and sung by his Youth Chorale was called an "excellent performance." The performance was part of the opening day's program for Jewish Music Week and the audience filled the hall to standing room.[5]

Besides his first Carnegie premiere in 1938, Max Helfman was hired as the conductor for the Handel Choir of Westfield, New York. Their first concert got raves on April 3, 1939. He stayed on in this position until 1940. Also, in 1940 Max Helfman left his job in Paterson, New Jersey and became the choir master at Ansche Hesed Synagogue in New York. This position did not last however, and Max soon got a job as the musical director for B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey. Max stayed in this position for twelve years until 1952.

After WWI there was a marked change in Max Helfman's viewpoint on the role of Zionism. Max had always been involved in expressions of Yiddish culture through the Freiheit Gezang Farein but after the war this changed to expressions of Hebrew national culture. The Yiddish speaking working classes of Eastern European immigrants were not

[4] Amusements: "Hebraica Program attended by 2100," *The New York Times*, 30March 1942.
[5] Amusements: "Jewish Music Presented," *The New York Times*, 25 February 1946.

Zionist. They saw Zionism as a tool of capitalism, with the exception of the labor Zionists.[6]

In 1945 Max Helfman was named artistic director of the Jewish Arts Committee. This was sponsored by Histadrut Ivrit and the American Zionist Youth Commission. The Jewish Arts Committee was set up to promote Hebrew culture and Zionist ideals. The committee's underlying goals were to "mobilize, stimulate, and affect an ongoing dialogue with artistic life in the *y'shuv*, to attract American Jewish youth to Zionist ideals through the medium of artistic expression, and to forge ties between the two communities."[7] The Jewish Arts Committee included a theater workshop, dance studio, and a sinfonietta. Helfman conducted the Hebrew Arts Singers. This group was a chorus of 40 singers. Their repertoire included Oskar Guttman's cantata *The Day of Creation* and Helfman's *Hag Habikurim*, in addition to the Sabbath liturgy of Bernstein, Weill, Milhaud, Saminsky, Copland, and others.

Max was not alone in his change in viewpoint. Other Jews became Zionists with the birth of the state of Israel. In fact in 1948 the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus, a Yiddishist group that never sang in Modern Hebrew, at their annual Town Hall concert in New York spontaneously started to sing "Hatikva".[8] This concert was just a few days after the proclamation of Israel's independence and statehood. Most of the audience enthusiastically joined in the singing. "Hatikva" had never been accepted as the "national anthem of the Jewish people" by this chorus and most of their audience in the past,

[6] Neil W. Levin, "Sing unto Zion! In Praise of a Jewish National Home." Milken Archive of Jewish Music. 3 www.milkenarchive.org/articles/view/introduction-to-volume-8 (Accessed 12 March 2013)
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

however, "now it was the perceived national anthem of a sovereign Jewish state (although not actually so confirmed by the Knesset until 2004.)"[9]

Max Helfman's involvement with the Jewish Arts Committee was orchestrated by its chairman, Moshe Davis. He suggested Helfman for the role of music director because at that point Helfman was a highly acclaimed choral conductor, arranger and composer of the Yiddishist choirs, a director of synagogue choirs and a well known liturgical composer. Davis helped Max transition from his old Yiddish and liturgical repertoire to the new Hebrew repertoire. It was also through this new position that Max became involved with the Brandeis Bardin camps.

Shlomo Bardin (1898-1976), was the executive director of the American Zionist Youth Commission from its beginning in 1939. He believed that Jewish identity for young American Jews could be encouraged by engagement with the culture of music and dance of modern Israel without a political angle. Bardin attended Columbia University and that is where he ended up meeting Justice Louis Brandeis.[10] Brandeis was known for his Zionist ideals but he was also very concerned about the engagement of young Jewish people. He thought that too many of them, especially university age students, were alienated from Judaism. He believed that Judaism needed to be made relevant and meaningful to this Jewish generation without taking away their full participation in American society and culture. The solution he favored was the Zionist spirit, the cultural

[9] Ibid.
[10] Justice Louis Brandeis was the first Jewish Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. He served June 1, 1916 until February 13, 1939. He was notable for fighting railroad monopolies, defending workplace and labor laws, and helping to create the Federal Reserve System. He fought for social justice and was a devoted Zionist. He is also credited with introducing the precedent of expert testimony and with some of the greatest defenses of freedom of speech and the right to privacy written by a member of the Supreme Court.

aura and the idealist spirit of the kibbutz.[11] Shlomo Bardin was in agreement. He had immigrated to Palestine from the Ukraine in 1919 and he was unable to return there in 1939 after his second visit to the United States. Brandeis inspired him to establish a cooperative-type institute to bring the culture of Palestine to America's Jewish youth.

He began by searching for faculty. On the recommendation of Cantor David Putterman, whom Max Helfman had composed for and whose choir he had conducted at Park Avenue Synagogue, Bardin hired Max Helfman as the music director. Helfman began working at the Brandeis Camp in Winterdale, Pennsylvania in the summer of 1946. The following year Max became the music director for the Brandeis Camp at Santa Susana, near Los Angeles. Robert Strassburg later took over the position as music director at the Brandeis Camp in Pennsylvania. Helfman was attempting to create a "Jewish renaissance."[12]

The California camp at Santa Susana became the Brandeis Arts Institute in 1948. During the 1940s and the 1950's it was a kind of "Jewish Interlochen" modeled on Tanglewood but within the Brandeis camp framework. Very gifted Jewish college age composers, writers, performers, conductors, and dancers were mentored by the resident artist faculty. The goal was to allow Israeli and Jewish composers to share their knowledge with the next generation. The resident artist faculty for music included Brach Zefira, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Julius Chajes, Eric Zeisl, Heinrich Schalit, Alfred Sendrey, Izler Solomon, Ernst Toch, and others. Some of the students who were extremely influenced and went on to become successful composers in their own right

[11] Neil W. Levin,"Sing unto Zion! In Praise of a Jewish National Home," Milken Archive of Jewish Music. www.milkenarchive.org/articles/view/introduction-to-volume-8 (Accessed 12 March 2013).
[12] Ibid.

include Yehudi Wyner, Jack Gottleib, Charles Davidson, Gershon Kingsley, Raymond Smolover, and Charles Feldman. The Brandeis Arts Institute only lasted through the summer of 1952 but these composers show its lasting impact on Jewish culture and music. Helfman continued to direct the music program at the Brandeis Camp for seventeen years.

In 1951 the two other Brandeis Camps, the camp in Winterdale, Pennsylvania and the camp in Hendersonville, North Carolina closed. The camp in California stayed open because with its climate it had the advantage of staying open all year round. These closings led Helfman to focus all his energy on the California camp. It was also the impetus he had to move his family from the East coast to the West coast when he took a position as the camp's music director full time.

Once in California, Helfman got a job as the music director at Temple Sinai in Los Angeles. Three years later in 1954 he was appointed as the director of the Department of Sacred Music of the West coast branch of Hebrew Union College-the College of Jewish studies in Los Angeles. He had previously served on the faculty of the Hebrew Union College in New York City in 1944. Helfman worked for Hebrew Union College for three years and then he was replaced by William Sharlin. In 1958 Helfman was appointed as the Dean of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. He invited Robert Strassburg to serve as his assistant dean. At this time Helfman also moved to Hollywood. Five years later Max Helfman died suddenly from a heart attack while attending his nephew's wedding in Dallas, Texas on August 9 in 1963. He was only sixty-two years old.

Chapter 2: Max Helfman, The Composer

Max Helfman was a gifted composer. He was able to take the elements of Jewish music and incorporate them into compositions that contained modern Western harmony. His music is often very dramatic and dense in its harmonization. But at the same time it can be filled with nuance, such as a small motif that is woven throughout a piece. In the following section I will look in depth at Helfman's setting of "*Adonai, Adonai*." Then I will examine some of the stylistic tendencies that are found within Helfman's music.

Musical Analysis of Helfman's "*Adonai, Adonai*"

This piece by Helfman is a setting from his complete Torah service *Aron Ha-Kodesh* published in 1950. In the preface to this service, Helfman described "*Adonai, Adonai*" as full of "supplicatory pathos."[13] He wrote that "It is this dramatic element that I have here primarily sought to capture. And it is this element that, I feel, should be particularly stressed in performance through a vital rhythmic pulse and a wide dynamic range. At the same time, the very real distinction between the "dramatic" and the "theatric" must be kept in mind." The piece is 6 and 3/4 minutes long. It is written for Cantor and for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass and for organ.

The piece can be split into three sections (see Appendix 2A). It opens with a call and response between the Cantor and the mixed voice choir. The choir is singing the same words at the same time in order for the text to remain clear. There is also no repetition of the text until the da capo repetition. This first section is 18 measures long and ends with the word *v'emes*. The next section is dolce beginning with the choir. The

[13] Max Helfman, *The Holy Ark (Aron Ha-Kodesh): Torah Service for Sabbath and Festivals* (New York: Transcontinental Publications, 1950), Preface.

alto and tenor have a duet with flowing triplets accompanied by the grounding of the bass line. The cantor then adds drama with a repetition of the text, *Notzer*. This drama is achieved through the higher range in the vocal line, the *forte* dynamic marking and the addition of the A-naturals in measure 25 emphasizing the B-Flat tonic. The choir responds a beat and half after the cantor. This is reminiscent of Helfman's "*Hashkieveinu"* setting. The call and response pattern repeats again for the next line. On measure 27 the choir keeps singing and the cantor's entrance overlaps with the end of their phrase on measure 29. In measure 30 and 31 the cantor and choir finish the phrase together. The next section of the piece is a small Cantorial recitative from measures 31 to 41. It is punctuated by two brief choral overlays. This section is a repetition of the text again. It also serves as a bridge to return to the beginning of the piece.

The form of this piece is AB-Bridge-AB. The piece begins in F-Ahavah Raba, with a sustained B-flat for the first seven measures. In measure 5 there is an A-natural. This is the raised third of F- Ahavah Rabah. The raised third of the Ahavah Rabah scale is characteristic of this mode and separates it from a regular Phrygian scale. But the tonality feels unsettled until measure 9-11 on the text *El rachum v'chanun*, God full of mercy and grace. At this point there is a i-V-i cadence that outlines B-flat minor as the tonality. This is a very stable transition and transmits the comforting meaning to the text. Measure 12 continues on the tonic. Measure 13 moves to outline a VI chord. Measure 14 marks the beginning of three ascending phrases that build tension on the words *v'rav chesed,* full of mercy. This repetition illustrates the text by declaring God's mercy three times with higher notes and chromatics. This tension is resolved in the 18th measure on the words *v'emet*, and truth. Measure 14 has the return of the A-natural. It is a seventh

chord on vii, A-natural-C-E-G. There is also a passing tone with a B-natural. This is foreshadowing the changes coming in measures 15 and 16. Measures 14, 15, and 16 are a series of ascending notes which leads to an unexpected step down and change in tonality on the fermata. These measures rise in pitch and dynamics are expressing the repeated text *v'rav* chesed, full of loving kindness. The change in tonality on the fermata showcases the different side God. God is full of loving kindness but also *v'emet*, and truth. Measure 15 also is a seventh vii chord but the vocal parts moved up increasing the drama of the repeated text of *v'rav chesed*. In addition the D and B were made natural in the passing tones of the organ. Measure 16 starts with the vii-seventh chord then it moves to an F-minor i chord. The tonic moves to F instead of B-flat minor. The fermata contains an A-natural-C-E-natural -G chord. This a major II seventh chord. Measure 17 ends with a vii-seventh chord followed by a major I chord on F. The switch between major and minor and the change in tonality increase the drama of this section and place it in contrast with the lyrical, piano, non-chromatic section beginning with *notzer* on measure 19.

The B section begins in the key of B-flat minor. The altos and tenors share a duet with lyrical lines and triplets and are grounded by the counterpoint of the basses. The accompaniment consists of seventh chords played every quarter note. The flowing lines and evenness of the accompaniment illustrate the text of *notzer chesed laalafim*, keeping mercy unto thousands. The next phrase *nose avon vafesha,* forgiving iniquity and transgression, ends in measure 22 in F major. The brighter side of the major contrasts the previous B-flat minor and indicates the forgiveness. In measure 23 the cantor re-enters singing *forte*. The previous two lines of text are repeated. The accompaniment drops out

for an a capella moment. There is a call and response between the cantor and choir, with a slight delay before the choir's entrance. At measure 23 there is a return to B-Flat minor. The A-natural is flatted again in the tenor line. The repeated text is set at a higher tessitura to add tension. At measure 26 the B-Flat chord is a pivot point and the phrase ends on F major again on the text, forgiving our iniquity and transgressions. In measures 26-27 all four choir parts are in unison. There is a return to B-Flat minor. On the text *v'nakeh*, and pardons, there is an unexpected chord E-Flat-G-Flat-B-Double Flat-C-Flat-F, which prepares for the dominant. This chord strikingly sets off the text of pardons. The rest of the phrase repeats this text with the more expected i-V-i cadence in B-Flat minor. This is where the piece ends on the second repetition.

The next section is a Cantorial recitative of the entire text. This recitative is punctuated by two choir doublings on the words *vafesha*, and transgressions, and *v'nakeh*, and pardons. The accompaniment is held chords. The first phrase goes from i-iv on measures 31-33. It has an appoggiatura on the word *v'chanun*, gracious. The second phrase goes from V-ii-III on measures 34-36. It also has an appoggiatura. These illustrate the pleading nature of the text. There is then a lessening of the tension with a VI-7 in the accompaniment. The rest of the recitative is a capella. It outlines a iv a ii- and a iv-7 chord and then it pivots up to end in C on a seventh chord with an appoggiatura in the soprano line. This step up feels unstable and it leads back to the F-Ahavah Rabah at the beginning of the piece.

The return back to the AB section of the piece emphasizes the sacred nature of this prayer. The text of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is repeated a total of three times just as the text of *Kol Nidre* is repeated three times on Yom Kippur. The symmetrical

structure of the music brings a feeling of comfort because of its familiarity during the second repetition. This comfort reinforces the text which defines God's mercy to us.

Stylistic Features of Helfman's Music

According to Helfman, "Originality is the most important quality of a composer. It is not achieved by breaking with the past, but by building on it and using it as a foundation."[14] This opinion played into the way that Helfman composed music. Helfman frequently included the modal harmonies of the synagogue. These Jewish melodies were often used correctly according to the traditional Jewish chants. For example, Helfman would use the Magein Avot mode while composing for the Maariv Shabbat service and he would also use the Adonai Malach mode when composing for Kabbalat Shabbat. Both of these are the traditional Jewish modes for those parts of the service. Helfman would also incorporate touches of the Jewish modes into his non-liturgical music to give it a Jewish flavor. This use of the modes is not completely surprising because Helfman grew up hearing these Jewish prayer modes when he was attending services with his father or singing in the boy's choirs on the Lower East Side. This modal Jewish flavor is then harmonized with modern western chord construction by Helfman. This fusion then results in melding of the old into the new.

This blending together of the modes and modern western chord construction is found in many of Helfman's pieces. Examples of this melding together of old and new can be found in Helfman's setting of "*Adonai, Adonai"* from his *Holy Ark Service*. It can also be found in many settings of his *Shabbat Kodesh* service such as his setting of

[14] Neil W Levin, "Max Helfman," Milken Archive of Jewish Music. www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/514/Max+Helfman (accessed 12 March 2013)

"*Hashkiveinu*" (see Appendix 2B). Helfman had studied composition at Curtis Institute with Rosario Scalero. This in depth instruction gave Helfman a solid foundation in Western harmony.

Form

Form is a distinct aspect of Max Helfman's music. The foundation of Helfman's music often contains symmetry of form, such as ABBA.

"Adonai, Adonai"

In the Helfman's setting of "*Adonai, Adonai*," this symmetrical form is used. The form is AB-Bridge-AB. The sections are not necessarily the same length. For example the A section runs from measure 1 through measure 18. The B section runs between measure 19 and measure 30. While the bridge runs only between measure 31 and measure 41. The A and B sections then repeat making a perfect mirror with the first half of the piece.

"Shma Koleinu"

In Helfman's famous *Shma Koleinu* the form is ABCA (see Appendix 2C). This piece also has symmetry with its return to the A section at the end of the piece. The A section runs from measure 1 through measure 20. The first section is through composed and it is very deliberate. It is a fervent plea for God to hear our prayers. The B section is shorter and has a different style. It only runs from measure 21 through measure 29. This section is written in a free Cantorial style. It has the form of a recitative. It is asking God to turn us back to God in repentance and to renew our days as in the past. The held

chords allow the cantor freedom in delivering these lines. The C section runs from measure 30 through measure 54. In this section the motive from the A section is brought back in the organ. The text is asking God not to cast us away from God's presence when we are old and to not forsake us when our strength fails us. The repeated A section runs from measure 55 to measure 74 with a different ornamentation on the word *ratzon* in measures 70 -71. The piece starts in one place, ranges afield and then returns.

"Hashkiveinu"

Yet another example of symmetry is found In Helfman's setting of "*Hashkiveinu*" (see Appendix 2B). It has the form of ABCDA'B' coda. This piece again shows symmetry of form with a return of A and B with minor variations. This piece, however, is not exactly symmetrical. The final coda brings an expected transition from minor to major.

Accompaniment

For Helfman's accompaniment he often uses a sustained pedal point in the organ and creatively uses seventh chords. These stylistic features can be found in "*Adonai, Adonai*." The piece opens with a sustained pedal point on B-Flat. There is also a wealth of seventh chords throughout this piece adding to the dense texture of the music. In Helfman's setting of "*Sh'ma Yisrael"* (see Appendix 2D) from the *Shabbat Menucha* service, there is a sustained pedal point on F as the piece opens. Added to the rest of the harmony it outlines a sustained chord of B-Flat-F-C. This double open fifth is a quartal harmony. This style of accompaniment is also found in the opening phrase of "*Shma Koleinu*." In Helfman's setting of May the Words I (see Appendix 2E); there is also an

opening with a sustained pedal point, this time on E, which moves into an *ostinato* pattern. His use of the sustained pedal point and quartal harmonies adds to the harmonic depth of texture. This depth is supported by many seventh chords. There are many other instances of Helfman using seventh chords throughout his music. Another example of this is found in his setting of "*Hashkiveinu*." Helfman has concluding cadences iv-7, V-7-i. It is common to have a V-7-I cadence. The addition of the iv-7 on the words *chayim* and *l'ma-an sh'mecha* adds a richer sound and is not quite as common. These seventh chords, like the sustained pedal points add volume and depth to Helfman's music.

Imitation

Another stylistic feature of Max Helfman and a feature of his accompaniment is his use of organ and voice imitation. This feature can be seen in his "*Mi Chamocha"* from the *Shabbat Menucha* service (see Appendix 2F). The opening accompaniment line of ascending eight notes from a low D to a high D begins the piece. There is then a variation of this motif in the vocal parts. It consists of a similar pattern of ascending eighth notes from low D to a high D. There is then a call and response pattern between the choir and organ on the words "*nora t'hilot*" in measures 11-14. In addition to the imitation opportunities, the accompaniment also offers counterpoint and harmonic support. There is another example of this organ and vocal imitation in the *Yis'mchu* from the same *Shabbat Menucha* service (see Appendix 2G). The opening noble motif of two quarter notes followed by a dotted quarter and eighth note in the first measure and subsequently of two quarter notes followed by a half note in the second measure is

immediately imitated by the vocal parts on the words "*yism'chu, yis'mchu."* There is a partnership quality to the pairing of the organ and the choir.

Word Painting

Another stylistic feature of Helfman's music is his close attention to textual word painting. For example in his solo soprano setting "The Voice of my Beloved" there is an abundance of word painting in the music (see Appendix 2H). There is an extended melisma on the word "voice" and on the word "behold" in the first two lines of text, "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh." This embellishment illustrates the speaker's excitement to see her beloved and it also illustrates the time she is kept waiting. This is all set over a sustained quartal chord. The next phrase, "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills," is illustrated with a melodic line which climbs upwards in differing intervals and contains quicker moving eighth notes to represent the leaps. There is also a marked accelerando tempo marking to further show the propulsion of leaping. In addition there is word painting on the word "arise." The notes jump from a C to a G above the staff and then descend. This motif is again repeated. The leap of the fifth illustrates the word arise. There is more word painting during the text "the time of the singing of birds is come." In these five measures there is a bird call. It is a sixteenth note figure of A above the staff down to an E followed by a half note F-sharp. This figure is repeated four times and then it modulates down in the fifth measure. The motive then repeats in a lower register in a new key for the text, "And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land." This lower motive repeats twice and it illustrates the voice of the turtle dove, which is separated by other birds by its lower register. The motive for the text of the word "arise" is repeated again up a half step. The last word painting in this piece

illustrates the rain. It occurs on the word "gone" from the line, "The rains are over and gone." There is a set of three descending triplet figures repeated over two measures that illustrates falling rain. In this one piece Helfman is able to paint the actions of anticipation, arising and leaping, and of birds and rain. He sets the mood of springtime and the lovers through music.

Nusach

As mentioned previously Helfman used the Jewish modes with a modern Western counterpoint to combine the old and the new, Helfman also used the biblical cantillation within his music. In his preface to his service *Shabbat Kodesh* published in 1942 Helfman wrote that:

> In its positive aspect it is the result of an ever-growing realization by the Jewish composer that in our ancient prayer-modes, biblical cantillation and chazonic lore is to be found a rich, congenial and evocative store of thematic material worthy of the most serious exploration, in the proper exploitation of which he can most truly find himself.[15]

Helfman believed that in the rich tradition of Jewish music there is tremendous inspiration for a composer and also a connection to his own identity, influenced by his own Jewish ancestry and experience.

Examples of Helfman's use of biblical cantillation can be found in the Haftarah influenced motive found in his *Shabbat Kodesh* service, specifically found in his "*Kaddish"* and repeated in his "Silent devotion." This motive can be found in the

[15] Max Helfman, *Shabbat Kodesh* (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1942), Preface.

"*Kaddish*" in the choir's response on "*Ba-agala*" in measures 13-16 and also their response in measures 38-41 beginning "*Tush-be-chata"* (see Appendix 2I) It is additionally found in the "Silent Devotion" in measures 8-16 (see Appendix 2J). This motive is a play on the Haftarah trope for *munach etnachta*. Another example of biblical cantillation can be found in his "Voice of my Beloved." This is a musical setting of text from *Song of Songs*. Helfman incorporates the traditional Song of Song trope into his composition. The text, "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone" occurs twice in this piece. In each case the music roughly outlines the *Shir Hashirim* trope of *mercha tipcha-munach etnachta*.

So in conclusion, Helfman's liturgical music tends to be a mix of Jewish themes and modern Western harmony. He was profoundly influenced by nusach hat'fillah, cantillation, modes, and chazzanut. At the same time he was influenced by the modern music being produced around him and by his own formal music training. This training led to pieces that were symmetrical in form, that were dense in harmonic texture with sustained pedal tones and seventh chords, that show interplay between the voice and the accompaniment, and that are illustrated with textual word painting. Helfman saw the synagogue as a medium through which to channel his talent into music. Outside of the synagogue Helfman also was a skilled arranger, a lover and producer of Yiddish and later Israeli music, and was talented in setting orchestration, as is shown in his settings of *Who is like unto Thee* and *Uvashofar Gadol*. Helfman said that "My music is an offering in sound. You may argue with a sermon but you can never fight a melody."[16]

[16] Philip Moddel, *Max Helfman: A Biographical Sketch* (Berkeley: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1974), 62.

Chapter 3

Music in Synagogues from the 1930's through the 1950's

Helfman did most of his composing between the year 1930 and 1960. This was a changing time for America. The Great Depression, World War II, the Holocaust, and the creation of the state of Israel all had a profound influence on American society.

Between 1920 and 1950, there were new neighborhoods opening up all over the suburbs. Many Jewish Americans moved to these suburbs and new synagogues were built to accommodate them. This expansion was a result of the quick rise of the new middle class of Jewish Americans, as well as the beginning of the branch of Conservative Judaism. This second generation of Americans had grown up in Jewish immigrant homes. The majority of the previous generation were raised Orthodox and now the younger generation felt that Conservative Judaism bridged the gap between tradition and modernization.[17]

The Conservative movement was growing and changing and there were also changes in the Reform movement as well. By the 1930's Eastern and Western European Jews were becoming American through assimilation. Changing society led to changes in the *siddur* as well. The Reform Movement published a new *Union Hymnal* in 1932. This hymnal included the compositions of Sulzer, Lewandowski, and Naumbourg, but it also included many Protestant influenced hymns. In addition it contained the new inclusion of traditional tunes and piyyutim. This *siddur* was another example of mixing tradition with the music of the modern, mostly Christian society around them.

[17] Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 69.

Another factor that affected Jewish music in America during the years 1930 through 1970 were the many talented Jewish European musicians who immigrated to America. They were trained in Europe and after coming to America they began writing music for the American synagogue. According to the musicologists Rubin and Baron, these musicians were "great composers, not simply hack musicians, and because they were deeply imbued with traditional European Jewish music, they brought a new dimension to American synagogue music: their music was art music as much as functional synagogue music."[18]

This new music encouraged the hazzanim to "raise their musical sights."[19] The previous generation of hazzanim were trained unofficially by oral tradition through service attendance and paid apprenticeships. This group was replaced by a trained hazzanim following World War II. They began their training at the Reform School of Sacred Music in 1947, the Conservative Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1951 and the Orthodox 's Cantorial Training Institute of Yeshiva University in 1954.[20]

Music in the synagogue during this period was a mixture of sacred chants along with compositions of talented composers and increasingly trained hazzanim. The Reform movement was moving away from Protestant hymns and embracing more traditional elements of worship. The Conservative movement was founded and growing. The congregants in the synagogues of both of these movements were increasingly well educated and middle class.

[18] Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 246.
[19] Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices,* 70.
[20] Ibid., 95.

Contemporaries of Max Helfman

A.W. Binder

Abraham Wolff Binder (1895-1966) was a composer, conductor, and teacher. Also known as A.W., Binder was born into a family of cantors and was a strong proponent of Jewish music. He founded and led a few of the earliest choral groups performing Jewish music in America including the Hadassah Choral Union in 1916. He was also the director of music at three major Jewish institutions: the 92nd street YMHA music school, the Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music. In addition, he was involved in the promotion of Jewish music in America. Binder was an officer of the National Jewish Music Council and he developed teaching materials at the Bureau of Jewish Education. He also impacted Jewish worship by musically editing the Union Hymnal and Union Songster in 1932.

For the majority of his life, from 1922 until 1966, Binder served as the music director at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City. While there he introduced important changes such as a return to biblical cantillation. This was a change from other Reform congregations who read the text without chanting.[21] His book, *Biblical Chant*, published in 1959, is still in use today for studying Eastern European cantillation.

In addition to a return to traditional chanting of the Torah, Binder also felt that there should be more Jewish music in the service. In 1921 Binder said, "I felt it was my

[21] Mark Kligman, "Reestablishing a 'Jewish Spirit' in American Synagogue Music: The Music of A.W. Binder," in *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times,* eds. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (Philadephia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007), 276.

duty to do something about letting Reform Jews hear some of the works of the masters of the nineteenth century, such as Sulzer, Lewandowski, Naumbourg, and Nowakowski. The Reform services had become saturated with music composed for them by non-Jews.[22]

He addressed this issue later when he was selected to edit the *Union Hymnal.* In 1932, along with Jacob Singer and James Heller, Binder edited the *Union Hymnal*. His goal in this edition as explained in the introduction was "…the adaptation of Jewish traditional music to the usage and taste of our own days."[23] Their version reintroduced traditional tunes and *piyyutim* as well as Eastern European synagogue composers. At the same time he kept many of the original Protestant influenced hymns of the previous editions.[24]

For Binder it was very important that synagogue music be Jewish. According to Mark Kligman, Binder's major concerns were "the retention of *nusach* in new compositions, the successful harmonization of traditional modal melodies, and the appropriate use of non-Jewish musical sources."[25] This meant that a composer should not only use the modes but should harmonize the modes with modal notation rather than using the current Western system of harmony. He said he felt that, "in the synagogue on Shabbes one should feel the warmth and beauty of Shabbes, or indeed, the distinctive Jewish qualities of the holidays and festivals at their services, even though the prayer

[22] Irene Heskes, ed., *A.W. Binder: His Life and Work* (New York: National Jewish Music Council, 1965), 4.
[23] Mark Kligman, 280.
[24] Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, 244.
[25] Mark Kligman, 276.

texts might be altered to suit the Reform or any other Jewish ritual sect.[26] To help promote this idea Binder published his first full Sabbath service in 1928. He said:

> I consider my most important contribution to synagogue music to be my association with the return to the *Nusach Ha-T'fillah*, which is our rich musical tradition to the synagogue, and my efforts to purify it and perpetuate it. I have endeavored to use it skillfully and tastefully in all services, not only for what it has meant to our forefathers and to the religious services of the ages past, but also significantly, for what it can do for the synagogue services of today and into the future.[27]

A.W. Binder could be seen as a predecessor of Max Helfman. They were both interested in finding a way to incorporate Jewish modes and *nusach* into the service. However, Binder believed that the music should sound modal and not have too much Western harmony. He felt that too much Western harmony would make a piece sound less Jewish. Max Helfman, on the other hand, incorporated many modern Western harmonies into his music.

A.W. Binder was also a very strong proponent of the Eastern European tradition. Max Helfman admired the music of Nowakowsky greatly but it was more for its originality than for its attention to the modes. In 1955 he said about Nowakowsky, "He rises to unequaled heights in his imaginative interpretation of our liturgy."[28] Max Helfman did not adhere to just one traditional style. He included whatever spoke to him.

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[26] Irene Heskes, ed., *A.W. Binder: His Life and Work* (New York: National Jewish Music Council, 1965), 4.
[27] Ibid.
[28] http://www.nowakowskyfoundation.com/ (accessed 9 Jan. 2014).

A.W. Binder wanted a return to a more "Jewish" sound. While Helfman valued originality that was based off of Jewish nusach and modes.

A good example of this difference can be seen in looking at a version of each composer's "*Hashkiveinu"* settings. A.W. Binder's "*Hashkiveinu"* (1943) setting is written in the style of Eastern European *Hazzanut* (See Appendix 3A). This is the style of music A.W. Binder heard growing up. There are held chords and a freely moving Cantorial line. The harmonization is modal instead of Western. There is no repetition of text. The Cantorial line sounds traditional. The chords are a modern replacement of the meshorerim singers that would have provided harmonies without instruments.

Helfman's setting of "*Hashkiveinu"* from his *Shabbat Kodesh* service published in 1942 is much more elaborate (see Appendix 2B). It is written for choir, organ, and cantor and is more than twice as long. It has solo and choir sections and varies the texture throughout. There is a call and response section with the choir, followed by a Cantorial solo and a choir interlude, followed by a return to the motives of section A and B and a dynamic coda. There is interesting use of seventh chords and a move from d minor to D major during the coda that sets this apart as a more Western influenced piece. Helfman's setting of "*Hashkiveinu*" does also have modal moments. The entire opening section is modal with an optional accompaniment of a choir a capella. This section returns again on the text *ushmor tzeiteinu*. The difference between Helfman and A.W. Binder is that Helfman uses smaller sections of modal music contrasted with western influenced harmonies, while Binder keeps the entire setting modal.

Herbert Fromm

Herbert Fromm (1905-1995) was one of the most prominent and prolific composers in the Reform movement who came over from Germany in the 1930's.[29] This group included Heinrich Schalit (1886-1976), Hugo Chaim Adler (1894-1955), Julius Chajes (1910-1985), and Isadore Freed (1900-1960). In addition to composing, Fromm was also an accomplished conductor and organist. Fromm was born in Kitzingen, Germany in 1905. He studied at the State Academy of Music in Munich and began his career as an opera conductor at Civic Opera in Bielefled and later in Würtzberg. In 1933 the government no longer let Jewish citizens contribute to cultural life so Fromm became the composer and conductor for the Frankfurt am Mein section of the Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland. This experience started Fromm composing on Jewish themes.

In 1937 Fromm immigrated to America. He first got a job as the music director and organist at Temple Beth Zion in Buffalo. Soon after, he was appointed the musical director at Temple Israel in Boston. He received this post through the recommendation of A.W. Binder, who had helped him find accompanist work when he first came over as a refugee musician from Germany. Fromm stayed in this position until he retired in 1972. While in Boston he also worked with Paul Hindemith. Binder had previously studied with him in Germany and studied with him again at Tanglewood in 1940 and 1941.[30]

Herbert Fromm also believed in integrating the old with the new. He explained that, "Synagogue music is emerging which successfully blends ancient materials with the

[29] Neil W. Levin, "Herbert Fromm*," Milken Archive of Jewish Music.* http://www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/527/Herbert+Fromm (accessed 7 Jan. 2014) .
[30]Ibid.

devices of modern music. I earnestly believe that the history of synagogue music could at no time boast such an era of ever growing enrichment as in our own days."[31] Fromm was referring to the post World War II era from about 1948 through 1978.

Fromm stated that:

> The proposition that Jewish music, for the sake of purity, should offer nothing but unharmonized chants may be the dream of academic theorists. If we want to face up to musical realities we must recognize the effects of a long Jewish history within the Western world. The extent of interpenetration between the Jewish heritage and the achievements of Western music is what interests us here."[32]

Fromm believed that Jewish music did not exist in a vacuum. Music is a product of its environment and Jewish music has had a long time to interact with its neighboring soundscapes and cultures. Glenn Watkins proposes a similar theory in his book *Soundings*. He believes that music is connected to the culture.[33] They are tied together. Fromm composed balancing the new with the old, never getting too far to one side or the other. According to Neil W. Levin, Fromm's music was "judiciously modern, yet imaginatively respectful of tradition and never on the fringe of the avant-garde."[34] Fromm believed that the combination of the older traditional Jewish music and the newer modern music of the surrounding culture was where Jewish music was at this time.

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[31] Jonathan L. Friedmann, "Max Helfman in California: Creating Jewish Music, 1947-1963," *Western States Jewish History* 42, 1 (Fall 2009): 33-34.
[32] Herbert Fromm, *On Jewish Music: A Composer's View* (NY: Bloch, 1978), 3.
[33] Glenn Watkins, *Soundings: Music in the twentieth century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988).
[34] Neil W. Levin, "Herbert Fromm*," Milken Archive of Jewish Music.* http://www.milkenarchive.org/people/view/all/527/Herbert+Fromm (accessed 7 Jan. 2014).

Unlike A.W. Binder, Fromm did not believe that you had to stick with the correct Jewish mode for a piece. He said that for himself:

> The *Ahavah Rabbah* mode was eliminated in spite of its traditional associations. Its morose character has always appeared to me--and not only to me—as incompatible with the healthy sturdiness of our prayers and psalms. Its musical possibilities are too limited to offer much inducement, and the stagnancy of many a piece of Jewish music is due to the predominance of that mode.[35]

In addition to being more fluid with Jewish modes for a piece, Fromm believed that *Hazzanut* should not be too overdone. He believed that recitatives in the traditional style should be trimmed and kept clean of "florid figuration which so often stops the flow and meaning of the words." For Fromm what was important was the text and meaning. This purpose of the music trumped ties to following tradition. Because of this Fromm believed that the traditional material be embodied within "a framework of a free creation."[36]

Fromm's compositional style overall is sparer than Max Helfman's style. Fromm wrote that liturgical music should be "unburdened by an overdose of emotion."[37] Herbert Fromm came from the Germanic school of composition. He viewed Max Helfman as an "uneven composer." Fromm wrote that Max Helfman had "his roots in the Polish-Russian tradition with its unrestrained emotional appeal and flair for theatrical effects. Helfman's work *Aron Ha-kodesh* accompanying the ceremony of the scriptural reading

[35] Herbert Fromm, *On Jewish Music: A Composer's View (*NY: Bloch, 1978), 8.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 56.

exemplifies these traits most strikingly."[38] According to Fromm, Max Helfman's music was overly dramatic.

A good illustration of their two differing styles can be seen in each composer's composition of "Grant us Peace." Fromm's version contains a one measure opening phrase with hints of cantillation (see Appendix 3B). It then moves on with a sustained fifth in the accompaniment and an overlayment of a reciting tone on G in the Cantorial line. There is then a reciting tone on D, then C, and a return to G on the words "enable our nation to be a messenger of peace." The piece continues throughout in this way. The text has a recitative-like form and the music is very speech-like. The accompaniment is sparse, sustained chords. Fromm writes of this piece that there is a "kinship with cantillation and prayer modes, not quoted verbatim, but recreated from that reservoir of our ancestral memory of which I spoke before."[39]

On the other hand, Helfman's setting of "Grant us Peace" has a melodic style (see Appendix 2K). The focus is on the tune. The organ accompaniment is steady and harmonic. There is also much vocal doubling with the accompaniment. This doubling can be seen on the phrase "and enable Israel to be its messenger unto the peoples of the earth" and on the phrase "Bless our country that it may ever be a stronghold of peace and its advocate in the council of nations." There is then the juxtaposition from D-minor in the A section to D-major in the middle section. This illustrates the optimistic text of "May contentment reign within its borders, health and happiness within its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship and fellowship among the inhabitants of all lands."

[38] Herbert Fromm, *On Jewish Music: A Composer's View* (NY: Bloch, 1978), 34-35.
[39] Ibid., 74.

This section is then followed by a return of the A section in D-minor. Helfman's musical setting has a more dynamic, emotional appeal while Fromm's more static setting and speech-like text-setting sounds more like traditional davening.

Max Janowski

Max Janowski (1912-1991) was a prolific liturgical composer, conductor, and choir director throughout the mid twentieth century. Born in Berlin, Max Janowski was musical from an early age. He was a talented pianist and won a few piano competitions. These successes resulted in his appointment as head of the Piano department at Mosashino Academy of music in Tokyo. In 1937 he left Tokyo and immigrated to America. He was commissioned to write a composition to celebrate the silver jubilee of the United Synagogue of America. This piece was titled *Compassion Cantata.* In the process of touring the country with performances of this piece, Janowski heard about the opening for the post of music director at Kehilath Anshe Maarav (K.A.M.).

Janowski started his career at K.A.M., Illinois' oldest synagogue, in 1938. While there, he introduced innovations such as a switch to more traditional Jewish elements. These innovations included returning Shabbat services to Friday night instead of Sunday morning and reintroducing Hebrew into the religious school.[40] Max Janowski held this position until he passed away in 1991.

Musically, Max Janowski found it difficult when he first came to K.A.M. because the music was very influenced by that of the Protestant Church. It was in German and English and it lacked Hebrew and *nusach*. Janowski was against using some of their

[40] Deborah Lynn Felder, "Liturgy and Drama in Jewish Music: Max Janowski, A Case Study" (Master's Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1993), 15.

music just because it was old and established. He said that, "I think the length of time that something has been done is not necessarily a guarantee for its value."[41] Because of these beliefs, music was another area that Max Janowski went about changing and incorporating more traditional elements as well as more choral music.[42]

By the late 1950's through the 1980's Max Janowski hired opera singers such as Sherill Milnes or Isola Jones as choir members and soloists to raise the vocal quality at the temple and to fit his compositions. By 1986 the services were becoming more participatory for the congregation. Max Janowski said that "…the service to my way of thinking is one in which the congregation participates, as opposed to a concert…we probably do one number, a special number…the rest is all congregational singing."[43]

Max Janowski had a few things to say on being a composer and more specifically a Jewish liturgical composer. As a composer Max Janowski said, "I take my inspiration from the text."[44] And on the reason that he composes liturgical music as opposed to secular he says it is because "….I felt a need in myself, to put it very bluntly, to do something for my people."[45] But just wanting to compose Jewish music is not enough if one lacks the proper training. According to Max Janowski, "Before you can write Jewish music, or compose Jewish music, you have to be a musician first."[46]

[41] Ibid., 80.
[42] Ibid., 16.
[43] Ibid., 69.
[44] Ibid., 70.
[45] Ibid., 71.
[46] Ibid.

Max Janowski also had certain views of what constitutes Jewish music. He believed that Jewish music is "…basically for a Cantor and a choir."[47] Due to this belief many of his compositions are choral. In addition, Max Janowski believed that

> We have a great treasury of folk music and the point is to retain the ethnic feeling of Jewish music, and there is such a thing. And yet if you can, and that's why it's important to be on very good terms with classical music and to be a good musician altogether; to develop it and surround it with very beautiful sound without taking away the ethnic sound of Jewish music.[48]

In other words, Jewish music should sound ethnic while still being classically influenced. Finally, Janowski believed in incorporating the use of Hebrew in Jewish music. According to Janowski the text in Jewish music was all important. He believed that the Hebrew language has a certain sound and it has its own innate accents. He was not put off by the participatory camp music of the day, but he was against their use of folk music of other nations with Hebrew words placed in it.

Max Janowski and Max Helfman were both enthusiastic choral composers and conductors. Janowski spent fifty-four years serving Kehilath Anshe Maarav Temple. He wrote many pieces for choir and enjoyed conducting the synagogue choirs. The choir was filled with volunteers but he also peppered it with professional singers as well. Max Helfman worked with a number of amateur choirs and was very involved in encouraging young people to engage in Jewish singing, especially at the Brandeis Camp Institute.

[47] Ibid., 72.
[48] Ibid., 75.

To compare these two composers let's look at two settings of the prayer *El Male Rachamim*. They are both choral settings but Max Janowski only includes the choir in the final *Amen.* Max Janowski writes a mostly solo Cantorial piece in E-Ahavah Rabah mode (see Appendix 3C). According to Isadore Freed in his book *Harmonizing the Modes,* this mode is the most complicated and colorful of the three scales from the harmonic point of view.[49] This Jewish mode is a modified Phrygian scale. It is marked by its raised major third instead of a minor third. Janowski's setting of *El Male Rachamim* is in the recitative style. The Cantorial line is free over sustained chords following the modes. It is a simple setting, but powerful. It follows the modal chord progressions relying heavily on I-iv-vii chords throughout. It ends on A-minor, up a fourth from the beginning E-Ahavah Rabah. This ending gives the piece the feeling that it moves on to someplace different than where it began. This ending fits well with the text.

Max Helfman's setting of *El Male Rachamim* is more complicated (see Appendix 2L). It is also twice as long. It begins on a held unison E in the organ and introduces the chromatic descending motif of E-D-sharp-C. This figure is doubled by the soprano and the organ, and then echoed by the tenor and organ. The accompaniment has an open sixth. This process is then repeated descending B-A-sharp-G. The organ has a held fifth. This opening feels out of time and mysterious. Without completed chords, the piece is neither major nor minor. The Cantor then enters repeating the descending motif. The organ then moves to a very open E-7 chord, while the cantor adds a chromatic flourish. The modes are hinted at but not clearly defined. It is a statement of the ambiguous nature

[49] Isadore Freed, *Harmonizing the Jewish Modes* (New York: The Sacred Music Press, 1958), 17.

of death. We don't know about the afterlife and this setting illustrates its indeterminate nature. The choir hums lightly in the background. They sing in colorful chords that add character to the chromatic Cantorial line. The ending *Amen*, is a juxtaposition of the descending motif. In the final two measures the motif is flipped and it is ascending four times in a row and concludes on an E-minor chord. The piece ends on a note of hope.

Both of these settings show elements of the modes. Janowski writes in Ahavah Rabah and Helfman's use of chromatics and pentatonics hints at the modes and non-Western music. Both pieces start in one place and end someplace else. It is clear that both composers had a firm knowledge of the text.

Max Helfman Compared to His Contemporaries

Max Helfman shared a number of things in common with his contemporaries. They all had a love for Jewish music and appreciated traditional Jewish elements such *nusach, hazzanut,* and cantillation. They came from European backgrounds. A.W. Binder was a second generation American while Janowski and Helfman were first generation Americans. Their career paths all led them to become music directors for synagogues.

There are some differences, however. Max Helfman was devoted to spreading his love of Judaism to young people and made the move across the country to California to work at the Brandeis Camp Institute full time. He was a real mentor and saw the growth of young composers as strengthening Klal Yisrael. The Brandeis Camp Institute was non-denominational so Max Helfman worked with young Reform, Conservative and

Orthodox Jews and went on to work at both Conservative and Reform synagogues. Max Helfman's contemporaries, Binder, Fromm, and Janowski, all worked in the Reform Movement.

Max Helfman was not competitive with other composers and often admired their originality and capabilities. That was not always the case with other composers. Max Janowski, for example, only used his own compositions for the services at K.A.M. And while he taught voice, he did not encourage young composers. A.W. Binder also influenced young students as a teacher at the Jewish Institute of Religion and later at Hebrew Union College. But mentoring was just a part of his work. He was also involved in promoting Jewish music through committees such as the Jewish Music Council.

Max Helfman was unique. He was very charismatic and helped to mentor a whole new generation of Jewish composers. His compositions are not always long. Phillip Moddel describes him "a master of the miniature."[50] They are, however, original and creative. He wrote many completely different interpretations of the same text. It is possible that he believed that our Jewish wisdom stating, "There are seventy faces to the Torah (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15)," applied to music as well. He took the love of Jewish modes and added in current trends in Western harmony. His music was received in different ways by his contemporaries. For example, his music was too modern for Binder, while Fromm found his music too emotional. However, his lasting achievement was his influence not on his contemporaries but on his protégés including Jack Gottlieb,

[50] Phillip Modell, *Max Helfman: A Biographical Sketch* (Berkeley, CA: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1974), 32.

Charles Davidson, Gershon Kingsley, Yehudi Wyner, and Raymond Smolover to name a few.

Max Helfman also differed from his contemporaries with regards to his compositions. Compared to A.W. Binder, Max Helfman wrote with more Western influenced harmonies and less of an emphasis on the Jewish modes. Max Helfman would incorporate seventh chords and quartal chords that would be too modern for Binder. Compared to Herbert Fromm, Max Helfman wrote music that had more of an Eastern European influence. It was more expansive and romantic. Fromm wrote in a more Germanic style that was simpler and more ordered. Compared to Janowski, Max Helfman wrote in a more avant-garde style. Where Janowski would write completely in a mode, Max Helfman would hint at it through chromatics and pentatonic. Overall Max Helfman's music was more complicated and lusher than his contemporaries. It was filled with dense harmonies and interesting juxtapositions. He was not afraid to mix modern elements of jazz and contemporary Western music with Jewish nusach and cantillation.

Chapter 4

Music in the Synagogue from 1960 through Today

There have been many changes in Jewish music since Max Helfman passed away in 1963. The most marked change is the eclectic nature of the music found in the synagogue. Besides traditional nusach and compositions written in the style of classical art music, there has been the addition of jazz settings, folk settings, Israeli music as well as music from other modern, popular styles. For example, Jack Gottlieb wrote jazz-oriented synagogue compositions. While Michael Isaacson writes in a more Hollywood style and Dan Nichols and Craig Taubman compose in a more rock and roll influenced style.[51] Besides these different styles, there also has been the introduction of woman composers. There are many women who have written for the synagogue including Cantor Benjie-Ellen Schiller, Lisa Levine, Rachelle Nelson, Hannah Tiferet-Siegel, Julie Silver and, of course, Debbie Friedman.[52]

One element that influenced the eclectic nature of Jewish music during the second half of the 20th century and onward, was the strong influence of Jewish summer camps. The music from these camps has consistently been making its way back into the synagogue. The National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) summer camps, which had begun in the 1950s, had become increasingly popular into the 1970s. The music from these camp composers such as Debbie Friedman, Louie Dobin, Cantor Jeff Klepper and Rabbi Dan Freelander became more common in worship. According to musicologists Rubin and Baron, "Their music served initially a very limited function: to

[51] Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, *Music in Jewish History and Culture* (Sterling Heights, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 264.
[52] Ibid., 265.

provide young people with easy to sing songs based on popular folk styles of the 1970s with liturgical words or paraphrases of the liturgy in Hebrew or English."[53] This music contained a folk rock sound that was supported with guitar. When these teens became adults it eventually led to this music replacing much of the Sulzer, Bloch and traditional Hazzanut that had been more common in the synagogue previously.

Also in the 1970s Jewish women clergy were starting to be ordained in the Conservative and Reform movements.[54] This change had an impact on the music of the synagogue. With women cantors, there was a difference in keys and registration in the music. Music is often moved to lower keys because women sing the music an octave higher than men. What would work for a man does not necessarily work for a woman's voice. Additionally, the ordination of women led to many more women composers.

Two further influences on music in the late 1960s and 1970s were the Chavurah movement and Israel. The Six Day War in Israel raised Israeli consciousness and Zionism. Americans were starting to prefer the music of Israel.[55] This led to the beginning of the *Chavurah* movement in 1968. The Chavurah movement, according to Cantor Benjie-Ellen Schiller was "a countercultural community, usually of young Jews intent on radical democracy, equality, and cultural self-sufficiency."[56] They were reacting to the large, formal synagogues. These *Chavurah*s were informal groups who met and worshipped in participatory styles with popular and Israeli influence. According

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 122-123.
[55] Benjie-Ellen Schiller, "The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues." In *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience,* Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 204-5.
[56] Ibid., 206.

to Schiller, the music at this time became "simpler, thoroughly democratic in its singability, largely Hebrew, and playable on guitar."[57]

Cantor Eli Schliefer also refers to the influence of the establishment of the State of Israel on music.[58] He argues that The State of Israel led to more Hebrew being used in Reform worship. It also led to a change in Hebrew pronunciation from Ashkenazic to Sephardic because of the Israeli influence. In addition, it led to a new "Mediterranean" style in their music.[59]

Support of Schliefer's argument can be found in the prayer book *Gates of Prayer* published in 1975. It had much more Hebrew and Hebrew transliteration than previous Reform siddurim. Its songster, *Gates of Song* or *Sha'arei Shirah* also contained much more Hebrew and it was more eclectic. It contained Israeli songs, Hasidic melodies, Sephardic songs, Yiddish folk songs, and classic Reform composers such as Lewandowski and Sulzer.

By the 1980s there was a growth in the number of art music composers for the synagogue. Many of these composers were published by Transcontinental Publications. These composers included Ben Steinberg, Simon Sargon, Samuel Ladler, Stephen Richards, Michael Isaacson, William Sharlin and Bonia Shur. By the 1990's that list also included many women such as Andrea Jill Higgins, Rachelle Nelson, and Benjie-Ellen Schiller. These pieces combined higher art music with the need for congregational

[57] Ibid.
[58] Eli Schleifer, "Current Trends of Liturgical Music in the Ashkenazi Synagogue," In *The World of Music* 37 no. 1 (1995): 59.
[59] Ibid.

participation. They supplemented the folk music and Israeli tunes that were also a part of synagogue music.

This conflict between the role of the cantor and the congregation in regards to music is still a very relevant issue and much has been written about it. Mark Slobin defines this conflict as the difference between the "music of presentation" and the "music of participation."[60] Eli Schliefer states that "This conflict involves several important questions, namely, the balance between art and popular music in the services, the role of the cantor as artist, songleader and educator, traditional versus modern music, and classical versus pop-music." [61] Within a service it revolves around the balance between solo Cantorial pieces and congregational melodies.

According to composer Samuel Adler, synagogue music does require "easy-to-learn songs" but it also requires "challenging works worthy of the great prayers in our liturgy."[62] Additionally he believes we should revive the choral tradition. However, he argues that there is no need for a complete return to the synagogue music of yesterday but rather to make a greater synthesis between the older and newer styles.

Contemporary composer Michael Isaacson believes that the desire for participation of the congregation in services has led to subpar music. He believes that it is vital for clergy to introduce the importance of great Jewish works to the congregations and to furthermore, showcase the difference between these great works and those that are

[60] Slobin, 195.
[61] Schliefer, 70.
[62] Samuel Adler, "Sacred Music in a Secular Age," In *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical music in Jewish and Christian Experience,* Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 298.

facile and mediocre.[63] He states that "the arts, by unlocking a part of the brain that is used less frequently, can reveal new Jewish meaning, inspiring and refreshing the greatness of Judaism's message."[64]

According to Rubin and Baron, "The debate that raged a century before—Protestant church music versus traditional Ashkenazic *nusach* – has now been reformulated as popular secular music versus any traditional Jewish music …the resolution is to keep it all."[65] It is common for services to be very heterogeneous with newer composers mixed in with Hazzanut, art songs, Israeli songs and some classical Reform repertoire. In my opinion, services are very heterogeneous these days. They do contain traditional Jewish music and I see more and more of this music within the service. On the other hand, while services do contain a mix of different genres they are still mostly folk inspired and congregationally sung.

Max Helfman's Influence on the Next Generation

Max Helfman had an incredible ability to mentor. While at the Brandeis Camp Institute, from 1946 until 1963, Max Helfman had a platform to influence others. Although he was typically shy and reserved, Helfman came alive before the crowd, expressing contagious enthusiasm for his projects and ideals. Shlomo Bardin wrote about Helfman:

[63] Michael Isaacson, "A Paradigm Reconsidered," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 5.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 266.

> It is important to remember that he was not only a great musician and composer, but also a well educated man, a man of deep convictions, with much knowledge and the ability to share his knowledge with others. Therefore he had a great influence on any audience, whether they were college youths or adults.[66]

Shlomo Bardin went on to say that, "Many people know how to teach, but very few know how to touch. Max knew how to touch a human being. He radiated enthusiasm."[67] Max influenced many Jewish youths to be more inspired by their Jewish heritage and he also inspired the next generation of talented Jewish composers to write music for the synagogue.

Protégés of Max Helfman

Jack Gottlieb

Jack Gottlieb (1930-2011) was a prolific composer, conductor, writer, and teacher. Gottlieb was born and raised in New Rochelle, New York where he was musical from an early age. He became interested in Jewish music after his time at the Brandeis Camp. Jack Gottlieb received his BA from Queens College in New York. Later, he became an assistant to Leonard Bernstein at the New York Philharmonic from 1958-1966. They met while Gottlieb was attending Brandeis University for his Master of Fine Arts. Gottlieb later wrote his doctoral thesis on Bernstein's music. In addition to Bernstein, Gottlieb also studied with Aaron Copland and Boris Blatcher at the Berkshire Music Center. From 1973-1977 he taught at the School of Sacred Music at the Hebrew

[66] Jonathan L. Friedmann, "Max Helfman in California: Creating Jewish Music, 1947-1963," *Western States Jewish History.* Vol. XLII, No. 1 (Fall 2009): 36.
[67] Ibid., 40.

Union College-Jewish Institute for Religion. His book, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and Hollywood* was very well received. His last publication, *Songs of Godlove,* was a two-volume set of 51 solos and duets. It contained Gottlieb's compositions from 1970-2004.[68]

Jack Gottlieb was extremely influenced by Max Helfman when he was a young man. Gottlieb was mentored by Helfman while attending the Brandeis Arts Institute. The institute ran from 1948 until 1952. It's purpose, according to Max Helfman was:

> …to train gifted Jewish youth for artistic leadership in the cultural life of the Jews in America. To create and make available programs and material truly expressive of our ethos and answering the cultural need of our people today.[69]

According to Jack Gottlieb, "I was still raw and not very musically developed. Max Helfman gave me a sense of purpose and was my spiritual father."[70] While at the Brandeis Arts Institute Jack Gottlieb said, "I fell under the spell of a pied piper, my mentor and 'Sweet Singer of Israel,' the one and only transcendent Max Helfman. I became Max's assistant for several years."[71] As Max Helfman's assistant Gottlieb edited and transcribed Max's scores and became very knowledgeable on his style. According to Jack Gottlieb, Max Helfman's music is:

> very theatrical, very dramatic, uses high sopranos and lots of fortes and lots of

[68] "Composer Biographies," *Reclaiming American Judaism's Lost Legacy: The Art of Synagogue Music.* New York, 12 -14 November 2006. American Society for Jewish Music.
[69] Ibid., 39.
[70] Humphrey Burton, "Jack Gottlieb Obituary," *The Guardian,* 4 May 2011.
[71] Joshua Breitzer, "*Shirei Yedidot*: The Music of Jack Gottlieb in Contemporary Jewish Worship" (Master's Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2011), 271.

very quiet moments, lots of contrasts. That was very influential to me. He paid attention to the text. Too much of the music that I came to learn is the traditional music in synagogue context seems to be interchangeable, that one piece of music could use a different text all the time, and I always fought against that. Text comes first.[72]

It is interesting to note that even after Helfman's passing, Jack Gottlieb remained involved with Helfman's music. Gottlieb edited and published Max Helfman's works of *Ahavat Olam* and *Kedusha* by Transcontinental music in 1975.[73]

This importance of emphasizing text in liturgical music Jack Gottlieb learned from Max Helfman. It is nicely illustrated in Jack Gottlieb's setting *Three Candle Blessings*. I find his use of this text unique. It was composed in August in 1970. At this time, as I am sure was the case then, the candle blessing composed by A.W. Binder, *Kindling of the Sabbath Lights* from his 1940 service *Kabbalat Shabbat,* is considered *miSinai* or customary. Gottlieb's use of this text despite the customs of his synagogue shows how important it was to him to set. The introduction of Gottlieb's "Candle Blessing No. 1" is marked as slow and dreamy (see Appendix 4A). The text is marked "childlike." The melodic solo line has a gentle lullaby quality and the accompanying organ often doubles the vocal line. It sets the mood for a peaceful entrance into Shabbat. The music is definitely not transferable to any other text.

Besides text, Gottlieb mentions Helfman's use of drama. This type of drama is illustrated in Gottlieb's jazz influenced "*Eitz Chayim*" (see Appendix 4B). Jack Gottlieb

[72] Ibid., 14.
[73] Ibid.

incorporates the modern music of jazz into a liturgical setting. The tempo is slow and the piece is marked throughout by syncopation. The notes held over the bar line contribute to the swinging feeling. It also has jazz influenced seventh chords throughout. The second section begins with the word *hashiveinu*. There is a duet of call and response, with the second voice dovetailing the first. This section is in a higher tessitura than the beginning. The response is also a step higher than the opening call increasing the drama of the text "*hashiveinu Adonai elecha v'nashuva,"* return us to you, God, so that we shall return. The text is also illustrated by the change in key. The piece begins in G-minor and moves to B-Flat major. This shift illustrates the text returning us to God and renewing our days.

Gottlieb's first premiere of his sacred music took place at Park Avenue Synagogue in 1965. This is the same synagogue in which many of Max Helfman's own works had been premiered. Gottlieb's musical service *Love Songs for Sabbath: A Friday Evening Service Dedicated to the Holiness of Time* was a work commissioned by Cantor David Putterman. It was performed as part of the synagogue's commitment to promoting new liturgical art music. Gottlieb dedicated it to Max Helfman who had passed away in 1963.[74]

Jack Gottlieb commented that most of his contemporaries had musicians and cantors in their families. However, Gottlieb's influence was Max Helfman. He went on saying that "He had such an incredible charisma that he could persuade people, just by sitting and talking with them. The way he talked was musical."[75]

[74] Ibid., 25.
[75] Ibid., 9.

Personally, Jack Gottlieb remembered:

> Max encouraged me, and I remember one day, years later, the phone rang and it was Max calling me and I didn't know who it was. And he started to sing some music of mine, or music that seemed to be mine. And I said, "Who is this?" And it turned out it was the first publication I had. It was a cantata on poems of Moses Ibn Ezra entitled *In Memory Of...*, and Max was singing it to me on the phone.[76]

This story is an illustration of Max's support for his students. Max did not see his students as competition but rather encouraged them onwards.

While at the camp Jack Gottlieb was also shown the importance of writing classical compositions for the synagogue. According to Gottlieb there was a difference between campfire music and liturgical music. He said,

> Now when one is 18, 19 and is surrounded by gung-ho Israeli folk-songs with pumped up Helfman harmonies and stirring, traditional shabbat *nussakh*, it is bound to leave a lasting impression. Does this sound familiar? This was my summer camp experience, and although we had comradely campfire *kumsitz*, folk-songs were regarded as *milchig* (nourishing, but light fare) and worship music was *fleishig* (meaty, weighty). Never, never were they combined. You don't mix meat with dairy.[77]

[76] Ibid., 287.
[77] Ibid., 271.

There was a distinct difference between the two styles of music. Jack Gottlieb said that these styles were harder to separate later on. According to Gottlieb on composing contemporary worship music, "The music of my predecessors: Helfman, Freed, Fromm and company and that of my contemporary colleagues has tried, not always successfully, to find a happy medium between songwriting and composing."[78] Gottlieb wanted to be on the side of composition. He said that:

> I wanted, basically, melodies that would be memorable but at the same time I was learning how to deal with accompaniments, and accompaniments to me were as equally important. And I started to turn out what we euphemistically call art song music, rather than so-called "practical music.[79]

Jack Gottlieb was influenced by Max Helfman at an early age in the art of composition. The goal was to compose serious synagogue music and not to just write songs.

Charles Davidson

Cantor Charles Davidson (1929-) has had a very full career of composing. Born in Pittsburgh, he was one of the first graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary's Cantor Institute. In addition he received his doctorate in sacred music from the Jewish Theological Seminary and served on the faculty there from 1977 until his retirement. He got his training before Cantorial school at the Brandeis Arts Institute.[80] His composition *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, a setting of children's poetry from the Terezin

[78] Ibid., 272.
[79] Ibid., 287.
[80] "Composer Biographies," *Reclaiming American Judaism's Lost Legacy: The Art of Synagogue Music.* New York, 12 -14 November 2006. American Society for Jewish Music.

concentration camp in Czechoslovakia is his best known and celebrated work.[81] His catalogue contains more than three hundred works including synagogue pieces, songs, choral cantatas, entire services, Psalm settings, musical plays, theatrical children's presentations, and instrumental pieces. In addition, Charles Davidson served as the hazzan of Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania from 1966-2004.

Like Jack Gottlieb, Charles Davidson was also inspired by Max Helfman. When asked what it was about Helfman that was inspiring, Charles Davidson said that, "Helfman's greatest asset was his Jewish fervor. It was contagious. He was a spell-binding speaker."[82] Davidson was influenced by the power of his personality.

In 1979 Charles Davidson wrote the preface to Max Helfman's *Music for a Mourner's Service*. In the preface he describes this charisma more fully. Charles Davidson wrote:

> He had the unique ability to fire and to inspire any who heard him speak or watched him teach or direct. Through these songs we can understand his ability to touch lives and to sow seeds of love for things Jewish and for Jewish Music in countless numbers of hearts. Max Helfman lived and breathed the Jewish melos all of his life and showed the living quintessence of the Jewish Heart and the Jewish Soul by the example of his own life.[83]

[81] "Composer Biographies," *Reclaiming American Judaism's Lost Legacy: The Art of Synagogue Music.* New York, 12 -14 November 2006. American Society for Jewish Music.
[82]Charles Davidson. Interview by author. 30 June 2013.
[83] Max Helfman, *Music for a Mourner's Service* (New York: Mills Music, Inc. 1979), Preface.

Charles Davidson wrote music that was infused with Jewish motifs. These motifs were drawn from cantillation and nusach as traditional musical elements and also Hasidic tunes for their use of the Jewish modes. Some of his compositions draw almost entirely on cantillation. His "*Yihyu L'Ratzon"* published by Transcontinental Publications in 1992 is written in the *Shir Hashirim* trope throughout (see Appendix 4C). The opening text *yihyu l'ratzon imrei fi* is exactly *mercha-tipcha-sof pasuk.* The middle section implies *rivii* and *pazer* trope. The closing text *vimru amen* has the same *tipcha-sof pasuk* trope influence. This setting was probably used on Pesach when Song of Songs is chanted.

An example of Davidson's Hasidic music can be found in his service *Chassidic Sabbath*. Composed in 1961, this service is written for Cantor, mixed choir and organ. Davidson's setting of "*V'shamru*" is written entirely in the D-Ahavah Rabah mode (see Appendix 4D). This piece is entirely for choir and is mostly in unison. It has a simple melody and mostly held chords in the organ.

And much like Helfman, Davidson incorporated modern music styles as well such as the addition of jazz or rock. His composition *Hush of Midnight: An American S'lichot Service* draws on traditional nusach for S'lichot as well as on the folk rock music of the 1960s.

Gershon Kingsley

Gershon Kingsley is an eclectic composer who describes his musical style as "chaos versus organization." He has had numerous major works for radio, television and motion pictures. He is best known for his hit "Popcorn" first released in 1969 as part of a

solo album *Music to Moog By*. He also composed "Baroque Hoedown" which became the mainstay of the Main Street Electrical Parade at all of the Disney theme parks. Gershon Kingsley has reflected that, "I have always been sitting between two chairs in my music. I try to bring the classical and pop together."[84]

He was born in Goetz Gustav Ksinski in Bochum, Germany. He spent his childhood in Berlin and became involved in the Zionist youth movement. After *Kristallnacht,* Kingsley immigrated to Israel. While there he built his musical skills attending conservatory and playing jazz. In 1946, he immigrated to the United States and soon moved to Los Angeles where his first employment was as an organist in a Reform synagogue. He recalled that, "They asked me to write a small liturgical setting – for *bar'khu* or *sh'ma,* so I became a 'Jewish composer' by default!" By the late 1960s he began to devote serious attention to expanding the boundaries of synagogue music. He was attracted to electronic music:

> not only for the uncharted and potentially infinite territory of its sonic world, nor merely for its newness or its place in the avant-garde, to which he nonetheless aspired. Equally important for him was the control it promised a composer, at least in theory, over the final product heard by an audience.[85]

Gershon Kingsley was also mentored by Max Helfman at the Brandeis Arts Institute. He believed that Helfman was "one of the best-loved figures in the contemporary music field." Kingsley also believed that Helfman's uniqueness was his ability to reach the heart of his students, at a time when technical knowledge and dry information constituted

[84] "Composer Biographies," *Reclaiming American Judaism's Lost Legacy: The Art of Synagogue Music.* New York, 12 -14 November 2006. American Society for Jewish Music.
[85] Ibid..

a major part of college instruction.[86] Helfman was able to teach in an energetic and engaging way. Unfortunately, Kingsley also believed that this frenetic energy had its downsides. According to Kingsley, Helfman did not apply his gifts to best advantage in as much as he dissipated his talents in too many different areas. By being spread too thin he could not focus in depth in one particular area.

Between Gershon Kingsley's first job at a Reform synagogue and his summer at the Brandeis Camp, he was influenced to compose music for the synagogue. He went on to write synagogue music that incorporated the technological creativity of composing with a moog synthesizer. In addition, like Jack Gottlieb and Charles Davidson, Kingsley also wrote a Jazz service. Gershon was not afraid to compose in new styles using electronic music.

Despite his extensive use of electronic music, his most well known liturgical composition is written without electronic instrumentation. This composition is his *Yihyu L'Ratzon* (see Appendix 4E). This setting was published in *Shiru L'Adonai: A Friday Evening Service for Cantor, Mixed Choir and Keyboard*. Published by Transcontinental Publications in 1994, this setting is for soloist and choir and uses Hebrew and English. It has a pleasant melodic line and dovetails the soloist with the choir to enhance the drama of the text. According to Kingsley, although he has composed much secular music, "his soul remains Jewish and he is proud of his contribution to the music of the synagogue."[87]

In conclusion, Max Helfman's main influence on his protégés was to inspire them to compose music and more specifically to compose Jewish music. The compositional

[86] Philip Moddel, *Max Helfman: A Biographical Sketch* (Berkeley, CA: Judith L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1974), 76-77.
[87] Gershon Kingsley, *Shiru 'Adonai* (New York: Transcontinental Publications, 1994), Preface.

styles of his protégés are not so much influenced by Helfman's own compositions but rather by the man himself. Jack Gottlieb was probably the most influenced by him and his compositions being that he was his assistant and actually worked transcribing and editing Helfman's music. Gottlieb did not have a cantor or composer in his family and Max influenced him to write for the synagogue. Charles Davidson was influenced by Max as a teacher and went on to teach himself. Gershon Kingsley was influenced by Helfman's incorporation of modern harmonies. Music shifted dramatically from 1960 until today. While Helfman's protégés did not write exactly like Helfman they did use some of stylistic tendencies such as mixing the new with the old. All three of Helfman's protégés continued to incorporate traditional Jewish nusach, cantillation, and hazzanut with modern harmonies and American musical styles such as folk, pop, electronic, and Jazz.

Conclusion

In conclusion Max Helfman was a magnificent composer and an influential cornerstone of American Jewish music during the twentieth century. He was unique amongst his contemporaries. He used Jewish influences in his compositions but he also added on more Western harmony and modern stylistic features. Helfman believed that originality was the most important aspect of composition; however, it should use Jewish music as its foundation. His music was complex with dense textures drawn from using sustained pedal tones, quartal, and seventh chords. It was often also dramatic and majestic as showcased in his "*Shma Koleinu*." But it could also be simple, as shown in his well known "*Y'varech'cha."* Helfman's music is wide ranging. Helfman's originality can be seen in how his music was varied to reflect different interpretations of the text. For example, he could compose three different *Mi Chamocha* settings that would sound nothing alike. This flexibility and his interweaving of Jewish themes into modern compositions really separate Max Helfman from his contemporaries.

In addition to his unique music, Max was exceptional in his devotion to mentoring and to influencing young people of all denominations to be more interested in their Jewish heritage. He influenced a whole generation of young Jewish people to get involved in Jewish music and culture. He especially influenced the next generation of Jewish composers as well. Students of Max Helfman's including Jack Gottlieb, Charles Davidson, Gershon Kingsley, Yehudi Wyner, and Bonia Shur all went on to become well known synagogue composers. While Helfman's protégés' music may not be written like Helfman's, Max's influence was in encouraging them to compose and to compose Jewish

music. In addition, Max Helfman's music drew on contemporary music and Jewish traditional music and this fusion was something he passed onto his students.

Max Helfman encouraged one generation of Jewish composers and this legacy lives on today. Currently in California there is The Max Helfman Institute for New Jewish Music. This institute was envisioned by Cantor Phil Baron who works at Temple Valley Beth Shalom, and was previously a songwriter for Disney studios. The Institute began in the spring of 2010. The goal of The Max Helfman Institute for New Jewish Music is to engage experienced and gifted Jewish songwriters and composers who are writing secular music, to begin writing Jewish music.

These musicians were invited to a two day retreat at the Brandeis-Bardin Campus of the American Jewish University. Once there they worked with a distinguished guest faculty including Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Dr. Ronald Wolfson, and Dr. Michael Isaacson. They also were introduced to texts and literature with which they could "enrich the palette of their writing and be able to contribute to the liturgy of today's synagogue experience."[88] The artists met over the next few months with the faculty individually and as a group. During Shabbat Shira of 2011, a concert presentation was made featuring the music they created from this program.

There are currently twenty-three Helfman Institute Fellows in Los Angeles. They come together to compose Jewish music and to lend support and encouragement to one another. According to one of the fellows:

[88] Jewish Music Commission of Los Angeles. www.jewishmusicla.org/max-helfman-institute-of-jewish-music (Accessed 12 March 2013)

> Writing music that praises God rarely puts money in the mailbox. It's unlikely to bring fame. But something interesting has happened. In peeling away the usual incentives, each of us who has been a part of this group gained something immeasurable: the comradeship, and honest and genuine concern of peers for our own work. We have found a sounding board that does not exist in our little studios, and we've learned not to fear, but to cherish the critiques and re-directions offered by others in the group. The usual wall of defense largely evaporates, because the contest for supremacy is a non-starter. We all win. We win because we strive with ourselves, and he continued, as composer Samuel Adler has said, 'we labor for something that is greater than ourselves, and that makes all the difference.'[89]

Helfman's influence is not gone. The Helfman Composer's Group is the current incarnation of the Helfman Institute started by the Jewish Music Commission of Los Angeles and Cantor Phil Baron. They have music in easily downloadable pdf form and also mp3s that are free and available for anyone who wants it. They are adding new voices to liturgical music in Max Helfman's name. The Helfman's Composer Group shows that Helfman's influence is moving on to yet another generation.

Besides Max's mentorship, Helfman's lasting influence has mainly been his grand music for the synagogue. Many people feel that it is not the High Holy Days until they have listened to Helfman's "*Shma Koleinu."* In addition, his "*Y'varech'cha"* is standard repertoire at many Reform congregations. There are not an overwhelming number of Helfman settings in a standard service but that is not surprising because Max Helfman

[89] Ibid.

passed away fifty years ago and styles of music have changed. However, Max Helfman's music is regularly found today in Reform and Conservative synagogues and it is also a part of the Hebrew Union College curriculum for Cantorial students. There is still a love for his music today and a desire to hear it. The Los Angeles Jewish Symphony put on a concert, "The Light of Helfman: Generations of Music from the Brandeis-Bardin Institute" in 1999. In addition, Temple Emanuel of South Hills in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had a Helfman Shabbat Service on March 30, 2013 and Bet Shira Congregation in Miami, Florida recently featured Max Helfman's entire Friday Evening Service on October 18, 2013 in honor of Max Helfman's fiftieth yahrzeit anniversary.

Max Helfman's music is inspiring and lifted up synagogue music to a higher level. I have learned through researching this thesis that the importance of encouraging synagogues to commission new music. It is extremely important that if worship is to remain fresh and exciting it needs to be invigorated with new melodies. These should be of quality. This kind of quality takes musical training and time and that is why commissioning should be encouraged. In addition, there is so much beautiful music and old classics that should not be lost just because styles have changed. There is room for all types of music in worship, as Cantor Schiller states in her Hymnal as an Index article. More presentational through composed music can still be incorporated in services. It could be used as a special moment in a Shabbat service, or for a special service such as a new board or Torah installation, or on the High Holy Days.[90] I have found that beautiful music is welcome and encouraged. We are there to seek connection to God and others.

[90] Benjie-Ellen Schiller, 210.

We are there to be moved from our secular life to a sacred space. What better way than through music?

Appendix 1

Max Helfman Chronological Timeline

1901 Born in Radzyn, Poland

1909 Arrives in America with parents, Nathan (cantor/teacher) and Eva (nee Daniels)

1909-1919 Attends Rabbi Jacob Joseph Yeshiva School/Is sought after boy-alto for NY Orthodox synagogue choirs

1920s Studies at Mannes College of Music in New York

1926 Max marries Florence Snowe-(Two children Naomi and David)

1928 Takes position as organist at Temple Israel in Manhattan-succeeds Zavel Zilberts-begins working with David Putterman

1929 Takes position as Choir Director at Temple Emanuel in Paterson, NJ/ Establishes an amateur choir

1929-1931 Received a three year fellowship at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia-studied piano with Ralph Leopold, composition with Rosario Scalero. And conducting with Fritz Reiner

1929 Became the music director of the Peterson branch choir of the Arbeter Ring (Workman's Circle)-They specialize in secular Yiddish songs- related to social action and working people's orientation

1932 Helfman directs the Workmen's Circle Chorus

1937 Directs the Freiheit Gezang Farein-originally conducted by Lazar Weiner

1938 Premiere of Benyomin the Third, a choral pantomime, Carnegie Hall, May 7, 1938

1938 Becomes head of the Jewish Workers Musical Alliance-supervised all branches, wrote for them, edited music publications, conducted its Jewish Folks Choir in Newark, one of its branches

1938-1940 Becomes conductor for Handel Choir of Westfield, NY-first concert got raves Apr. 3, 1939

1940 Helfman leaves position in Paterson, NJ

1940 Becomes choirmaster at Ansche Chesed Synagogue in NY-soon leaves

1940 Prepares and Rehearses the People's Philharmonic Choral Society production of This is our Time, a secular cantata by William Schuman, premiered July 4, 1940 under baton of Alexander Smallens, second performance conducted by Fritz Mahler

1940-1952 Becomes Musical Director for B'nai Abraham in Newark, NJ

1942 Helfman's Shabbat Kodesh premieres at Carnegie Hall, March 29, 1942 sponsored by the Long Island Zionist Region, included ritual dances to accompany liturgical pieces

1944 People's Philharmonic Choral Society participated in Gate at the Metropolitan Opera in NY

1944 Helfman was invited to join the faculty at the Hebrew Union College in New York

1944 (April) Helfman meets Dr. Shlomo Bardin via Cantor David Putterman

1945 Named artistic director of the Jewish Arts Committee-sponsored by Histadrut Ivrit and the American Zionist Youth Commission-It included a theater workshop, dance studio, Sinfonietta, Helfman conducted the Hebrew Arts Singers-40 singers-repertoire Oskar Guttman's cantata The Day of Creation and Helfman's Hag Habikurim, Sabbath liturgy of Bernstein, Weill, Milhaud, Saminsky, Copland, etc. Marked shift of Helfman from Yiddish idiom to Hebrew national cultural expression

1946 Max was the music master at the Brandeis Camp Institute in Winterdale, PA in the summer

1947 Max was music master of the Brandeis Camp in Santa Susana, CA near LA (Robert Strassburg took over PA position) A third camp opened in Hendersonville, NC.

1948-1952 CA camp becomes Brandeis Arts Institute –a "Jewish Interlochen" resident artist faculty included Brach Zefira, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Julius Chajes, Eric Zeisl, Heinrich Schalit, Alfred Sendrey, Izler Solomon, Ernst Toch, and others. Students influenced included Yehudi Wyner, Jack Gottleib, Charles Davidson, Gershon Kingsley, Raymond Smolover, and Charles Feldman

1948-1958 Max was the musical head of the Brandeis Institute

1951 The two East coast camps close. This is the impetus for Max to move with his wife and son to CA to become music director of the camp full time (Naomi stayed in NY)

1951-1957 Max takes job as the music Director at Temple Sinai; Dr. Alfred Sendrey takes over for him

1952 Naomi Helfman marries pianist Gary Graffman

1954-1957 Appointed director of the Dept. of Sacred Music of the West coast branch of Hebrew Union College-the College of Jewish studies in Los Angeles, William Sharlin replaced him

1955 Max led a master class on Jewish music and formed the Hillel Chorus

1958 Helfman appointed Dean of the dept. of Fine Arts at the University of Judaism in LA, he invited Strassburg to serve as assistant dean, Helfman moved to Hollywood

1963 Helfman passes away suddenly from a heart attack on Aug. 9 in Dallas at his nephew's wedding

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