

# Bonia Shur

## The Man and The Music



**James Avi Stolloff**

**2013**

**Advisors: Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, Ph.D. and Cantor Yvon F. Shore**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

## Table of Contents

<b>Thesis Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Bonia Shur: The Man</b>	<b>8</b>
The Man: Introduction	8
I: Parents, Family, and Youth	10
II: WWII	12
III: Post WWII & The Road to Israel	17
IV: Israel & Musical Training	18
V: Los Angeles, Seattle, and an Introduction to Synagogue Music	23
VI: Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati: Early 1970s	27
VII: Director of Liturgical Arts: Creating the Position	33
VIII: Bonia Shur: Director of Liturgical Arts	43
IX: Bonia Shur: Out of HUC and into Congregations	56
The Man: Conclusion	62
<b>Bonia Shur: The Music</b>	<b>65</b>
The Music: Introduction	65
I: Nationalism in music	66
II: Russian Nationalist Music	68
III: Mediterranean Style	72
IV: Bonia Shur's Style	83
The Music: Conclusion	90
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>93</b>

## **Thesis Abstract**

Bonia Shur (1923-2012), Z"l, was a major creative force in the Reform Jewish movement in America. He had more than three hundred compositions published for use in congregations and on stages across the country and abroad. In 1974, he was appointed as Director of Liturgical Arts at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, where he taught hundreds of rabbinical students for over two decades. From his position in Cincinnati, Bonia also worked with congregations across the country, composing and arranging music and working with synagogue ensembles. Several of his liturgical compositions and arrangements have become standard repertoire in Reform worship.

This thesis consists of two main sections. The first section is a biography of Shur's incredible life; this includes surviving in the Red Army during WWII, living on a Kibbutz in the earliest years of Israel's statehood, and living in Los Angeles in the 1960s. Using the biography as a framework, I examine Bonia Shur's impact on HUC Cincinnati and on liturgical music in Reform Judaism. I try to capture who Bonia was as a person – a man radical both in personality and appearance, yet loving and caring at his core.

The second section is an exploration of the unique sound of Shur's music, which is heavily based in the Mediterranean Style of composition. Bonia's music

does not sound like the music from earlier liturgical composers, like Louis Lewandowski and Salomon Sulzer, nor did it sound like the music of his contemporaries, Max Janowski and Stephen Richards. Bonia introduced a new, yet fundamentally Jewish, sound into Reform synagogues. In a brief conclusion section, I offer my opinion on the status Shur's compositions have reached in synagogue music, the lasting effect Shur has had on liturgical music, and the place his music may have in years to come.

## Introduction

*Stoloff...it is Russian name. Do you know what it means? It means "someone who makes tables." A good Russian name. You are related to Bonnie. Are you also a musician?<sup>1</sup>*

The above quote is what I remember from my first real conversation with Bonia Shur. When he decided to engage with you, you became his total focus. It could be an intense experience. Of course, when Bonia was disinterested, it was just as obvious. He could play the "aloof artist" quite well. I was first introduced to Bonia Shur in high school. Abba and I came up to listen to Ema sing in a Mifgash Musicale performance, as well as to check out HUC for me. I already knew who Bonia Shur was – my mom was and is choir director at my home congregation, and she has always loved his music. Still, I was not prepared to meet him. His swept-back hair, his flowing un-tucked shirt, his prodigious eyebrows – from a high schooler's perspective, he was a crazily awesome sight. I am only slightly ashamed that my first-ever thought regarding Bonia Shur was that he kind of looked like a more extreme Neil Young. The quote at the top of the page is from later, when I visited HUC while in college, deep into my musicology courses. This time I actually met Bonia Shur, and had a conversation with him following an HUC ordination service. I already knew at this point that I wanted to go to HUC. It wasn't many weeks later

---

<sup>1</sup> Bonia Shur's first words to Jim Stoloff (that would be me) when I met him visiting HUC while still in undergraduate school.

that I had a conversation with Ema about how cool it would be if I were at HUC in Cincinnati, where I could maybe write my thesis on something about Jewish music with Bonia Shur.

And here I am, indeed, writing a thesis on Jewish music, and on Bonia Shur himself, no less. The original goal of this thesis was to examine the impact of Bonia Shur's music on Reform Jewish worship within the first decade or so of his being hired at HUC. As my research progressed, that turned into a goal of two parts. The first goal, using his biography as a framework, is to outline the cultural contexts surrounding Bonia Shur's life, as well as to examine the impact that he and his music have had on the College and on Reform synagogue music. This is the concern of *Section 1: The Man*. The second goal is to analyze the musical influences on Bonia throughout his life, to demonstrate how those influences express themselves in his music, and to highlight aspects of his music that are specifically "Bonia." This is the concern of *Section 2: The Man*. A more in-depth overview of each section can be found in the introduction specific to that section.

I had a lot of help in writing this thesis, first and foremost from my two advisors, Rabbi Richard Sarason and Cantor Yvon F. Shore. I thank them for their invaluable guidance, patience, and wealth of information. Regarding much of the cultural analysis in this thesis, typical academic sources were consulted. However, the larger portion of this thesis was built upon interviews, particularly in writing *Section 1: The Man*. I could not have done this without every interview (see bibliography for the complete list), and I thank each person for sharing her or his memories and thoughts with me. At the top of that list are Bonia and Fanchon. I

could not have done this without their open willingness to share. A memory I will always hold dear is when I first told Bonia I was doing my thesis on him and his music. A huge smile lit up his face, and he told me in his typical, direct fashion, "You have made me very happy."

## **Bonia Shur: The Man**

### **The Man: Introduction**

When my approach to writing a thesis on Bonia Shur was originally conceived, the biography was to be a pure biography, and a separate section was to deal with how Shur affected the Hebrew Union College, Reform synagogue music and liturgical worship. Also, the focus of the analysis was to be narrowed down to the first decade of Bonia Shur's tenure as Director of Liturgical Arts at HUC Cincinnati – from 1974 to 1984. That decade saw the creation of many of his most famous and frequently used compositions, as well as many of the innovations he brought to HUC.

I quickly found that it is not possible to separate Bonia's life from his greater impact on Jewish music. In order to understand Bonia's effect on the culture of Jewish synagogue music we must know his story, and how his story intersects with major shifts and trends in American Judaism. On top of this, following Bonia Shur's death, it seemed appropriate to broaden the biographical aspect of this thesis. Therefore, *Section 1: The Man* uses Bonia Shur's biography as framework in which the analysis of his influence can be portrayed. This section also contains contextual information that is needed to fully understand and appreciate all aspects of Shur's life and impact. The period from the 1974 to 1984 will receive the most attention and analysis, as these years were initially the primary focus of this thesis. To



support that analysis, the understanding of Bonia's life before 1974 is crucially important and therefore receives a fair amount of attention. If one is to understand the Bonia Shur who walked into HUC in the 70s, we must understand his journey as a man and as a musician. The leanest component of *Section 1: The Man* is the latter part of Bonia's life. It had not been within the original focus of this thesis, which was outlined before Shur's death. However, I will offer some remarks on Bonia's later years at the College, which will also serve as a conclusion to this section.

Finally, a word on sources. Most of the content in this section is heavily based on interviews of people who were connected with the College from the years directly preceding Shur's arrival in 1974, through the 1980s. Much of the information came from Bonia himself, via interviews. Obviously, information gathered through interviews is infused with personal memory and opinion. However, when enough people are remembering the same things and there is significant overlap from interview to interview, a determinative history begins to emerge. Occasionally pieces of information do only come from one source, or interviews will conflict with each other. When this is the case, it is identified in the body directly or via footnote. The materials used to contextualize the information from the interviews come from more typical academic sources, and the analysis is predominantly my own.

## **I: Parents, Family, and Youth**

*You must be truthful for your soul. You cannot go out to please anybody.*<sup>2</sup>

Bonia Shur was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1923 in Dvinsk, Latvia (renamed Daugavpils in 1920 during the Latvian republic's short-lived independence from 1918-1940), to Yaakov and Ethel Shur. Shur's only sibling was his older brother, named Yekutiel after his paternal grandfather. The two were very close throughout their lives, until Yekutiel's death in 1990.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, Dvinsk was a typical, small, eastern European city with a large Jewish population located in the Pale of Settlement. The Jews were Ashkenazi and spoke Yiddish. The majority of them were involved in commerce and industrial manufacturing, and poverty was a significant problem for a large portion of the population. A Jewish hub, Dvinsk was host to diverse Jewish activity, particularly Zionist activities which included youth movements.<sup>4</sup> In Bonia's early lifetime, the status of Dvinsk as a significant Jewish community and center began to decline. An 1898 Russian imperial census records the population of Dvinsk as 72,231, with the Jews numbering 32,369.<sup>5</sup> The number of Jews in Dvinsk continued to grow until political events, beginning with World

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010). Response to "what is your philosophy composition?"

<sup>3</sup> Yekutiel Shur: b. 12/8/1918, d. 7/27/1990

<sup>4</sup> Mordechai Zalkin, *Daugavpils*, translated from Hebrew by Michael Aronson (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research: 2010),

<<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Daugavpils>> (9 April 2013)

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online edition, s.v. "Dvinsk,"

<<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5380-dvinsk>> (9 April 2013).

War I and Latvia's independence, then culminating in World War II, brought Dvinsk's Jewish population down to a shadow of its previous cultural vibrancy.<sup>6</sup>

Shur's life in Dvinsk essentially covered the entirety of the inter-war period. Though the effects of World War I and Latvian independence had greatly decreased the Jewish community of Dvinsk, Bonia still grew up in an intensely Jewish environment, though the Judaism of his family (as with many of the non-Chasidic Ashkenazim) was much more cultural than religious. Everyone spoke Yiddish, and Bonia attended a Yiddish-speaking Jewish elementary school (though secular school was also an option for Jews). Another part of Bonia's cultural Jewish identity as a youth was his relationship to Zionism. He was involved in Zionist youth movements, and attended middle school and early high school at a Hebrew Gymnasium. It was at this point that his family's life was starkly interrupted by international events. When asked in an interview where he went to school after the Hebrew Gymnasium, Shur simply responded, "World War Two."<sup>7</sup>

Musically, Shur demonstrated both interest and natural talent very early. His father was a musician, but it was Shur's older brother Yekutiel who was being groomed as a violinist, and who was the model musician in the home. Yekutiel was not undeserving of his position as the primary musician among the Shur boys. He went on to have a successful career as a violinist and composer in Israel, and Bonia, from his youth to his last years, boasted of Yekutiel's talent as the better musician.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Constance Whippman, *The Jewish Families of Dvinsk: The Jewish Community of Dvinsk (Daugavpils)* (Latvia SIG: 2001)  
<<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/latvia/DvinskFamilies.htm>> (9 April 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

As Shur tells it, he was not given the same musical opportunities as Yekutiel. Bonia's first instrument was a mandolin-banjo (a fretted instrument with the strings of a mandolin and the drumhead body of a banjo). This was a much less serious instrument than the violin, more in the realm of folk music than Western art music. Bonia also did not have access to formal private lessons, and initially learned how to play the instrument from his friends. It is also likely that his father and brother had a hand in his early music education. Still, with mostly his own devices, Bonia became skilled enough that he would steal his older brother's violin music and play it secretly around the house on his mandolin-banjo. This haphazard level of musical training proved to be enough, when combined with Bonia's inherent musical gifts, to save Bonia's life multiple times over the next few years.

## **II: WWII**

*"Pick a year between 1942 and 1946", he would say. So one of the kids would randomly pick a year, say 1944. He would respond "Well, today (October 6th) in 1944 I was in..."*<sup>9</sup>

The next several years of Shur's life, spanning the period of WWII, form an incredible story of survival, musical opportunity, family, friendship, and growth

---

<sup>9</sup> Limore Shur, Introduction to *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front* (Kindle Locations 25-26). Kindle Edition.

from boy to man. This period is beautifully preserved in Shur's diary, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most incredible aspects of this part of Shur's story is that all of the terrible things he and his family suffered through – separation, starvation, illness, injury, and loss – were not unique to him, but experienced by hundreds of thousands of people in near identical situations. Shur was but a variant on a theme; he was one of many in the masses of suffering and underfed (frequently to the point of starving) refugees fleeing eastward into Russia, away from the German lines forming in the west. Despite claiming an age younger than his actual years, Shur was eventually conscripted into the Russian army in September 1942, and sent back west toward the German front.

While in the Red Army, Bonia Shur beat the odds and stayed alive due to three qualities. The first was luck. There were many times, described in his diary, when Shur should have been with a group of soldiers that were wiped out, sometimes to a man. Instead, Shur was elsewhere due to an injury on the way in, or due to a mistake by the Russian army bureaucracy, or some other circumstance beyond Shur's control. The second was Shur's intellect and clever choices that would remove him from the combat lines for a time. For example, Bonia applied for and was accepted into an officers'-training program that kept him out of the field as well as increased his rank in the army. He had a good memory, and could memorize information quickly. That alone, in one particular case, helped him gain distinction within his

---

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, biographical information on Bonia Shur's war years is taken from Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition.

battalion that included receiving an official commendation and a medal of excellence from his superiors, and certain notoriety amongst his fellow cadets. The final and most unique factor in keeping Shur away from the front lines, where Russians were dying in waves against entrenched German forces, was his musical ability; this was despite Shur's lack of formal musical training and polish. Over the course of the war, Bonia Shur performed, arranged, and conducted. His musical activities didn't always get him out of combat. Indeed, the first ensemble he formed (described in the next paragraph) and the prestige that ensemble brought him and his group did not prevent him from being shipped out when his name came up to be sent to the front lines. Once Shur was enrolled in the army, he seemingly always found a musical outlet himself, or a musical opportunity would find him. Even in his extended stay in a hospital, Bonia Shur created an ensemble to be a part of until his release.

These musical activities during the war witnessed several of Bonia's musical firsts – including his first time organizing, conducting, and arranging music for various ensembles. In November of 1942, Shur had his first full ensemble experience for which he found the musicians, provided the music, and led the rehearsals. I want to particularly note that the army did not hand Shur an ensemble, complete with instruments and music. He had to find the people and the instruments, and organize the ensemble himself. The ensemble had eleven instrumentalists, consisting of mostly Russian national and folk instruments, such as the balalaika (a fretted string instrument with a characteristic triangular shape) and a bayan (a type of chromatic button accordion), and a vocal octet. The three pieces Shur arranged for this group, despite the lack of formal training in composition or

arrangement and only a basic knowledge of music theory, were *Moment Musicale* by Franz Schubert, *March Fizkultury* by Dunayevsky, and the *Guardia March*.<sup>11</sup>

Although the initial debut of the ensemble fell through due to a miscommunication between Shur and the local army bureaucracy, Shur was able to find a new venue for his prepared ensemble. His group was chosen to close a program that showcased ensembles from many different units. His ensemble was a huge success, with the audience demanding an encore of the march. The success led to Bonia having his own ensemble for a time, consisting of seventeen instrumentalists and a twenty-five-voice choir.

In July of 1944 Shur took advantage of another opportunity to form, rehearse, and conduct an ensemble that would perform music arranged by him for whatever instrumentation he had on hand. His group eventually came to twenty instrumentalists, including strings and winds. This was a group that could pass for a decent Russian nationalist orchestra. With the success of this ensemble, Bonia Shur actually gained a reputation within the music entertainment circles of the Russian army. Shur achieved all of this with only a basic knowledge of chords gained by his facility with fretted string instruments, a vague idea of the range of wind instruments, and what Shur describes in his diary as “an inborn intuition for natural harmonic progressions.”<sup>12</sup>

His reputation followed him to the front lines in March of 1945, when the now Lieutenant Bonia Shur had crossed the German border, heading to fight. When

---

<sup>11</sup> Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 955-956.

<sup>12</sup> Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition, Kindle Location 2814.

a group of officers showed up inquiring after musicians and a conductor, Shur's captain announced...

"Yes...there is a conductor among us and his name is Lieutenant Bonia Shur." I [Bonia Shur] was really surprised and angry at the Captain who was here as one of the chaperons of our company. I said to him: "Captain Chazan, I didn't come to Germany to make music but to fight the Wehrmacht." He looked at me and replied: "If the war continues, you will have plenty of opportunities to do your fighting. If, however, it ends tomorrow, you will be glad to be alive." I didn't argue with him anymore and accepted his advice.<sup>13</sup>

This led to Bonia's involvement in several musical opportunities. He traveled from camp to camp performing, primarily acting as an arranger and conductor, using any musicians he could find to form his ensembles. Bonia continued in this manner right up until May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945, when the World War II Allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany. Once again, and this time for a significant period of the war, Shure's musical talents had kept him away from the deadly front lines where so many of his comrades perished. Also, he had been put in a position of musical leadership that required him to develop the musical skills that would point him in the direction that his life would ultimately take as a composer and arranger. It is important to understand that the high degree

---

<sup>13</sup> Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 2797-2805.



of self-taught skills, particularly with regard to arranging music and ensembles, would forever be an influence on the unique nature of Bonia's compositional style.

### **III: Post WWII & The Road to Israel**

*"I removed the Russian and Yiddish from my psyche, and replaced [it] with Mediterranean Israeli style."<sup>14</sup>*

Bonia initially continued serving in the Russian army as it moved across Europe, occupying Germany and Austria.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, Shur was stationed more permanently in and around Vienna as a translator for the KGB.<sup>16</sup> He adopted the city of Vienna, as well as a rather wayward lifestyle for a time. This went on until Passover of 1946, when a part of Shur's life was reawakened. Shur attended two *sedarim*<sup>17</sup> that year; one was with a group of officers and correspondents, and the second was with survivors and refugees from the Shoah. They began to rekindle Shur's Zionist feelings, and they were further ignited when Bonia reconnected with his brother Yekutiel, who was involved in clandestine efforts to create a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine.

---

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>15</sup> This section is taken primarily from Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front: Epilogue*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition, Kindle Location 2974.

<sup>16</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Plural form of *seder*, the ritual meal marking the beginning of the Passover festival.

Bonia deserted the Russian army in June 1946. He had been given permission to return to Latvia (then under Soviet control), but instead he traveled to Poland using forged papers. This act shut the door to Russia in Bonia Shur's life. He never returned; if he had, he would have had to face his desertion from the army. Once in Poland, Bonia organized a choir and put his Zionist passion to work. Shur was introduced to Israeli folk music, getting a handle on the style as well as learning melodies through the Halutzim movement's *shelichim* (representatives from Palestine sent to foster *aliyah*). Shur made choral arrangements of Zionist and Israeli songs he heard and taught them to the choir. Then, he brought the choir to Germany to perform Israeli songs in displaced persons' camps, lifting the spirits of Jews who were – even after the conclusion of the war – living in poverty and degradation, a lifestyle not so different from that in the concentration camps. Eventually, Shur convinced his entire choir to make *aliyah* with him to Israel.

#### **IV: Israel & Musical Training**

*The principle is [Paul Ben-Haim's], but I'm going further.<sup>18</sup>*

Bonia Shur made *aliyah* in 1949 and joined Kibbutz Neitzer Sereni, where 80% of the members were Holocaust survivors.<sup>19</sup> When Shur arrived, the only

---

<sup>18</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010). Response to "Do you follow Ben-Haim's path?"

<sup>19</sup> *Biography: Israel 1949-1960*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)

ongoing musical activity consisted of a person who had organized a single choir. Shur came in with his accordion and mixed things up, quickly getting involved in the musical community and activities within the kibbutz.<sup>20</sup> He began to teach members of the kibbutz how to play mandolin and guitar, so that he could start an orchestra similar to the ensembles he had put together during the war.

Like many kibbutzim during the early years of Israel's statehood, Neitzer Sereni was not well off economically. Despite the general lack of extra funds, Shur convinced the finance department of the kibbutz to purchase instruments for twenty people to learn so that they could start an orchestra. Bonia cited the need to lift the spirits of the community that were low in the wake of the Shoah. Indeed, the musical activity Shur instigated lifted the morale of the kibbutz greatly.<sup>21</sup>

In 1949, Kol Yisrael (Israel National Radio), the official radio station of the State of Israel, commissioned Shur's kibbutz to create and perform a Holocaust memorial piece about the Warsaw ghetto uprising that would be performed in, and broadcast from, Tel Aviv. Shur volunteered to head the project, and he organized a choir and composed an original piece of music for the occasion. He and his choir went to Tel Aviv and performed for Kol Yisrael and, through the radio, for the entire state of Israel. Bonia was aware of the significance of having a choir consisting of mostly Shoah survivors perform a piece on the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which had only happened five years before. He knew the emotional place the performers would probably be in while accessing memories of the Holocaust, even if only those of resistance, through the powerful medium of music. As Shur recalled, "I was a

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010)

<sup>21</sup> *Biography: Israel 1949-1960*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)

strict musician [with the survivors in the ensemble]. I respected them for what they are, and not for what they suffered.” With that attitude, he was able to keep the choir professional, even for such an emotionally charged performance.

At this point, Shur was playing with arrangements of Israeli songs, but was still operating without any formal training in conducting, arranging, or composing; he was relying on the basic musical training from his childhood, his innate musical abilities, and the musical skills he had developed on his own during the war. In order to receive structured training in music, specifically in composition, orchestration, and arranging, Shur went to Tel-Aviv in 1950 to meet with Nissim Nissimov, the head of the Music Committee of the Histadrut (the labor union organization of Israel). He showed Nissimov and the committee some of his arrangements, and was told that he should study with Paul Ben-Haim. They even recommended Shur to him as a student. Ben-Haim was the man who would be the primary teacher, mentor, and influence on Bonia’s musical training and compositional style. The importance of Ben-Haim in Bonia’s musical life cannot be underestimated, though it was not until his later years that Shur was secure enough in his own identity as a composer and arranger to attribute so much to his mentor.

Born Paul Frankenger in Munich, Ben-Haim received excellent training in composition and conducting at the Munich Academy of Arts from 1915-1929, where his primary teacher was Friedrich Klose,<sup>22</sup> who had been a student of Anton Bruckner.<sup>23</sup> Frankenger actively conducted and composed in Munich and nearby Augsburg until the onset of the Nazi leadership in 1933, when he fled to Palestine

---

<sup>22</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Ben Haim, Paul.”

<sup>23</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Klose, Friedrich.”

and settled in Tel-Aviv, where he adopted his Israeli name, symbolically replacing his Germanic roots with a nationalist Israeli identity. Dr. Kimberly Veenstra notes that as soon as “Paul Ben-Haim settled in Palestine, his compositional work centered on creating a Jewish musical idiom that could serve as a national standard.”<sup>24</sup> His strong nationalist identity and skill as a composer led Ben-Haim to become the foremost nationalist composer of Israel in his day. His First Symphony, written for the Palestine Orchestra (renamed the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra after independence) in 1940 is considered the first Israeli symphony. By the early 1950s Ben-Haim was the leading composer of Israel and had developed an Israeli nationalist style for Israel, blending western romantic styles with oriental / eastern influences from the Mediterranean region. To the average listener, there is something that sounds “Jewish” in his music. This school of composition, often called Mediterranean style, is still used in Israel and is addressed in depth in *Section 2: The Music*.

Ben-Haim had already worked with Shur’s brother, Yekutiël, in Yekutiël’s capacity as a violinist, and Bonia Shur had been recommended to Ben-Haim from the Histadrut. Still, it didn’t help that when Shur went to his first meeting with Ben-Haim he didn’t bring anything with him – no arrangements, no examples of compositions - so Shur played one of his arrangements. Ben-Haim still accepted Shur as a student because of his musical instincts and melodic power. Bonia studied

---

<sup>24</sup> Kimberly Veenstra, “Paul Ben-Haim: Father of Modern Israeli Music,” *The Ohio State Online Music Journal* 1(2) (Autumn 2008).

with Ben-Haim for five hours a week for 6 years, making the half-day commute once a week from the kibbutz to Tel-Aviv.<sup>25</sup>

During his time in Israel, Shur received some measure of recognition as a composer. In 1951, he won first prize in the Nissimov Competition for young composers with a four-part vocal composition. Also in 1951, he was commissioned by kibbutz Kvutzat Shiller to write a piece to commemorate their twenty-fifth anniversary. This choral work is one of the earliest to show a new style of Shur's, now influenced by Israeli music and shaped by his training with Ben-Haim.<sup>26</sup> This was a beginning toward Shur's unique style, which would eventually go beyond the Israeli Mediterranean style (detailed in *Section 2: The Music*). In 1953 Shur's kibbutz hosted an event commemorating the anniversary of the Nachal youth movement of the Ichud socialist kibbutz movement. Shur composed a large-scale piece for choir and symphonic orchestra for the occasion (the orchestra was brought in from Jerusalem); more than 10,000 people attended the event from neighboring towns and kibbutzim.

In his personal life, it was during his years studying and living in Israel that Bonia Shur met and married his first wife, Nitza Neiman, an American musician living in Israel, with whom he had two children, Adda and Ophir. Shur ultimately left Israel due to a dispute with his kibbutz. He had finally convinced the kibbutz to purchase a nice concert piano, to replace the old, battered one that was all the kibbutz had. The kibbutz decided to make the purchase, but then told Bonia he was not allowed to use or play the piano, and it would only be for visitors. Feeling hurt

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010)

<sup>26</sup> *Biography: Israel 1949-1960*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)

by a lack of respect, Shur and his family decided to leave Israel for a time, and to visit Nitzza's family in the States for a year. So it was that Bonia Shur left the land of Israel, but Israel – as a state and as a culture – never let go of Bonia Shur. Shur kept close ties with his family and friends in Israel, and, even though he had spent less time in Israel than in either Russia or the United States, Bonia always identified himself as Israeli. In my own memory of him at Hebrew Union College, Bonia loved to speak in Hebrew with students, staff, and faculty, as well as discussing his time in Israel and current issues in the state.

## **V: Los Angeles, Seattle, and an Introduction to Synagogue Music**

*There is a joy, a joy of worship, to Bonia's music.*<sup>27</sup>

In 1960, Shur and his family arrived in Los Angeles planning to stay for a year. A major personal event in Shur's life would change everything, however. When Shur asked to stay for a second year, the kibbutz informed him that if he didn't come back they would kick him out. Bonia didn't come back, and the kibbutz leadership kept their word, revoking his membership. Bonia fairly quickly settled into Los Angeles, now without many of his connections and commitments that could have brought him back to Israel.

---

<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Greg Marx in an interview by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

The personal event that changed Bonia's life was meeting his soul mate, both in love and in art, Fanchon. Bonia Shur and his first family moved in across the street from Fanchon and her first family, which is how the two families met.

Fanchon, from Los Angeles and already involved in the local dance scene as a dancer and choreographer, initially worked with Bonia's first wife collaboratively. This led to Bonia and Fanchon working together professionally, which eventually led to their marriage that would last with vibrancy and passion for the rest of Bonia's life. They were each other's muse and continual inspiration. They constantly collaborated with each other, Fanchon as a dancer and choreographer, and Bona as a composer and arranger. They married in Los Angeles and had their first son together, Itaal.

Life in the United States was very different for Bonia Shur. Now he and his family had to raise their children, find work, and make money independently, as opposed to living in the socialist economy found in the kibbutz. Shur began to make money freelancing, which was his main medium for finding work while in LA. Shur also was accepted as a student at UCLA, where he continued his musical training under American composer Roy Harris. Despite his new surroundings, Shur continued to develop his Mediterranean style to make it into his own.

Among his compositional activities while in LA, several moments stand out as personal achievements and milestones.<sup>28</sup> In 1961, Shur was commissioned to write the incidental music to a play performed in Los Angeles, titled, "Each Had Six Wings." In 1964 Shur formed the Mediterranean Arts Chorale, a thirty-five-person choir of UCLA graduate students. While a potential record deal with the group fell

---

<sup>28</sup> *Biography: Los Angeles 1960-1967*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)



through, Bonia Shur and the ensemble traveled and performed around California. In 1966 Shur, as a local Russian composer in the LA area who knew first-hand the sounds and compositional style of Russian folk music and military music, was chosen to collaborate with Johnny Mandel to write the film score for “The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!” The film was nominated for several awards, including four Oscars, and received the Golden Globe Award for best musical / comedy. His Mediterranean Arts Chorale performed the choral music in the film. In the Jewish community, Bonia and Fanchon collaborated together in creating a Jewish music program at URJ Camp Swig in Saratoga, California. Shur’s primary work at camp consisted of composing and introducing folk-style Jewish music that would be accessible to non-musicians. Bonia and Fanchon’s collaborative efforts at Camp Swig were more epic, including one memorable program that consisted of reenacting an ancient near eastern pagan new-year ceremony, incorporating music and dance, with the campers. This was to help the campers understand the cultural background of Israelite religion, and what the ancient Israelites were up against.

In 1968 Rabbi Joseph Glaser, the Executive Vice President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, referred Bonia Shur to Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle, which was searching for a new music director. During the interview for the position, Shur was asked if he was an Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform Jew. He responded simply that he was a Jew.<sup>29</sup> The nature of Bonia’s religious identity as simply – yet deeply – Jewish, and not part of a denomination, was a product of his

---

<sup>29</sup> *Biography: Los Angeles 1960-1967*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)

life in Latvia, Russia, and Israel. This identity was an unchanging constant in Bonia's identity for his entire life, even after his long career at Hebrew Union College.

Shur was offered the position of Musical Director, and, after the Shur family moved to Seattle, Bonia and Fanchon had their second son, Limore. The previous music director at Temple De Hirsh Sinai had held the position for 35 years, and his legacy left a deep imprint on the congregation. Wisely, Shur did not change anything during his first year in Seattle. Starting in his second year, Bonia entered the realm of composing and arranging music full time for the synagogue. He began with High Holy Day music, including some original compositions, and branched out by rearranging some of the traditional synagogue music. Bonia stayed on at the congregation until his move to Cincinnati in 1974.

Two other events of note happened in Bonia's professional life while in Seattle. In the commercial music scene, Bonia composed the score for the Emmy award-winning, "Revolt in Mode'in (Hanukah Suite)", which was performed and filmed in Seattle and broadcast on network television.<sup>30</sup> In 1970, Shur attended the annual conference of the American Conference of Cantors, the American Reform Jewish movement's professional association for cantors. Shur, from his time in LA and his two years at De Hirsh Sinai, had already become a known figure on the west coast, but no one from the central region or the east coast knew him. At this conference, Shur met various cantors and synagogue musicians, including composer Gershon Kingsley. On Kingsley's recommendation, Shur performed some of his music for the cantors, who received the music very positively. This led to Shur being

---

<sup>30</sup> *Biography: Los Angeles 1960-1967*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013)

invited to a convention of the Jewish clergy in Washington, DC where Bonia and Fanchon created a collaborative program that they performed together.<sup>31</sup>

## **VI: Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati: Early 1970s**

*Bonia was a bit of a wild man.*<sup>32</sup>

Bonia Shur was hired directly from Seattle to the position of Director of Liturgical Arts at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. However, before discussing Shur’s move into the position, we must understand how this position was created at the College. To accurately gauge Shur’s impact, we must understand the personalities and cultural background of the professors of the College in the mid 70s, as well as the students there at that time. Also, in order to understand the innovation Shur brought to HUC, we must consider the musical and liturgical traditions and practices of the period directly preceding Bonia Shur’s tenure. Bonia Shur wasn’t even an isolated change during the academic years of 1974 – 1976; the new prayer book *Gates of Prayer*<sup>33</sup> was introduced in the fall of

---

<sup>31</sup> As remembered by Bonia Shur in an interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010). He recalled that it was a CCAR conference, however the CCAR did not meet in DC in 1970s. It could be that Bonia misremembered the place, or that it was a regional conference.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Greengus remarking on how Bonia was perceived against the culture of HUC when he arrived in 1974. Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

<sup>33</sup> *Gates of Prayer* was published in 1975 by the CCAR. That it was available at the same time as Bonia Shur’s hiring and the chapel renovation was mostly coincidence,

1975, and the chapel itself was renovated, changing the physical worship space significantly. This three part plan for change – though I have not found it stated so concisely as a multi-part plan of action – of creating the position of Director of Liturgical Arts in Cincinnati, bringing in the new Reform Movement prayer book, and renovating the chapel, were all primarily changes that came from Eugene Mihaly, professor of rabbinic literature and at that time Executive Dean for Academic Affairs.

Let us start at the beginning of the 1970s with the musical activities of the College, particularly surrounding worship. At this time, worship at HUC was held on weekdays with morning services as well as on Shabbat with evening and morning services. These were held in the Scheuer Chapel (the campus sanctuary) located in the classroom building. At that time, the chapel had a high *bimah* with large steps leading up to it and the congregational seating consisted of fixed pews. There was an organ, and a choir loft above the ark. The choir, which primarily sang during Shabbat services, consisted of HUC students. It was mostly first year rabbinical students<sup>34</sup> because they were required to sing in the choir, unless they had a total lack of musical ability.<sup>35</sup> The choir was generally student led, either by a graduate student or rabbinical student who had a strong music background. This person, along with the organist, would decide the music for services unless the student leading that Shabbat specified the music for that service. Both Eugene Mihaly, as

---

though all three changes affected liturgy and prayer at the College quite significantly.

<sup>34</sup> When the Year-in-Israel program replaced the first year of rabbinical school in 1970-71, the choir became mostly second year students.

<sup>35</sup> Interview of Rabbi Michael A. Meyer, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (5 July 2012).

Executive Dean, and Alfred Gottschalk, as president of the entire College-Institute, were familiar presences on the *bimah* during services. Gottschalk particularly enjoyed sitting on the *bimah* as the 'senior rabbi,' so to speak, for the chapel at Hebrew Union College.<sup>36</sup> The music of the chapel was overwhelmingly of the choir and organ variety. The repertoire consisted of music from the period of American Judaism colloquially known as the Classical Reform period, as well as music composed in the 1950s and 1960s. This included works by composers such as Salomon Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, and Max Janowski.

In terms of the personalities of the HUC Cincinnati faculty at the time, there were more or less two categories. The first group was the senior faculty, professors who had been at the College for a number of years; the second group was the junior faculty, consisting of professors who had been recently hired. Understanding these groups will help understand how Bonia Shur fit into the College, although, as we will see, he was never faculty himself. Nor, really, did he fit into any category other than his own.

I differentiate the groups primarily to highlight their cultural differences, particularly in the nature of their Jewish identity. It is a construct I am using to help the reader understand the College in this period – this does not reflect an official division. Nor am I using the terms to differentiate between tenured and non-tenured professors, though that is basically where the lines are between these groups. The senior faculty group consisted of professors who had been at the College for about a decade or more, and – very importantly – most of them came out of Germany or

---

<sup>36</sup> Interview of Rabbi Edward Goldman, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (28 August 2012), and interview of Rabbi Kenneth Kanter by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

Eastern Europe. These individuals, including Eugene Mihaly,<sup>37</sup> Jakob Petuchowski,<sup>38</sup> Ben Zion Wacholder,<sup>39</sup> Alexander Guttmann,<sup>40</sup> Werner Weinberg,<sup>41</sup> and Matitiah Tsevat<sup>42</sup> had their Jewish identities forged, for the most part, in Europe. They had experienced Antisemitism in Europe or Russia first hand, in some cases leading up to and during the Shoah. Their understanding of Judaism, of Jewish survival, and of American Reform Judaism was from an immigrant perspective. Moreover, most of these faculty members had not been raised in a Reform or liberal Jewish culture, but rather in a more Orthodox background. This would include Mihaly, Alvin Reines,<sup>43</sup> and Ellis Rivkin,<sup>44</sup> and Herbert Chanan Brichto.<sup>45</sup> Typically, at least their initial Jewish training did not come from the tradition of Wissenschaft des Judentums

---

<sup>37</sup> Mihaly was really from Baltimore, having moved to America as a young child. However, he had enough of a reputation for owning his Romanian heritage for me to include him in this group. A Finding Aid to the Eugene Mihaly Papers Manuscript Collection No. 739: Biographical Sketch

<<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0739/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>38</sup> A Finding Aid to the Jakob J. Petuchowski Papers Manuscript Collection No. 653: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0653/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>39</sup> A Finding Aid to the Ben Zion Wacholder Papers Manuscript Collection No. 829: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0829/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>40</sup> A Finding Aid to the Alexander Guttmann Papers Manuscript Collection No. 663: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0663/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>41</sup> A Finding Aid to the Werner Weinberg Papers Manuscript Collection No. 668: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0668/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>42</sup> David Weisberg, Society of Biblical Literature Forum Archive: Matitiah Tsevat 1913- 2010 <<http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=866>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>43</sup> A Finding Aid to the Alvin Jay Reines Papers Manuscript Collection No. 786: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0786/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion online faculty directory <<http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/rivkin.shtml>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Testimony of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., (16 April 2013).

(academic Judaic studies), but came from traditional yeshiva-style learning. Finally, we must acknowledge the unique Reform identity of this group. As stated, they were not for the most part born into a liberal Jewish world. Some spent a significant time in the Orthodox world; Eugene Mihaly himself was ordained as an Orthodox rabbi, like his father.<sup>46</sup> These individuals came to Reform Judaism as adults and young adults because it satisfied their intellectual, spiritual, and emotional Jewish needs. Though their Judaism was forged in the old-country of Europe or in an Orthodox background in America, these individuals were typically the most fervent and the most staunch personalities at the College regarding the Reform component of Reform Judaism.

The second group of faculty in the early / mid 70s, the junior faculty, consisted of professors who had been on staff for only a few years by the time Bonia Shur was hired. This group included professors Edward Goldman, Michael Meyer, Michael Cook, and Norman Mirsky.<sup>47</sup> These individuals were born or fully raised in America, having their Judaism shaped by a period of welcoming and growth for American Jews and Judaism. There was some measure of American antisemitism in the 1920s and 1930s, partially mirroring that of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, partially stemming from the huge influx of Eastern European Jews. However, the post WWII period marked increasing Jewish opportunities and acceptance in America, and these junior faculty members experienced formative years of their

---

<sup>46</sup> A Finding Aid to the Eugene Mihaly Papers Manuscript Collection No. 739: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0739/>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 15 September 1998 <<http://huc.edu/news/mirsky.html>> (9 April 2013).

Jewish and personal identities during this period, many of them in a Reform Jewish context. Michael Meyer, for example, was president of the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), the American Reform Jewish youth movement. While these two categories can be used for most professors in 1970s Cincinnati, there are always exceptions. Samuel Greengus, for example, had been at the College for eleven years when Shur was hired, was from the United States, but came out of an Orthodox background. Or Jakob Petuchowski, for example, was born in Germany, receiving an excellent Jewish education, but escaped before the outbreak of World War II, and the entirety of his formal higher-level Jewish studies came from time in London with Leo Baeck, and then from HUC-JIR Cincinnati.<sup>48</sup>

From the perspective of the HUC students in the 1970s, the older professors represented the generation of the depression and the Holocaust; the Union Prayer Book and a required chaplaincy lottery;<sup>49</sup> immigrant Judaism and the old world. The students were products of the late 1960s cultural revolution and the hippie movement, of anti-Vietnam protests and civil rights activism. These students believed in innovation rather than tradition. They were very different from the professors, particularly those who were immigrants who had survived or fled from the Holocaust. This was also a period of very large classes, as the baby-boom generation was passing through and some students were avoiding the Vietnam War

---

<sup>48</sup> A Finding Aid to the Jakob J. Petuchowski Papers Manuscript Collection No. 653: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0653/>> (9 April 2013)/

<sup>49</sup> During the Vietnam War, there was a lottery that determined who would serve as a US military chaplain after ordination. For more information see Jonathan M. Brown and Laurence Kutler, *Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist And President of the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2005), 196.



draft. Ultimately, most of the students coming to HUC in this period were “feeling their oats in Jewish identity.”<sup>50</sup> These students were ready, hungry even, for a change in their Judaism and their spiritual practice, and they were coming out of a movement of self-empowerment that set them up expecting to be able to do just that.

When Bonia Shur arrived at the College, he represented an odd cross-section of these cultures, giving him a unique place among these groups. He was of the old country, yet also of the hippie movement along with his wife Fanchon. His interstitial cultural situation among the other groups at HUC in the mid-70s gave him a unique place to work from, as will be seen.

## **VII: Director of Liturgical Arts: Creating the Position**

*“I want to have the truth come in the music. My music is not jingles that just embellish the words. It is a reflection. It is mirroring what’s going on [in the text].”<sup>51</sup>*

Before Bonia Shur, there was already a long-standing tradition of strong musical leadership on the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College. The great Jewish ethnomusicologist and composer Abraham Zevi Idelsohn became professor of Jewish Music at Hebrew Union College in 1924, and “under his tenure, the College

---

<sup>50</sup> Interview of Rabbi Sam Joseph, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (11 July 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2012).

became a center of research in Jewish music.”<sup>52</sup> Idelsohn was a scholar of both liturgy and Jewish music, but is most well known as the likely writer of the text to the famous Jewish folk song Hava Nagila. Idelsohn retired in 1931 and was eventually replaced by another giant of Jewish music, Eric Werner.<sup>53</sup>

Eric Werner studied, taught, and composed music in various major European institutions, and was already a leading authority on Jewish music when he arrived in America in 1938, fleeing from Nazi Europe. The College secured a non-quota immigration visa for Werner, and appointed him Professor of Jewish Music and Director of the Choir at HUC in Cincinnati. Eventually, Dr. Werner went to HUC-JIR's New York campus where he was a founding faculty member of the School of Sacred Music in 1948.

These leadership positions – professor of Jewish music and choir director – were not solidified roles at the College after Eric Werner left, and they were no longer filled as an academic or administrative position. In fact, these positions were typically filled by whoever the most qualified person was within the HUC community at the time; many times students or their spouses filled these positions. For example, this was the case for the period in which Edward Goldman was both a student as well as the chapel organist,<sup>54</sup> or when Richard Sarason was both a student and the ordination choir director.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Idelsohn, Abraham Zevi,” by Edith Gerson-Kiwi.

<sup>53</sup> Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 2002 <<http://huc.edu/newspubs/pressroom/2002/wernerpr.shtml>> (9 April 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Interview of Rabbi Edward Goldman, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (28 August 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (19 July 2012).

However, HUC-JIR in Los Angeles was already offering a different model with their employment of Cantor William (Bill) Sharlin, starting in the mid 1950s.<sup>56</sup> Bill Sharlin, who had Orthodox training as a *chazzan* from Yeshiva University, had been hired in 1954 by HUC Los Angeles to form a Department of Sacred Music, serve as cantor for the campus synagogue, and act as professor of sacred music and Jewish liturgy. It wasn't until two decades after Sharlin had been established as Director of Liturgical Arts and a music professor that the position Director of Liturgical Arts was formed at HUC Cincinnati. The New York campus, of course, had the School of Sacred Music to supply its musical needs.

It is no surprise that the position of Director of Liturgical Arts, or its equivalent, happened first in Los Angeles and only twenty years later in Cincinnati. The Hebrew Union College, founded in 1875, already had old origins and ingrained traditions by the end of World War II, and the full history of the Reform movement was tied into these traditions. The LA Campus, on the other hand, opened as a new institution in 1954 at a new location that provided an excellent blank space for innovation.<sup>57</sup> With a fresh start on the West Coast with no previous traditions of musical leadership, it was easy to bring in Cantor Sharlin that first year in a position involving his skills as a cantor, a musician, and a liturgist. As far as the New York

---

<sup>56</sup> Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 2012  
<<http://huc.edu/news/article/2012/huc-jir-mourns-the-death-of-cantor-william-sharlin-zl>> (9 April 2012).

<sup>57</sup> The Chronicle: HUC-JIR/LA Historical Timeline 1947-2002  
<<http://huc.edu/chronicle/60/latimeline.shtml>> (9 April 2012).

campus, the School of Sacred Music had been established in 1948, two years before the Jewish Institute of Religion merged with Hebrew Union College.<sup>58</sup>

It was Alfred Gottschalk, president of HUC-JIR from 1971 to 1995, who wanted to create a position of Director of Liturgical Arts at the College in Cincinnati, though it was fairly unclear until the actual hiring of Bonia Shur what exactly that position would entail. Indeed, the position continued to change dramatically from the time of Bonia Shur until today, under the current Director of Liturgical Arts and Music, Cantor Yvon Shore. The idea of the position was inspired by Cantor Sharlin's position in LA. Incidentally, Gottschalk and Shur knew Sharlin independently. Gottschalk knew Sharlin from his years as the Dean of the LA campus before becoming president of the entire institution; Shur knew him from the years they were both working in LA. Bill Sharlin and Bonia Shur had become close, and were dear friends in their lives and careers.<sup>59</sup> Initially, President Gottschalk wanted to bring Bill Sharlin to HUC Cincinnati,<sup>60</sup> since LA only offered the first year of the rabbinical program,<sup>61</sup> and the School of Sacred Music already served the New York campus. However, Sharlin had already made his home and his career in the Los Angeles community.

---

<sup>58</sup> HUC-JIR Four Centers of Learning: New York <<http://huc.edu/about/center-ny.shtml>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., (19 July 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Until the class of 2002 was ordained in HUC-JIR Los Angeles, only the first three years of HUC rabbinical training were offered in LA (only years two and three once the Year-in-Israel program began in 1970-71). Students would finish their studies and receive their ordination from either the Cincinnati or New York City campus.

The earliest attempt to create this new position, for which I have a confirmed date, was when Gottschalk approached Richard Sarason, a fifth year<sup>62</sup> rabbinical student in Cincinnati, about such a job in the fall of 1973. This was to create a Director of Liturgical Arts, which would be an administrative position including the duties of a full time director of music and liturgy. Sarason had been serving as ordination choir director and student chapel coordinator at that time, and it was very common in those years to hire instructors and junior level administrators from within the College, directly after their ordination / Ph.D. graduation. This is what happened with Drs. Meyer, Cook, and Goldman; all received their doctorates from HUC and were then hired as junior faculty by the College. The practice is still not uncommon at Hebrew Union College, which both hires and produces scholars in specialized fields of Judaic Studies. Sarason turned the position down because he didn't feel his musical skills were adequate for the job, and because he wanted to pursue an academic graduate degree. Gottschalk was looking for either Sharlin or an equivalent, and in the young Sarason, Gottschalk saw not a cantor, seasoned professional musician, and composer, but a soon to be rabbi vocalist and liturgist, with musical skills and training enough that could allow him to grow into the position.

With Sharlin and Sarason no longer as options, the College created a search committee in winter, 1973 to hire someone for the position. Two issues created a split in the Director of Liturgical Arts search committee. The first issue was that, unlike today, the College hadn't quite figured out the need to have both an academic

---

<sup>62</sup> HUC-JIR offers a five-year program for rabbinic ordination, so the fifth year is the final year before ordination.

study of liturgy, as well as courses and learning opportunities in practical liturgy and the application of liturgy with someone to teach and help the students practice these skills. The second issue came from the vagueness of the position, or perhaps it would be better to say, from the wide range of possibilities the position could cover. Did the College want a Kapellmeister who was a composer and arranger of Jewish music, or a Cantor who could serve as a liturgical artist and general musician? This was indeed the split of the committee. Gottschalk, at least initially, was in the camp that wanted a cantorial figure like Bill Sharlin. The leading candidate and interviewee of this type was cantor and composer Stephen Richards,<sup>63</sup> who was a cantor in Indianapolis at the time and had taught a weekly course at the College.<sup>64</sup> The lead candidate of the former type was Bonia Shur.

It is unclear how Bonia was first connected to HUC, particularly with the HUC leadership in Cincinnati. Shur certainly was aware of the College from his relationship with Sharlin, and it is most likely that – after turning down the position himself – Sharlin recommended Shur for the job. This would make sense considering the close relationship between Shur and Sharlin, and since Shur was currently in a position as a synagogue music director in Seattle.

Some of the extended obituaries published following Shur's death report a meeting between Shur and Gottschalk at Camp Swig, and even tie this meeting to

---

<sup>63</sup> American Conference of Cantors, Biography of Stephen Richards <<http://www.accantors.org/acc/files/Stephen%20Richards%20bio.pdf>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason Ph.D., who served on the search committee, by Jim Stoloff (19 July 2012).

Bonia Shur's hiring by the College.<sup>65</sup> I have not been able to find evidence of this meeting. Bonia Shur never mentioned it, even in conversations about how he connected with HUC, and his wife does not remember it happening. It certainly could have happened if Gottschalk visited Swig during the same summer that Bonia was there. Nevertheless, even if this meeting happened, it is not what caused Bonia to be hired in Cincinnati. However Bonia was initially introduced to the College, it is clear from Bonia Shur that Eugene Mihaly was the driving force that brought him into the position of Director of Liturgical Arts.

The confusion about Gottschalk being responsible for bringing Bonia Shur to the College is understandable. Under Gottschalk's presidency, anything that happened at the College – especially if it was a significant event or major change, such as ordaining the first woman or accepting homosexuals into the rabbinical program – was perceived as coming from the “desk of the president,” so to speak.<sup>66</sup> In other words, no matter how much Gottschalk actually had to do with events, ultimately, significant hires at HUC had to be approved by the president and could be seen as coming from him.

Due to another reality of HUC Cincinnati at the time, it is impossible to overemphasize Eugene Mihaly's role in bringing Shur to the College. This is especially important because, as we will see, Bonia was happy in his position at Temple De Hirsch Sinai and entered the job interview process with a high level of

---

<sup>65</sup> *Celebrating the life and music of Bonia Shur*, 23 September 2012  
<<http://americanisraelite.com/archives/20337>> (9 April 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Interview of Rabbi Kenneth Ehrlich by Jim Stoloff (6 December 2012).

indifference toward getting or not getting the job.<sup>67</sup> Mihaly pushed to bring Bonia in to the College for a few reasons. Firstly, Mihaly considered himself to be a music maven.<sup>68</sup> He loved the arts, and music especially; he wanted to have a serious composer on campus, writing for the College and for the movement. He believed that HUC Cincinnati should be the vanguard for creativity in the movement,<sup>69</sup> not in the former Idelsohn tradition of Jewish ethnomusicological discovery, but through new creations. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, Mihaly was creating a series of changes in the mid 1970s to shake up and re-energize prayer and services at the College, including the introduction of the new prayer book *Gates of Prayer*, and renovating the chapel.

The chapel renovation was major (completed in the late summer of 1974), drastically changing the esthetics of the sanctuary to reflect new prayer space ideals represented by an accessible *bimah* and a connection between the *kahal*, the congregation, and the *shaliach tzibur* (service leader). The *bimah* was lowered, the huge stairs were removed, the choir loft and the pipe organ were removed, a new ark was put in, and the fixed pews were replaced by movable seating. For Mihaly, Bonia Shur represented a component of the change and progressivism that was Mihaly's agenda for the school; he would do what Sharlin was doing in LA, but more so – something that didn't exist on any other campus. At this time, Mihaly had a great degree of independent power to introduce change in the College through his position as Executive Dean of Academic Affairs. For example, Mihaly organized and

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010), and interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

<sup>68</sup> Interview of Rabbi Michael A. Meyer, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (5 July 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Interview of Rabbi Edward Goldman, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (28 August 2012).



implemented the chapel renovation as his own project, and simply brought it to the HUC leadership to be formally ratified.<sup>70</sup> With this in mind, it could be unclear just how much sway the search committee had in hiring Bonia Shur, compared to Mihaly's power to bring Shur by himself. The majority of the committee and faculty at the time liked Shur for the job, so it did not come to a head, despite a conflict between Mihaly and Gottschalk.<sup>71</sup> Either way, the full search and interview process did happen, even though Mihaly was intent on hiring Bonia Shur to fill the new position. Finally, when the decision was made to hire him, everyone knew what they were getting – the composer and musician, not the cantor and liturgist.<sup>72</sup>

Bonia Shur was brought in for an interview as part of the search process, as was Cantor Richards. Shur had dinner at Mihaly's home, had full interviews with Gottschalk and the faculty, and time to spend working with some of the students. Bonia recalled being rather detached from the process, since it wasn't that important to him whether he got the job – he already had a job and a home that he liked. Shur also remembers Mihaly's agenda for the school, as Mihaly wanted to know, "What can you do with the school, which is so dead?"<sup>73</sup> In working with the students, Shur surprised the faculty and the students by having each student go up on the *bimah* alone and improvise spontaneous prayer.

---

<sup>70</sup> Interview of Rabbi Kenneth Ehrlich by Jim Stoloff (6 December 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Bonia described Mihaly as complicated, political, and ambitious. There was a political struggle, a friction, between Mihaly and Gottschalk marginally involving Bonia. Bonia did not want to comment, and said it was better left in the past.

<sup>72</sup> Interview of Rabbi Edward Goldman, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (28 August 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010); Bonia's recollection of what Mihaly asked Bonia in the formal interview.

So, ultimately, why did Shur get the job? First of all, Shur was the candidate Mihaly wanted, because Mihaly was creating the frame for the Director of Liturgical Arts to be one that would hold an innovative composer and musician. Shur fit this perfectly, with wild hair and eyebrows, relaxed dress, and radical demeanor. For those who wanted the composer over the cantor, he was the obvious choice. There were other qualities that Shur had, though, that helped others at the College see him as a desirable contribution to the community. Firstly, Bonia Shur - unlike the cantor applying for the position - was an old-world Jew. His identity was formed in Eastern Europe before the war, and he spent the war in the middle of the conflict between Russia and the Nazi regime. This would have resonated powerfully with many of the senior faculty members who were also immigrants who had fled or survived antisemitism, the Nazi threat in Europe, and the Holocaust. Also, Shur was Israeli. There was a certain level of "Israel-philia" in the Jewish community at the time; the mid 1970s followed the wake of the exhilaration at the Israeli victory in the Six Day War as well as the feeling of vulnerability during the Yom Kippur war. Israeli music was also quite popular with American Jewry at this time, and increasingly becoming a source of camp and synagogue music. Being an Israeli, and bringing that identity into the College, would have been attractive for this reason as well. Ultimately, though, Bonia accurately recalled the heart of the matter, saying, "They needed radical, innovative, and creative. Cantors couldn't do it. They didn't

want cantillation. They wanted a spirit to break boundaries.”<sup>74</sup> Two weeks after the interview, Bonia Shur was offered the position of Director of Liturgical Arts.<sup>75</sup>

### **VIII: Bonia Shur: Director of Liturgical Arts**

*“Bonia was not going to lose his job by pushing limits – he was hired to push the limits.”<sup>76</sup>*

Before getting into the nature of Shur’s job as Director of Liturgical Arts, let us understand the contractual nature of this position at the College. The position Director of Liturgical Arts was not a faculty position, but administrative. There was no option of a tenure track or its equivalent. Bonia Shur’s contract had to be renewed, initially, every three years. It very much seems that the position was set up to be not quite a trial run, but certainly a position that would be regularly reevaluated. This resulted in Bonia feeling recurring insecurity during his first decade or so at HUC, particularly when his contract would come up for renewal, an insecurity that did not fully go away until he had held the position for approaching

---

<sup>74</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>75</sup> A copy of the official letter offering Bonia Shur the position of Director of Liturgical Arts can be found in the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati s.v. *The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*, Series 2: Alfred Gottschalk, Box A2b-27: Faculty topics 1970s-1980s. Call number MS-20: A2b-27.

<sup>76</sup> Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

two decades.<sup>77</sup> This insecurity was not something one would have necessarily sensed in Bonia's character – particularly not in light of the confidence and radicalism with which he approached his compositions and musical work.

In the fall of 1974, when Bonia began his position as Director of Liturgical Arts, the actual job description was very slim. This is part of what gave Shur an environment in which to flourish compositionally during his first years at HUC (years that saw the composition of many of his best known works). As Director of Liturgical Arts, his only official duties were to teach cantillation, teach a class on Jewish liturgical music and melodies, and act as a true Kapellmeister. Kapellmeister has come to refer to any choirmaster, but its original use and the literal meaning is “chapel-master,” and Bonia fit both of these definitions. His duties as Kapellmeister included organizing and rehearsing the student choir that sang during services, and coordinating all of the music for the chapel.

Teaching a couple of classes, organizing music for the chapel, and rehearsing and leading the choir for services make a minimal description for a full-time job. This left Bonia plenty of time to do what truly created his legacy at HUC, and that was composing and generally being himself. As Rabbi Richard Sarason put it, “Bonia is at his best when his job description is to be Bonia.” Working with students one on one, writing original compositions by student and faculty request, composing occasional music for events at the College, and visiting congregations across the country to compose and work with congregational music programs were all part of “being Bonia.” These activities, however, did not accompany Shur when he walked

---

<sup>77</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012) and interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

through the doors of the College, though they did build up quickly over a series of events. But, before exploring where Bonia Shur's impact went beyond his title of Director of Liturgical Arts and HUC, there is the evolution of his in-house responsibilities to discover and examine.

Concerning the year in which Bonia joined the College, Dr. Michael A. Meyer recalled, "Bonias [at that time] had a strange combination of Jewish knowledge and lack of Jewish knowledge." Bonia Shur was an Israeli fluent in Modern Hebrew and Yiddish, but he was not trained in the Hebrew of the Torah or Torah cantillation, nor had he received a systematic religious - Jewish education growing up. So, initially, Shur was receiving training in reading and chanting Torah from professors at the College, while at the same time teaching Torah trope from an Israeli cantillation teaching guide called *Kriah b'ta'am*.<sup>78</sup> Dr. Samuel Greengus was one of the professors at the College who helped Bonia adjust to biblical Hebrew, and he recalled that the trope came naturally to Shur as a musician.<sup>79</sup>

The course Bonia taught that involved learning Jewish music was the more interesting of his two courses, because while cantillation is fairly straightforward, teaching "Jewish music for use liturgically / in the synagogue" was not. Now, Bonia Shur stood out and was generally an infamous presence at HUC, but this class was particularly notorious. Part of this has to do with the fact that, unlike his duties as a Kapellmeister and composer, Bonia was now in the position of teacher – yet Bonia was not an HUC professor. This was reflected not only in the reality that Shur's position was instructional staff, not faculty, but also that Bonia "looked, sounded,

---

<sup>78</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., (19 July 2012).

<sup>79</sup> Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

and acted differently”<sup>80</sup> from other professors. He was further distanced from other professors in students’ minds because his course subject, music, was often not considered an “academic” course like history or Talmud. Taught over nearly his entire career at the College, this course was further known for its location in the Klau Library basement like classroom and office of Bonia Shur (which I frequently heard referred to fondly as likened to a cave where the wild, radical Bonia dwelt). Bonia sought out and taught Jewish music in this course from a huge variety of sources, and over his career at the College Bonia maintained a music book that he had compiled specifically for this class. This music companion was originally called *Bi-Weekly*<sup>81</sup> *Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, but eventually was titled simply *Music Companion* (with the same subtitle). It was a collection of sheet music melodies of various prayers, texts, and wordless *niggunim* that spanned all styles of Jewish music. Each student received a copy of the book, and over Bonia’s tenure at HUC the book grew as Shur acquired new melodies and wrote more arrangements and compositions of his own. The first iteration of this book was a 1975 High Holy Day companion consisting of 15 selections of music.<sup>82</sup> By 1982, the book included music for Shabbat and festivals. There were 128 pieces of music for Shabbat, divided into the stylistic categories of Reform, traditional, Hasidic, and contemporary. There were 103

---

<sup>80</sup> Interview of Rabbi Mark E. Washofsky, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

<sup>81</sup> “Bi-weekly” is an in-house term at HUC-JIR. A “bi-weekly” refers to a smaller congregation that does not have a full-time rabbi, but is instead served every other weekend by a visiting rabbinical student from the College.

<sup>82</sup> *Selected Prayers for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*, ed. Bonia Shur (Cincinnati: Summer 1975).

melodies for the festivals, divided by festival.<sup>83</sup> By 1989 the Shabbat selection had increased to 144 pieces, and overall included 232 settings of 165 prayers and texts. The 1989 edition also marks the first edition in which Shur included a guide to the composers whose music was in the book, giving a brief biography for each.<sup>84</sup> The last edition of Bonia's companion was the 1992 edition.<sup>85</sup>

Just as the course and the music book grew in scope, so did Bonia Shur's pedagogy. He was always excellent with students who were naturally musical or knew how to read music, but initially was not quite sure how to relate to rabbinical students who had no musical background. This further distanced him from certain students until he learned how to spoon-feed Jewish music to non-musical rabbinical students. The second-year rabbinical students in 1975/76 in particular served as guinea pigs for this class while Bonia learned what second-years needed musically, as well as how to teach non-musicians.

Outside of class, Bonia was always excellent in meeting students where they were. Current HUC professor Rabbi Mark Washofsky recalled approaching Shur as a student in the spring of 1976 with a request to learn to how to chant the *sheva brachot* for weddings. Washofsky, not a musician, asked for a recording he could listen to and learn. Shur was very receptive, and worked with Washofsky to find a melody he could sing. It was often through such individual interactions with Bonia

---

<sup>83</sup> *Bi-Weekly Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (Cincinnati: August 1982).

<sup>84</sup> *Music Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (1989).

<sup>85</sup> *Music Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (1992).

Shur that the more academically focused or non-musical students would come to appreciate Shur as an artist and a treasury of musical knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

Also outside of class, Bonia and Fanchon together participated in hosting and programming a number of HUC community events. Sometimes these events were outside of the HUC community entirely, and were held as part of the greater Cincinnati arts community. Bonia, as a composer, and Fanchon, through her work in dance and choreography, became connected to the greater arts culture of Cincinnati very quickly, and maintained strong and active ties in Cincinnati with their individual and collaborative work. A major example of this was when Bonia was honored with the commission to write a piece for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra to commemorate the bicentennial of the city in 1988. Shur wrote *The Pearl Street Market*, a piece for orchestra and voices that uses three different languages.<sup>87</sup> One of the first of these activities took place of course in the HUC community, and it was one of the largest. It was called “Everything’s Connected.” The event took place during Hanukkah of 1975, and was later repeated by the Shurs with other communities. This affair involved dance and music, and – as one might guess from the name – gave a strong outlet for an alternative expression of Judaism and Jewish spirituality for which a large part of the post-60s generation of American Jews were looking; this included many of the rabbinical students, if not as many of the professors. The program involved a core group of dancers, who had practiced and prepared for the event, and a component where everyone was involved in

---

<sup>86</sup> Interview of Rabbi Mark E. Washofsky, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

<sup>87</sup> Charles Davidson, “Bonia Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995): 51.



movement and dance together, connected by a single rope. This type of opportunity, particularly the ability to experience it though HUC Cincinnati, was unique. It truly happened due to the presence of Bonia and Fanchon. Certainly, this type of event was not for everyone. However, for some students, it was a much-needed breath of fresh air in a Jewish setting. Rabbi Sam Joseph was a student at the time, and was in the core group of dancers (all were HUC students) for the occasion. The program presented not only his first opportunity to experiment Jewishly while stretching his boundaries through dance, but was an opportunity “about testing the limits of worship”<sup>88</sup> – which was high on the agenda for many students coming through HUC in the 1970s.

Ultimately, though, it was Bonia Shur’s work as Kapellmeister that defined much of his impact on the College and the greater world of Reform Jewish worship. The innovations from this aspect of Bonia’s position as Director of Liturgical Arts primarily consist of new compositions and arrangements, the introduction of an instrumental ensemble with the choir, and working with students to craft music specifically for their services.

As HUC professor Dr. Samuel Greengus said, “No one had the instrumentation Bonia was using (in a synagogue). It was phenomenal.”<sup>89</sup> This quote encapsulates the reaction of nearly everyone I interviewed regarding Bonia’s instrumental addition to HUC worship. It is not true that Shur was the only one introducing alternative (as in not organ or piano) instrumentation into the synagogue, nor was Bonia Shur the first to do so in a Reform synagogue setting. Others had

---

<sup>88</sup> Interview of Rabbi Sam Joseph, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (11 July 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

experimented in the use of instrumentation beyond the organ. For example, cello and flute had already been used in services at the College's campus in Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup>

However, three realities support crediting Bonia as a major factor in introducing diverse instrumentation to liturgical synagogue music. First, Bonia Shur, as Director of Liturgical Arts, was in a position at HUC to influence liturgical customs broadly in America through the rabbinical students who were ordained during his tenure, through his work with other synagogues, and through everyone who visited HUC and attended services. Secondly, Bonia Shur was writing and arranging music that integrated the use of instruments seamlessly, and the selection of instrumentation he regularly used in the synagogue (flute, oboe, clarinet, double bass, together with organ) was new. Further, with Bonia instruments were not simply added on to double the melody line, or play a countermelody. Shur started to write music for the synagogue that specifically called for integrated instrumentation in the original composition or arrangement. When he first started adding various instruments together in liturgical settings in 1975 and 1976, the organ accompaniment was the vastly dominant instrumental presence in Reform sanctuaries across the country. The use of other instruments in a sanctuary worship service would have been totally new for most people. Certainly in the Cincinnati community, as in most cities around the country, professional choirs and organ defined the musical aspect of Reform synagogue services.

Shur recalled that it was around 1976 that he started adding instruments to Shabbat morning services. Bonia had a knack for finding talented instrumentalists

---

<sup>90</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., (19 July 2012).

and vocalists during his time in Cincinnati, and the practice of both finding musicians on his own and composing and arranging for whoever was on hand was one of the first skills he had developed as a musician in his days in the Red in WW2. However, instead of orchestrating for whatever instrumentalists he could find on the front of a hot war, he had the entire city of Cincinnati to draw from. It started with discovering that his neighbor played the flute, so he brought the flute player in to play on Shabbat. He soon found a clarinet to add, and then decided he needed a third instrumental voice and hired an oboe. Lastly he hired a double bass. This was the original formula for the Shabbat morning quartet, and at this point the organ was also in use. Although the structure of the ensemble as a quartet was fairly constant, the type of instruments and the instrumentalists varied over the years. Mostly the players were from the nearby University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), and most were not Jewish. Bonia had a reputation for being able to find talented vocalists and instrumentalists at need from CCM, local musical contacts, as well as occasionally from the student body. When he found a talented student, he would use them to recruit others. He was offering work in a competitive market, and one that was an easy walk from CCM. He consistently got very good players, and his reputation for working with his musicians helped bring students in as well. Further, since it was more or less the same music from month to month, a consistent ensemble was able to become a very musically tight group. Further, when a student would graduate from the conservatory and stay in the Cincinnati area, they would often keep the job until they didn't need the extra

income.<sup>91</sup> By the early 2000s, however, the cost of instrumentalists for the Shabbat ensemble was contributing to the College deficit, and started to be phased out. By 2006/2007 an ensemble was only used for Shabbat services on a special occasion, and the presence of an ensemble on Saturday morning had been totally phased out by 2008 for financial reasons. For the ordination service, Bonia arranged for a small orchestra of winds, brass, and strings as well as a larger choir. The presence of this ensemble still continues in the HUC Cincinnati ordination service.

How Bonia created original music for students took various forms. One component was introducing an original musical interlude following the sermon (given by a student) on Shabbat. Bonia would pick a few words from the end of the sermon, and – drawing from a handful of tunes he reserved for the purpose – create a musical interlude following the sermon that would (in Bonia’s mind at least) be based on the sermon. A more direct method of how Bonia created new music for students was by request. Students would request arrangements of certain melodies or compositions for a prayer in a certain style, e.g. asking Bonia for a Chassidic melody for this prayer, or an arrangement of a feminist setting for the text of that prayer. Bonia Shur’s choir-book (to which he added more and more music over the years, and each student in the choir had a copy) became full very quickly. For example, in Rabbi Kenneth Kanter’s choir book from 1975-1980, there were already 7 options for *Barechu*, and 9 for *Mi chamocha*.<sup>92</sup> There are also a few very unique items in the choir book. The most notable is a setting of *Oseh shalom* to the opening

---

<sup>91</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>92</sup> HUC Cincinnati Choir Book, no title page (1975-80). Shared from the personal library of Kenneth Kanter.

song from the television show M\*A\*S\*H.<sup>93</sup> Shur also enjoyed helping rabbinical students push limits in services, as it complemented his own radical nature. It was with a composition written by Bonia Shur that the first student at HUC Cincinnati led services reading not only the patriarchs' names in Hebrew for the Avot, but the matriarchs' names as well. This caused a bit of an uproar, and Professor of Theology and Liturgy Jakob Petuchowski actually walked out of the service.

Bonia Shur's most famous and frequently used composition, his *Kedushah*, also came out of a request from a student. In 1980, rabbinical student Jeffrey Ableser came into Bonia's office and asked for a new melody for the *Kedushah*.<sup>94</sup> The student wanted something more like a Chassidic melody that would match the music for the rest of his service (the Lewandowski setting would have stuck out like a sore thumb). When interviewed for this thesis, Bonia was obviously proud of the success of this piece of music. It has attained the rare status in the Jewish world of a melody everyone thinks has existed forever and must come from Sinai. What I had not expected was the surprise. Even after decades of his *Kedushah* being an established melody across the world, Bonia Shur was still surprised that, of all his compositions, this one has received the most use by a huge margin. If you type "Kedushah" into Google, the fourth result is a YouTube video of a Rabbi singing Shur's melody.<sup>95</sup> It simply is the *Kedushah*.

Another of Bonia Shur's most significant compositions, in terms of the scope of the piece itself as well as its impact on the College, is the *Hallel*. Like the

---

<sup>93</sup> Opening song to M\*A\*S\*H is "Suicide Is Painless" written by Johnny Mandel (music) and Mike Altman (lyrics).

<sup>94</sup> Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (19 July 2012).

<sup>95</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHphx4iMlF0>> (9 April 2012).

Kedushah, this piece came from the request of students. In April 1975 two students, including Karen Soria, approached Bonia. They wanted to reclaim an observance of Rosh Chodesh on the HUC campus.

In American Reform Judaism, the 1970s was the beginning of a period of Jewish reclamation that is still going on today. Many rituals, liturgical components, and festival observances that had been removed in the various reforms made in Germany and America were being re-integrated by a new generation of American Jewry. The reintroduction of Rosh Chodesh observances at HUC was part of this greater process, but had the added aspect of being a ritual tied into feminine reforms, which were also going on in America and Reform Judaism in the late 70s. Rosh Chodesh, the observance of the new month, had been tied to women at least since the Middle Ages, connected by the monthly aspect of the menstrual cycle and various texts.<sup>96</sup> We must remember that not only had there not been a Rosh Chodesh observance previously at HUC, there had never been any female rabbinical students either; that one came with the other is no coincidence.

For the ancient Israelites, Rosh Chodesh was a joyous day likened to other festival days (Numbers 10:10), marked by the visual observation of the first new crest of the month's lunar cycle. Eventually the Hebrew calendar was set mathematically, but the observance of Rosh Chodesh has remained; it is primarily observed by a Torah reading from Numbers 28 as well as some changes in the liturgy, prominently featuring the addition of part of the Hallel, often called the half-

---

<sup>96</sup> The Tur, in *Orach Chaim* pg 417, identifies the connection between women and Rosh Chodesh in the episode of the Golden Calf, when the women refused to surrender their jewelry for use in making the idol. As a reward, they were given Rosh Chodesh as a day that they would observe more than the men.

Hallel. The full Hallel is Psalms 113-118. In the half-Hallel, the first eleven verses of Psalms 115 and all of Psalm 116 are omitted.

When asked by students if he would compose a Hallel for the College to use, Bonia's response was "What is Hallel? Show me the text." With the students still in the room, he improvised something, and the students liked it. What was impressive beyond the musical aspects of the piece, which will be examined in *Section 2: The Music*, was how it evolved in terms of orchestration. It began with two singers (indeed, the two students who had approached him) and the chapel keyboardists. He found a student who played the violin, and decided to hire another one for harmony. Bonia then found out that there was a student, Peter Hyman, who not only played the marimba, but had one with him in his dorm room.<sup>97</sup> So, he added marimba. He hired a double bass, played guitar himself, and used the readily available HUC student choir for a full vocal component.<sup>98</sup> The first performance was so well attended that there were people sitting on the floor. The *Hallel* saw some performances outside of HUC, including at a cantorial conference, but mostly it was an annual staple in Cincinnati for many years. The initial concert was an HUC event that the whole community came out to see.<sup>99</sup> It had taken Bonia two months to set the Hallel, and his inspiration came from imagining himself being a part of the Israelite tribal society observing the new moon.

---

<sup>97</sup> Marimbas are very expensive instruments. The fact that Bonia found not only a marimba player at HUC, but one who had his own marimba, is quite unexpected.

<sup>98</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

<sup>99</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

## **IX: Bonia Shur: Out of HUC and into Congregations**

*Bonia wanted students to bring people into the service. Not just "Shabbat Shalom, please turn to page 27."<sup>100</sup>*

During his time at HUC Bonia Shur visited many congregations as a guest musician, composer, and synagogue choir trainer. He also touched synagogue musicians across the country through Mifgash Musicale, a program that he initiated at the Cincinnati campus. However, when Shur first arrived at the College he was mostly unknown to American synagogue musicians, particularly outside of the west coast. The first significant national exposure of Bonia Shur's music, in his position of Director of Liturgical Arts, happened during his first year in Cincinnati at HUC.

Having started his post in the fall of 1974, Shur's second semester at the school was also the beginning of the centennial celebrations of the Hebrew Union College (1875-1975). Celebrations, special services and special learning opportunities were hosted across all of the campuses that year, but the larger festivities were held in Cincinnati, the mother campus. One of the major centennial event weekends, attended by dozens of Reform rabbis from across the country, included a particularly special commemorative service to dedicate the newly renovated chapel.<sup>101</sup> Eugene Mihaly asked Bonia Shur to compose some original music for the service, in addition to arranging the rest of the music for the service as

---

<sup>100</sup> Interview of Rabbi Robert Barr by Jim Stoloff (18 July 2012).

<sup>101</sup> *Service of Dedication of the Scheuer Chapel: HUC-JIR Cincinnati, OH.* Service written and arranged by Eugene Mihaly and Jakob Petuchowski. Music composed and arranged by Bonia Shur.



would normally happen. This resulted in two of Bonia's finest pieces: *Ki Ata Ta'ir Neiri* (text from Leviticus Rabbah 31:4) and *Kol Haneshamah Tehalel Yah* (text from the end of Psalm 150). The former text came up during a conversation between Bonia and Eugene Mihaly, with Mihaly suggesting the text for a musical setting. For the latter piece, Shur chose the text. Later, he would be chagrined at his choice – he had not realized that *Kol Haneshamah*, and Psalm 150 as a whole, is one of the most common Hebrew texts set to music, and already had many melodies and arrangements.<sup>102</sup> Despite the existence of other settings for this text, it remains one of Shur's more popular compositions with its focus, power, and building layers of voices and instruments. The piece also feels markedly different from the work of other major synagogue music composers, and is unmistakably "Bonia." It is also a wonderful example of Bonia's sensitivity to the articulation and musical layout of the Hebrew language (which will be explored fully in *Section 2: The Music*).

This service and these two compositions, attended by so many congregational rabbis at once, comprised a huge moment in getting Bonia's music outside the walls of HUC and into synagogues. *Kol Haneshamah* was particularly successful, its first performance resonating powerfully in the sanctuary.<sup>103</sup> As Shur recalls, "You could feel the vibration in the room." About a month later Bonia received his first call from a congregation that he had no previous contact with, asking him to visit for a week and work with the choir. Later that year Rabbi

---

<sup>102</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012) and interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

Gunther Plaut invited him to Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto. The visit included a performance of *Kol Haneshamah* with choir and ensemble.<sup>104</sup>

Invitations to synagogues began to come more and more frequently, and indeed his work inside congregations became a regular part of the next two decades of his life. This increased markedly once rabbinical students who had spent all four years of rabbinical school with Shur began moving into congregations as rabbis. The most typical pattern of these visits is that Bonia would come in for about a week and work with the choir – teaching some new music, introducing his compositions, and generally training the choir particularly around the enunciation of Hebrew and sensitivity toward sung Hebrew. It would end with the choir giving a performance or musical Shabbat for the congregation that would feature Shur’s music. Usually, one or two of the pieces Bonia introduced would particularly stick and become a part of that congregation’s musical culture.

An excellent example of this was Bonia Shur’s visit to Beth Or in Philadelphia, under Rabbi Gregory Marx. It started rather simply with Rabbi Marx and his assistant rabbi – both ordained at HUC Cincinnati – reminiscing in the late 90s about the music and ritual scene of HUC; both felt that the music at Beth Or was too much in the realm of Sulzer and Lewandowski.<sup>105</sup> So, they decided to bring in Bonia Shur. For a week Bonia worked with their cantor and their adult choir, ending with a

---

<sup>104</sup> Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (30 June 2012).

<sup>105</sup> It is important to remember that this, and indeed Shur’s entire career, coincided with the camp music phenomenon, which was also starting to drastically change the culture of synagogue music. Camp music, however, is (with a few exceptions) not able to fill the synagogue music need for the equivalent of “high church” music – a need that is still proven to be valid in 2013 congregations. Bonia’s music, however, can fit that need while also changing its culture from the purely western-church-music-sounding tradition to one of a more inherently Jewish feel and sound.

beautiful Erev Shabbat service as well as a Saturday evening concert. A lasting impact of his visit is that (in addition to using his more common Shabbat melodies) the choir continues to use his *Ken Ken Yehi Ratzon* on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>106</sup>

Occasionally, Bonia Shur would have a deeper and more unique impact on a congregation, and form a true bond between the community and his music. This would most commonly come about at the beginning of a congregation's life with the composition of new music for that congregation. There are two excellent, yet very different, examples of this with Congregation Beth Adam in Cincinnati and Central Reform Congregation in Saint Louis. In both congregations, Bonia Shur was brought in at the beginning of the congregation's history and left a strong musical imprint that continues in those congregations today. Also, both congregations have a unique relationship to Bonia Shur and his music.

Bonia was brought in for the founding of Central Reform Congregation in 1984 (by this time he had had a decade of seasoning – as a composer and as a liturgist – at HUC). He came in for two weeks preceding the congregation's first High Holy Days. In this particular case, Bonia was brought in as much because of his close personal friendship with Rabbi Susan Talve and her husband, Rabbi Jim Goodman, as for his musical expertise.<sup>107</sup> The three of them had grown close early on in the two students' time at HUC. Rabbi Goodman and Shur were particularly close in that they had collaborated musically very often while Goodman was a rabbinical student; Bonia Shur is the reason Rabbi Goodman has pursued classical guitar over his entire

---

<sup>106</sup> Rabbi Greg Marx in an interview by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

<sup>107</sup> Interview of Rabbi Susan Talve by Jim Stoloff (12 July 2012).

rabbinic career.<sup>108</sup> Central Reform Congregation was a small congregation (30 families at the first High Holy Days), without a choir and without a cantor. Bonia was given very specific instructions according to the congregation's needs. Rabbi Talve and the congregation wanted sophistication (as opposed to camp music) for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, music that would feel Jewish, yet music they could all sing together. Shur's solution was to compose chants for the major High Holy Day liturgical components. He was also helpful in determining which musical selections everyone needed to hear over the holy days. The fact that Shur was able to do this demonstrates just how much his liturgical knowledge had grown over a decade at the College. For Bonia, this was an ideal opportunity to shape a congregation's musical culture, as there was no previous musical culture to deal with or to rival him. The core of the congregation's High Holy Day music is still rooted in the music from this visit. Shur continued to have a relationship with this community, and he is an "in-house" name for the congregation. He visited a few more times over the years, with two visits particularly standing out. The first followed the death of a two-year-old child in one of the families, which was the first major tragedy the congregation had suffered. Bonia wrote an original piece in the boy's memory, called the Nathan Cantata, and the piece is still used for the High Holy Day Yizkor service. The other was what would be Bonia's last visit to the congregation, in the early 2000s, when tears came to Bonia's eyes after hearing his music, which had been maintained and performed in the way he created and loved it himself years ago.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> From Rabbi Jim Goodman's words at the memorial service of Bonia Shur at HUC-JIR Cincinnati (2 September 2012).

<sup>109</sup> Interview of Rabbi Susan Talve by Jim Stoloff (12 July 2012).

Shur's work at Beth Adam in Cincinnati was equally involved, but different from his work in Saint Louis and also a unique situation. The most exceptional aspects of the relationship between Beth Adam and Shur came from them both being in Cincinnati, and that Beth Adam – as a humanist congregation – needed entirely new liturgy, not only new music. The first High Holy Day services at Beth Adam were held in 1980, and Shur was brought in to work with the congregation primarily in 1981 and 1982. Bonia not only composed original music for the congregation and worked with the choir; he also worked with his former student, the recently ordained Rabbi Bob Barr (Beth Adam founding and current senior rabbi), in writing the Hebrew for the original liturgical texts for the congregation. One agenda of Barr and the congregation was to interconnect all aspects of worship – songs, readings, prayers, responses, the rabbi, the congregation, the prayer book, and the choir. Shur wrote music with this vision in mind. For this congregation, Shur was tasked with creating traditional music for non-traditional texts. Beth Adam's choir still uses much of Bonia's compositions from his work in their early years, particularly on the High Holy Days. One piece that Shur wrote for them, *May The Memory*, took on a life of its own and has become one of his more common pieces used by many synagogue choirs. Being in Cincinnati, the Shurs maintained a relationship with Beth Adam, though Fanchon was always much more religiously at home in the humanist congregation than Bonia.

Eventually, Bonia Shur developed another way that he could reach out to synagogue musicians, this time by bringing them to him. In 2001 Bonia Shur was looking for a way to spread his music, and he was having some issues with

Transcontinental Music Publications. In a very typical fashion, Bonia took matters into his own hands. He invited twenty cantors to HUC for a weekend of music and professional development. As part of the weekend, he distributed his own music among the cantors. Though the intent had been to market his music, what Bonia had actually created was a weekend of sharing Jewish music in an intimate setting of trained and devoted synagogue musicians, and it was very successful. Word spread, and it turned into an annual event at HUC Cincinnati, administered at first by the URJ and eventually taken over by the American Conference of Cantors and the Guild of Temple Musicians who currently administer Mifgash Musicale. The program shifted from being geared toward cantors to being geared toward synagogue musicians generally (soloists, choir directors, keyboardists). Bonia stayed involved as a teacher, having his own component in the program especially in the early years, when there was a session specifically on his music. Mifgash truly has taken on a life of its own far beyond Bonia Shur's original concept. Other Jewish musical figures who have been involved with Mifgash over the years include Ben Steinberg, Samuel Adler, Stephen Richards, John Planer, Josh Nelson, Rachelle Nelson, and Danny Maseng.

## **The Man: Conclusion**

We are now moving into the period of the late 90s, well past the era of Bonia's life and career that is the primary focus of this thesis ('74 – '84). I will use

this last period as a framework, therefore, with which to conclude the biography section.<sup>110</sup>

The 90s saw a continuation of much of the work Shur was doing in the 80s, including his choir and ensemble work at the College, his on-site work at congregations, and Mifgash. In many ways, the ripples of Bonia's initial splash at HUC had truly started to reach out across congregations, and Bonia himself had transitioned from making new ripples to continuing to develop the innovations he had already brought to the table. One thing that did particularly flourish for Shur in the 1990s was the amount of commissioned work he received. There were now dozens and dozens of Bonia's former students in the field at congregations and organizations providing opportunities for commissioned compositions and on-site visits at congregations.

There were three recognizable phases leading to his full retirement. The first was when the College hired Cantor Sharon Kohn to work part-time at the College to teach practical liturgy and to serve as cantor for weekday services. Cantor Kohn's presence at the College answered a clear need of HUC-JIR, which was to have a cantor to would work with students on each campus. Now that HUC Cincinnati had a cantor, Shur transitioned his role to only that of Kapellmeister, while courses involving learning and practicing liturgical music and Torah trope were taught by the cantor. The next phase was in the fall of 2003 when Cantor Yvon Shore was hired to come to HUC Cincinnati full time as the Director of Liturgical Arts and

---

<sup>110</sup> The biographical and historical information in this section is of relatively recent memory. It was corroborated across interviews with Bonia Shur (30 June 2012), Fanchon (30 June 2012), Richard Sarason (19 July 2012), and Yvon Shore (7 November 2012).

Music. This position was built on the work of Cantor Kohn, and filled a necessity that Kohn had made obvious – HUC needed a full time cantorial position that would integrate duties involving liturgy, services, and teaching. Bonia himself was beginning to have some health issues around this time, and some components connected to his tenure as Director of Liturgical Arts were already being phased out due to financial reasons (as mentioned earlier). The passing of the torch from Bonia Shure to Cantor Shore was not without friction, but the two came to both respect and care for each other professionally and personally. After Cantor Shore's arrival, Bonia stayed on only to work with the music and ensemble at ordination, at Cantor Shur's insistence. He also continued to conduct the *Hallel* annually through 2007, and cantor Shore served as the female soloist. The last phase of Bonia's involvement was in 2009, which marked Bonia Shur's last year supervising and conducting music at ordination services. This year was marked further by increased health issues, and Shur truly transitioned out of any and all responsibilities at the College.

Still, for every year of his life starting in 1974, Bonia never truly left the Hebrew Union College community or campus. During my own time at HUC, Bonia was a frequent presence at services and events when his health was on the better side. Even the day preceding his death on August 30, 2012, Bonia was out and about at the HUC Cincinnati convocation ceremony and luncheon. He will be remembered, from his unique music to his unique eyebrows.



## **Bonia Shur: The Music**

*His Hallel settings, particularly, exult in praising and glorifying the Almighty with rhythmic and percussive phrasings directly related to the accents of the Hebrew and suffused with exuberant joy.<sup>111</sup>*

### **The Music: Introduction**

This section examines Bonia Shur's style and technique as a composer, which is heavily rooted in the Mediterranean Style. I will begin with musical influences in Shur's life that preceded his move to Israel, most notably his experiences in the Russian army. Then, I will define the Mediterranean Style of composition and explore how it relates to his compositions, especially regarding the use of Hebrew language in vocal music. Finally, I will address the flavors of his music that are uniquely Bonia. I will demonstrate these aspects of Shur's music by introducing the musical phenomenon, explaining how he uses it, and providing an example of the phenomenon taken from one of his compositions. Most of the examples provided are taken from his *Hallel*, whose compositional context is discussed in *Section 1: The Man*.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Charles Davidson, "Bonia Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995): 50.

<sup>112</sup> For background and contextual information on Bonia Shur's Hallel, see Section 1: The Man, VIII: Bonia Shur: Director of Liturgical Arts.

In order to achieve the goals outlined above for this section, I must rely on language derived from musical analysis, music history, and music theory. I will be defining many of the terms and musical phenomena that surround Bonia Shur's compositions. However, I will not be going out of my way to define basic, general musical terms. Particularly regarding the direct analysis of musical selections, I will be writing with the assumption that the reader can read music and has a very basic understanding of music theory. Lastly, a major facet of Shur's career was his work as an arranger. This component of his musical life was very significant, and his arrangements have had as much of an impact on synagogue music as his original compositions. Though references to some of his arrangements will be made, a full discussion of Bonia Shur as an arranger is outside the scope of this thesis.

## **I: Nationalism in music**

Before exploring the role of Bonia Shur's background in Russian and Mediterranean musical styles, we must understand the overall phenomenon of nationalism, and nationalism in music. The rise of European nationalism in the 1800s was based on the belief that one's allegiance and identity were no longer based on a dynastic-state or religious-state authority. Rather, you were a member of a nation and a people. Members of a nation spoke the same language, shared the same culture, and operated within their own body politic. One of the outcomes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist perspective was the belief that cultural products,

including all of the arts, should reflect the character of the nation from which they come.<sup>113</sup>

Nationalism in music is the musical reflection of this more general rise of European nationalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, while some say that music is the universal language, nationalist composers set out to show that in western art music, it is not.<sup>115</sup> Nationalist music began as a movement away from the Austro-German dominance of western music during the classical<sup>116</sup> and early romantic periods,<sup>117</sup> especially within the Holy Roman Empire. It is marked by the introduction of nationalist elements into art music including folksongs, folk dances, and folk rhythms – any sounds that relate specifically to the traditions and culture of that ethnic group. In opera and in symphonic poems, this also included the use of folk legends and stories, and the use of texts and literature written in one's nationalist vernacular. Let me stress that the term "nationalism in music" does not refer to folk music itself. Rather, it refers to the use of native melodies and ideas in compositions of western art music. This is all generally a late 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, though the height of nationalist music depends on the country. The European revolutions of 1848 are a handy marker for the beginnings of nationalist trends in Europe, particularly in Germany, the Austrian Empire, France, and Italy.

---

<sup>113</sup> Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 341.

<sup>114</sup> Unless otherwise noted, general information regarding nationalism in music is taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Nationalism in Music."

<sup>115</sup> Arthur Farwell, "Nationalism in Music" in *The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, 9th ed., editor Oscar Thompson (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1964), 1446-1451.

<sup>116</sup> The classical period, in music, is usually deemed to be from 1750-1820.

<sup>117</sup> The romantic period, in music, is usually deemed to be from around 1815 or 1820 up to just after the turn of the twentieth century.

Many European composers of the late 1800s built their reputation as specifically nationalist composers, including Bartók, Smetana, Grieg, and Wagner.

## **II: Russian Nationalist Music**

Bonia Shur's early years involve Latvia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and these two nationalist musical traditions deserve special attention. Russian music, at least, had a direct influence on the earliest period of Shur's life as a composer. The nationalist music of Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union share a different timeline from most of Europe because nationalist trends in Russia were shaped by different events.<sup>118</sup> Russian nationalism wasn't even reacting against Austro-German musical dominance in the same way as that of the central European nations. For Russia, the Austro-German music tradition was something imported and popularized by the aristocracy during the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725) as part of his larger effort to westernize Russia. That was what Russian nationalist music was moving away from – a Germanic musical tradition that, for Russians, was “outsider” in every way. Further, because of Peter the Great and the aristocracy's involvement in introducing western music, art music in Russia was tied in to the political structure fairly early, well before the Communist Party took an active hand in controlling it.

---

<sup>118</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, IX, 1: Russia SFSR, Russian art music,” 384-387.

The first Russian composer to give voice to nationalist musical ideas in a way that was significant enough to mark a true move away from the ideal of European music was Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), particularly with his work *A Life for the Tzar* in 1836.<sup>119</sup> This opera used Russian characters and settings, Russian folk songs, and the Russian language. His work inspired the next generation of Russian composers, known as the Mighty Five.<sup>120</sup> During their lives, these five composers defined Russian art music. Their compositions avoid strict Germanic counterpoint and embrace folk and religious melodies of the Russian people as a compositional basis. Russian vocal music in this period would often shift meter freely, following the patterns of the Russian language. This is something, as will be further discussed later, that Bonia Shur would apply to the use of Hebrew language in his vocal music within the context of the Mediterranean style. However, even while the compositions of the Mighty Five were ingrained into the Russian consciousness well before Shur was in the Russian Army, there was already another layer of Russian music in the air by WWII.

The deaths of the composers of the Mighty Five coincided with other major events in Russian culture and politics, including the rise of the Bolsheviks, the Russian revolution of 1905, and finally the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. So, by the time the USSR was founded in 1922 (the year before Shur was born), the relationship between nationalist Russian art music and the government had changed significantly. Music and art became supervised to ensure maximum benefit

---

<sup>119</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich."

<sup>120</sup> The Russian Five are Mily Balakirev (1836–1910), César Cui (1835–1918), Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), and Alexander Borodin (1833–1887).

to the masses, as determined by the Communist Party. Soviet music was to be moral and uplifting, to reinforce the ideals of the government. What this amounted to was that the priority for the state-sponsored Russian music became the social and moral aspects of art, instead of the aesthetic considerations of the composer.<sup>121</sup> The involvement of the Party in Russian art music could be seen measurably in the nationalization of both conservatories and the music publishing industry. Early on, some efforts were made by organizations to allow venues in Russia to perform current European compositions, but in the early 1930s the Party put a stop to these organizations. Further, the Union of Soviet Composers and a 1932 resolution prevented similar organizations from forming. As a result, Russian music moved forward in a unique manner compared to the rest of western music; it moved as determined by the government, not according to aesthetics of composers, musicians, and audiences.<sup>122</sup> The government dictated that the primary concern of Russian music was to express socialist ideals and to be accessible to the Russian masses. Inaccessible 'modernist' compositions by Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky, as well as some of Prokofiev's early works, were banned. As a result, many Russian composers – including Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Rachmaninoff – moved out of Russia to compose in the West. Even Prokofiev and Shostakovich, the two premier Russian composers who were actually in Russia in the 1930s and during WWII, did not have free rein. They were monitored closely by the Union of Soviet Composers. This was the tightly controlled musical culture in which Shur was writing his first

---

<sup>121</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, IX, 1: Russia SFSR, Russian art music," 384.

<sup>122</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, IX, 1: Russia SFSR, Russian art music," 384.

compositions; being in the Red Army at the time only magnified the rigidity of these cultural realities. This oppression didn't end until Stalin's death in 1953, by which time Bonia was already in Israel studying with Paul Ben-Haim.

It is worth considering Latvian art music as a possible early musical influence on Bonia Shur. However, while the Russian influence is easy to cite thanks to Bonia's war diary and his willingness to share his musical experiences during the war, Bonia was never very revealing regarding whatever musical training happened in his early years in Dvinsk. Shur's pre-WWII childhood coincided with the short-lived years of an independent Latvian republic (1918-1940), which were years of rapid growth for Latvian art music.<sup>123</sup> The first Latvian opera was produced in 1920, and several musical institutions including the Latvian Conservatory were founded in this period. The major musical styles in the Latvian republic were Latvian nationalism, post-Wagnerism, and impressionism. There is no evidence or testimony to demonstrate how connected or isolated Bonia Shur's initial musical training with regard to the greater Latvian music scene preceding WWII. However, with such a musical family,<sup>124</sup> it would not be surprising if Bonia had some degree of direct exposure to the greater musical culture of Dvinsk / Daugavpils, aside from whatever Bonia soaked up in the musical Shur home.

---

<sup>123</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, VI, 1: Latvia, art music," 368.

<sup>124</sup> See *Section 1: The Man*, under *I: Parents, family, and youth: Pre WW2*.

### III: Mediterranean Style

Mediterranean-style composition, sometimes referred to as the Eastern Mediterranean school, synthesizes Middle Eastern and western music styles (especially French Impressionism)<sup>125</sup> under the umbrella of western art music composition. This style is the single most significant influence on Bonia Shur's compositional approach. Paul Ben-Haim was one of the primary innovators of this compositional school, has been considered the foremost nationalist composer of the state of Israel, and was Bonia Shur's primary teacher (from 1950-1956) in composition, arrangement, and orchestration.<sup>126</sup> This training, as well as Shur's lack of qualms about using "old country" Jewish folk music, is what kept a 'Jewish' sound in his liturgical compositions that is lacking in works by other synagogue music composers.

Put into historical perspective, Mediterranean style developed during the first of three generations of Israeli composers. This initial group, including Ben-Haim and his contemporaries, were immigrants to the land of Israel and all directly experienced the transition into Israeli statehood. The second generation of Israeli composers emerged during the same years that Bonia was studying with Ben-Haim. It consisted of composers who reflect a style influenced both by their Israeli teachers of the first-generation and their own additional studies in Europe and the United States. Bonia shares the feature of this generation in that he was trained by a

---

<sup>125</sup> Robert Fleischer, "Three Generations of Israeli Music," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18(4), 102-126.

<sup>126</sup> Paul Ben-Haim and his relationship with Bonia Shur are detailed in Section 1: The Man, IV: Israel & Musical Training.



first generation Israeli composer. Further, he also formally studied music, after his time training in the Mediterranean style, with Roy Harris at UCLA.<sup>127</sup> Even with his training after Israel, however, his style of composition and arrangement continued to deeply reflect the Mediterranean style. The third generation of Israeli composers was born in the already independent state of Israel, and their experience does not overlap with Bonia Shur's.<sup>128</sup>

The Mediterranean style of Paul Ben-Haim and his contemporaries, including Marc Lavry and Menachem Avidom, came to Israel amidst a large wave of German speaking Central European immigrants during 1933-1939. This immigrant group, who came after waves of mostly Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europeans, had a significant influence on the establishment of Israeli culture, politics, and institutions. The Ben-Haim generation of Israeli composers was doing the same thing in the world of music – influencing the establishment of musical culture by combining Jewish and Oriental music with the forms and modalities of French impressionism to create a distinct “Mediterranean style” of western art music.<sup>129</sup> With goals similar to those of Nationalist movements in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, Jews in Israel were creating Israeli culture, an Israeli language of modern Hebrew, and an Israeli political structure. Mediterranean style was the musical expression of this effort. It is important to understand that the works of these composers were not religious, much less liturgical, in nature. The burgeoning of this contemporary Israeli art

---

<sup>127</sup> *Biography: Los Angeles 1960-1967*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography> > (9 April 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Robert Fleischer, “Three Generations of Israeli Music,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18:4 (Summer 2000): abstract.

<sup>129</sup> Robert Fleischer, “Three Generations of Israeli Music,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18:4 (Summer 2000): 102-108.

music was wrapped up in “the spirit of Israeli nationalism,” not “a nationalism of Jewish spirituality.”<sup>130</sup> This well represented the secular-Zionist Israeli attitude of this period, which was to see Judaism as more of a civilization and people than a religion.

It is easiest to describe Mediterranean style by its differences from standard, Germanic-tradition western composition, and different it is. It is as if the Middle Eastern sun washed away much of the rigidity of form and chromatic lines of European harmony and melody. Recitative, snatches of Hebrew songs, ethnic and liturgical Jewish materials, and original melodic inventions that reflect these sounds, dance through compositions replacing traditional usages of European-style motives.<sup>131</sup>

I want to take a moment to assess recitative as used by Bonia Shur. For Shur, this technique comes across more of a mixture between *sprechstimme*<sup>132</sup> and a more Russian style of declamatory speech set rhythmically to music. The following example, taken from Shur’s *Hallel*, shows this quite clearly.

---

<sup>130</sup> Robert Fleischer, “Three Generations of Israeli Music,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18:4 (Summer 2000): 102-108.

<sup>131</sup> Robert Fleischer, “Three Generations of Israeli Music,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18:4 (Summer 2000):102-108.

<sup>132</sup> *Sprechstimme* (speech-voice), is a musical term referring to an expressionist vocal technique between singing and speaking. It is very similar to recitative, or *sprechgesang* [spoken-singing] in German. However, while recitative and *sprechgesang* may have marked pitches, *sprechstimme* typically does not emphasized pitch at all.

Fast ♩ = 70

(Guitar)

NARRATOR *mp* *marcato*

Be - tzeit Yis - ra - el mi - mitz - ra - yim

5

beit Ya - a - kov mei - am lo - elz ha - ye - tah Ye - hu - dah le - kod - sho Yis - ra -

10

*mysteriously*

el mam - she - lo - tav. Ha - yam ra - ah va - ya - nos ha - yar - den yi -

15

sov le - a - chor. He - ha - rim ra - ke - du che - ei - lim ge - va - ot

*mf* *questioning*

ki - vnei tzon. Mah le - cha ha - yam ki ta - nus ha - yar - den ti -

The guitar accompaniment is sparse, rhythmically simple, and repetitive, leaving the Hebrew metrically set in solo voice as the only active musical component. The importance of Hebrew in Bonia's compositions will be directly addressed later, but I must point out that the use of this declamatory / recitative style lets Bonia focus solely on how the Hebrew words come across through accenting and pulsating rhythmic patterns.

Returning to Mediterranean style, within the European schools of composition it is closest to French post-impressionist methods of composition. This includes parallel motion of perfect intervals, quartal harmonies, and modal / diatonic compositional frameworks.

The musical score is for a piece by Bonia Shur. It features four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Chorus (Ch), Soli (SOLI), and Bass (B). The score is written in 2/4 time and includes Hebrew lyrics. The Soprano part has a measure number 10. The Chorus part has a measure number 10. The Soli part has a measure number 15. The Bass part has a measure number 15. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*, and performance instructions like *Rit. al.* and *lunga*. The copyright notice at the bottom reads: "© Copyright 1975 by Bonia Shur 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220".

Certainly when it came to the use of parallel perfects, Bonia Shur had no qualms. There are parallel fifths in the first major choral cadence of the *Hallel*. In the above example this can be seen overtly in the vocal movement from measure thirteen to fourteen. Parallel perfects cannot pull one's ear more overtly than when they are between the bottom and top vocal line, which is exactly what Shur does here with the bass and soprano / soli voices.

With the freedom of composition offered by the impressionist style, particularly in using modes beyond Ionian (major) and Aeolian (minor), taking the step to Middle Eastern modes was not a far one. Regarding harmony, Mediterranean style is not totally free of the Germanic importance of focusing on harmonic motion.

Nevertheless, harmony equally functions to provide color and texture, if not more so.

Rhythmically, there is an emphasis on oriental rhythms drawing from Arabic dance and modern Israeli (at the time, Palestinian) folk dance. The reflection of these rhythms, once represented in western notation, often demands a good deal of meter changes within a composition. Therefore, rhythmic motives and themes that require complex or changing meters are common. Again, the impressionist style with its asymmetry of phrase and free meter was an obvious vehicle for composition.

The musical score is written for guitar and voice/chorus. It begins with a tempo marking of 'Spirited' and a metronome indication of 176. The guitar part is marked 'SOLI' and 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The chorus part is marked 'CHORUS' and 'p' (piano). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 20 to 24, and the second system covers measures 25 to 30. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 and then to 2/4. The lyrics are: 'Ha-le-lu-yah ha-le-lu av - dei A-do-nai' and 'ha - le-lu ha le-lu et shelm A - do-nai A - do-nai'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'sub p' (subito piano).

Spirited ♩ = 176  
SOLI  
mf  
(guitar)  
CHORUS  
p  
sub p  
20  
Ha-le-lu-yah ha-le-lu av - dei A-do-nai  
S  
Ch  
mf  
sub p  
25 / 30  
ha - le-lu ha le-lu et shelm A - do-nai A - do-nai  
Ch  
mf  
sub p  
A - do-nai A - do-nai

This is very typical of Bonia's compositions, and the *Hallel* selection above provides an excellent example. In this dance-like section, the meter jumps between 5/4, 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4. The detached, staccato A motive (measures 18-20) is expressed over three measures, each in a different time signature. The lyrical B motive (measure 24-26) uses a 5/4 meter, instead of a more traditional non-compound meter in three or four.

One of the most crucial aspects of Mediterranean style is spoken Israeli Hebrew; it cannot be underemphasized. Max Brod (1884-1968), noted Israeli author and amateur composer, was one of the first to articulate the connection between the sound of Mediterranean style and "the particular consonantal structure of the Semitic languages."<sup>133</sup> Hebrew in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Palestine was reclaimed for the Jews living there. The language was at the center of every effort in creating a Jewish state with an Israeli culture. This connects to music most obviously with vocal compositions in Israeli Hebrew. The Ashkenazi (eastern and central European) accent is gone, replaced by the Israeli Sephardic pronunciation. Israeli Hebrew vocal music was written with the new Israeli speech patterns in the ears and on the lips of the composers, and this is reflected in how the language is used melodically. Even the very way Hebrew text is laid out musically reflects a uniquely Israeli culture. The centrality of Hebrew is not only important in vocal compositions, however. A nation's speech pattern is often reflected in its folk music. The most prominent example of this in Western art music is Béla Bartók, who frequently used Hungarian speech-rhythms in his instrumental music, giving his compositional style a unique

---

<sup>133</sup> Max Brod, *Israel's Music* (Tel-Aviv: 1951), 57.

rhythmic pattern. As mentioned earlier, the Russian composers of the Mighty Five also shaped their music to fit the patterns of Russian speech, but they primarily did this in their vocal music. This use of Israeli Sephardic Hebrew patterns in Mediterranean style instrumental music was not as overt as Bartok's work either, but it was part of the rhythmic patterning that helped define the style as distinct from western music.

The perfect use of Hebrew in Mediterranean style composition was a concept that Bonia carried with him in his compositions throughout his entire life. It is one of the most defining factors of his music, and has separated him from other liturgical composers in America. Most Jews writing Hebrew liturgical music used in synagogues knew Hebrew only as the language of the synagogue, and the sound of synagogue Ashkenazi Hebrew was the only Hebrew in their ears. Even for those diaspora composers who know liturgical Hebrew well, they do not set the language to music as native speakers. Bonia was writing with the ears of an Israeli who had been in Israel during the last years of the Hebrew reclamation. It is this Israeli Hebrew that is used in his liturgical composition. It is reflected clearly in the accents and movement of every Hebrew composition and arrangement he composed. The use and setting of Hebrew text in music was very important to him, and he was very good at it. Cantor and composer Charles Davidson said it best: "Throughout Shur's work there is a special concern for the Hebrew work. Not only are the musical accents all correct but the inflections and meanings of the Hebrew are reflected in

the rhythms and movements of the music.”<sup>134</sup> Without exaggerating, I can say that the sensitivity to Hebrew in Bonia’s compositions is present in any of his vocal compositions and arrangements – indeed, it is stylistically perhaps the single most consistent aspect of his music. It is not actually possible to pick one or two good example of this in Shur’s work, because the precision and purposefulness of Hebrew sounds in his melodic settings are always superb. One need only to look back at any of the previously cited selections of Bonia’s music to see this. I will include another example, however, to use in demonstrating this aspect of his music alone.

7

**[E]** CHORUS (in unison) *playfully* **[35]** *with hushed accent*  
A - do - nai ze - cha - ra - nu ye - va - reich, ye - va - reich et

belt Yis - ra - el, ye - va - reich et belt A - ha - ron. Ye - va -

**[40]**  
reich yir - el A - do - nai, ye - va - reich yir - el, A - do - nai ha - ke - ta - nim im ha - ge - do -

**[45]** SOLI (Soprano & Baritone) *mf* *dolce*  
lim. Yo - sef A - do - nai a - lei - chem, a - lei - chem ve - al benei - chem be - ru -

*legato* **[50]** *f* CHORUS *mp*  
chim a - tem la - do - nai o - seh sha - ma - yim va - a - retz. Ha - sha -

<sup>134</sup> Charles Davidson, “Bonias Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995): 51.



This example from the Hallel consists only of a single and relatively simple vocal line, letting one easily see how Shur treats the text. Take particular note of accents, what falls on the beat and what off the beat, and articulation marks. In Israeli Hebrew, the accent in most words is on the last syllable. Musically, only examining the first phrase, see this emphasis on the syllable “nai” in measure 34, twice on “reich” in measure 35, those same syllables in measures 36 and 37, and “ron” in measure 38. The one-syllable word “et” always has its naturally accented presence as it consistently falls on the beat. Yet, the beats “et” falls on are the weaker two and four, letting it function properly as the anacrusis lead to the stronger beats, one and three. Moving on in the example, notice the specific use of accents, staccato and slurring from measures 39-46. This level of precision and detailed attention to every syllable of Hebrew is an integral aspect of Shur’s compositions.

In terms of textual content for the Mediterranean style, the Hebrew Bible was certainly the “go to” text for musical settings in this period in Israel, especially the psalms.<sup>135</sup> This reflected a greater Israeli fascination and reclamation of the Hebrew Bible that paralleled the reclamation of the biblical land. The Israeli pioneers, sometimes known as sabras or “New Jews,” left the shtetls to build the land of Israel with their hands. Along with the shtetl life style they left behind many of their Jewish rituals and religious trappings – anything that represented the life of “the old Jew.” Most major rabbinic legal texts, like the Mishnah and the Talmud, and their

---

<sup>135</sup> The psalms are already connected to music directly in their biblical setting, and psalms were sung as part of Israelite worship as early as the First Temple period.

accompanying codes were left behind (if not quite physically thrown out) along with kippot, teffilin, and talitot. The Tanach, however, was not. It represented, in the eyes of the settlers, a Judaism that was physically connected with life lived in the land, by the land. The Tanach was the textual soul for the cultural Judaism being created in Israel, so of course it had a prominence in musical settings only rivaled by new Israeli poetic compositions.

Ultimately, we must understand that “Mediterranean style” is a broad term, and can be apply to a wide array of compositions and composers. It can range from compositions that have no basis in Western harmonies, melodies, and rhythms, to a composition in which a single facet brings a breath of the Mediterranean to an otherwise totally Western style. In his article *Israeli Art Music: A Reintroduction*,<sup>136</sup> Israeli musicologist Assaf Shelleg makes an argument that much of the music termed “Mediterranean style” belongs in the latter category. An example he gives is the opening of the second movement of Paul Ben-Haim’s *Symphony No. 1*, where Ben-Haim uses a Persian Jewish melody originally associated with Psalm 121:2, yet the setting of this melody is “exclusively Western, relying on a pentatonic and modal framework.” Shelleg’s point is that, while the sounds may be Mediterranean, the techniques and methodologies used are those of Western music. Mediterranean style is not purely innovative, but a blend of Middle Eastern sounds rooted in western techniques of composition.

---

<sup>136</sup> Assaf Shelleg, “Israeli Art Music: A Reintroduction” *Israel Studies* 17(3) (Fall 2012): 119-149 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/israelstudies.17.3.119>> (12 October 2012).

## **Bonia Shur's Style**

Despite how large an influence his time studying music in Israel had on him, Bonia Shur's compositional style and the sound of his music cannot be simply classified as "Mediterranean style" and nothing else. Anyone who ever met Bonia knows that he was a very unique human being (to put it mildly). His music, likewise, is highly individualistic, and Bonia was very particular about his music. He heard in his mind exactly how his compositions should sound in his mind, and wanted to hear them just so out of his performers. Reflecting this, Shur's sheet music is covered with stylistic instructions, accent marks, and dynamics (as demonstrated in the previous musical example).

Bonia's individual style comes from the fact that he is in many ways a musical anomaly. His first compositions and arrangements in the Red Army were done without having worked under an instructor. He was trained in composition in the Mediterranean style as a student of Paul Ben-Haim, but this was not built on any previous traditional compositional training.<sup>137</sup> Shur did not stay in Israel to continue the national style there, but moved to America and eventually came to work at HUC, where he wrote an overwhelming majority of his music for the synagogue. The series of events (outlined in section one) that led to Shur using his Mediterranean style-based music primarily for the synagogue could not have been predicted. And one must also take note of his large amount of compositional output. Of course, he

---

<sup>137</sup> Before Israel, Bonia was working only off of a basic knowledge of music, melody, and harmony that he gained as a youth and later through practice in the Russian army. See *Section 1: The Man*, under *I: Parents, Family, and Youth* and *II: WWII*.

has a smaller number of compositions that are frequently used and widely known by synagogue musicians, and his *Kedushah* of course is in its own category in its internationally widespread use. However, Bonia wrote hundreds of pieces of music, over three hundred of which are published. Some of his most impressive works are the ones commissioned outside of a synagogue – or even a Jewish – setting, like his piece commissioned for the Bicentennial of the city of Cincinnati.<sup>138</sup>

Within Bonia's individual style of composition there is quite an eclectic range of music that all somehow stays within the realm of feeling Jewish. I have spent significant time outlining the Mediterranean style of composition, and many of his compositions and arrangements fit that style, as shown in the selections of his *Hallel* included previously. Yet, unlike the composers who first crafted the Mediterranean style, Bonia was not afraid to embrace old world traditions of Jewish music. His *Mah Tov* harkens not to an Israeli Middle Eastern sound, but to the ethnically Jewish sound of Klezmer music from Romania and Eastern Europe. Even further from the Mediterranean style, *Come Join Me* includes quite a vigorous *niggun*.

Another technique Shur used frequently and to great effect is thematic repetition. Sometimes it is taking a Hebrew word or short phrase, like "amen" or "halleluiah," and developing it into an almost hypnotic mantra. In other cases Shur would use it to build a primal energy, what might be called a tribal sound. This involves strong, repetitious rhythms and stark melodic motives, and is heard in its purist form in his *Kol Haneshamah Tehaiel Yah* and *Ken Ken Yehi Ratzon*. In still another use of repetition, Bonia also would write highly complex pieces, like his *Sim*

---

<sup>138</sup>See *Section 1: The Man*, under *VIII: Bonia Shur: Director of Liturgical Arts*.

*Shalom* (his original composition, not his arrangement) with its intricate solo vocal melody and unexpected harmonic progressions, but introduce a repeating text with a basic musical theme. This recurring segment, the text in this case being the first line of the prayer, allows the choir or congregation to participate in what would otherwise be a pure solo liturgical piece. Shur would do this quite often in his compositions for the synagogue. The idea was to have, in one piece, solo verses composed with a trained vocalist in mind, but a simpler repeating chorus intended for the choir or congregation to join in singing. Two more examples of this are his arrangements of *Sim Shalom* and *Yom Zeh Le'yisrael*.

In addition to his original compositions, Bonia Shur was an absolutely brilliant arranger. Like a jeweler who knows the perfect setting with which to bring out a precious gem, his ability to wrap a melody in his own compositional style completely changes how the melody is heard. Even with his arrangements, which by definition use a melody and text already matched together, Shur still demonstrates his perfect placement of, and sensitivity toward, the Hebrew language. An excellent example of this is his arrangement of a Chassidic melody for *Sim Shalom*. After hearing the dance-like instrumental setting of this piece with its counter-melody introduced in the male solo voice, the notion of the melody existing outside of this composition is near unimaginable.

Still, in addition to stylistic tendencies, there are several compositional techniques that appear frequently in his works, and nearly all of them show up in the twenty-minute-long *Hallel*. Some are among the oldest techniques in music, like

call and response, which is used in various ways in Shur's music. Again, the Hallel provides a classic example.

The musical score is for a piece titled "Hallel" by Bonia Shur. It is marked "Joyfully" with a tempo of 118 (♩ = 58). The score is in 2/4 time and key of D major (two sharps). It features three main parts: Baritone II, Soprano, and Chorus & Congregation. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 10, 15, and 20 indicated. The lyrics are in Hebrew, with some words in English. The score includes a "call" section for the Baritone II and a "response" section for the Chorus & Congregation. The score is marked with a "F" in a box at the beginning. The score is numbered 11 in the top right corner.

**Measure 1-4:** Baritone II (B) plays a melodic line. Lyrics: du la-do-nai ki tov. Soprano (S) and Chorus & Congregation (Ch) are silent.

**Measure 5-8:** Chorus & Congregation (Ch) plays a repeated melodic phrase. Lyrics: ki le-o - lam - chas - do.

**Measure 9-12:** Soprano (S) plays a melodic line. Lyrics: mar na Yis - ra - el. Chorus & Congregation (Ch) is silent.

**Measure 13-16:** Chorus & Congregation (Ch) plays the repeated phrase. Lyrics: ki le- o - lam - chas - do.

**Measure 17-20:** Baritone I (B.I) and Soprano (S) play a melodic line. Lyrics: yo - me - ru na veit - A - ha - ron. Chorus & Congregation (Ch) is silent.

**Measure 21-24:** Chorus & Congregation (Ch) plays the repeated phrase. Lyrics: ki le- o - lam - chas - do.

**Measure 25-28:** Baritone II (B.II) plays a melodic line. Lyrics: ru' na yir - ei - A - do - nai. Chorus & Congregation (Ch) is silent.

**Measure 29-32:** Chorus & Congregation (Ch) plays the repeated phrase. Lyrics: ki le- o - lam - chas - do.

**Measure 33-36:** Baritone II (B.II) plays a melodic line. Lyrics: Ho - Yome - do.

In this selection, Bonia Shur has the solo voice, the “call,” move through the text, while the “response,” sung by the chorus in unison, uses a repeated phrase. Yet again, this selection also shows how focused and exact Bonia was with Hebrew with the detailed degree of marked accents and articulation.

Another frequent feature of his liturgical works that is even more common is almost an extension of the idea of call and response. It involves introducing a melodic idea in unison (often with a very simple, rhythmic background), and then complementing the initial melody with a counter-melody or melodies.<sup>139</sup> These counter-lines often come in the form of variants on the initial melodic idea, almost like a fugue or imitative procedure. A very clear example of this is in Shur's arrangement of *Adon Olam*. The piece has an A<sup>1</sup>BA<sup>2</sup>B format.

Festive ♩ = ca. 132-144 Arr. Bonia Shur

A - DON OLAM A -

- SHER MA - LACH BE - TE - REM KOL YE -

- TZUR NIV - RA LE - EIT NA - A - SA VE - CHEF - TZO KOL A -

- ZAI ME - LECH SHE - MO NIK - RA VE -

<sup>139</sup> Charles Davidson, "Bonina Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995): 50.

In the above A1 section, the opening of the piece, the primary melodic idea happens in solo voice, unfolding from the pickup to measure three to the melodic conclusion in measure ten. Now let us examine when this melody returns, in the A2 section.

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system is labeled "ALTO SOLO" and "TENOR SOLO". The Alto line has lyrics: "F - HU EI - LI VE - CHAI GO - A - LI VE - TZUR CHEVU BE - VE - AF - KID RU - CHI BE - EIT I - SHAN". The Tenor line has lyrics: "VE - HU EI - LI VE - CHAI GO - A - LI VE - TZUR CHEVU BE - EIT I - SHAN". The piano accompaniment is in the bottom staves. The second system is marked with a circled "30". The Alto line has lyrics: "- EIT TZA - RA VE - HU NI - SI U - MA - NOS LI ME - A - I - RA VE - IM RU - CHI GE - VI - YA - TI". The Tenor line has lyrics: "- U BE - EIT TZARA SHAN VE - A - I - RA VE - HU NI - SI U - MA - NOS LI ME - A - I - RA VE - IM RU - CHI GE - VI - YA - TI". The piano accompaniment continues. The third system is marked with "A" and "T" for Alto and Tenor. The Alto line has lyrics: "- NAT KO - SI BE - YOM EK - RA DO - NAI LI VE - LO I - RA". The Tenor line has lyrics: "MENAT KOSI GEYOM BE - YOM EK - RA A - DO - NAI LI VE - LO I - RA". The piano accompaniment continues.

The primary melody enters as it was before, but now a counter-line in the tenor voice complements it. This example is particularly fugue-like in how the tenor voice is introduced, with the same melodic structure as the primary melody and entering on the dominant instead of the tonic. But very unlike a fugue, the tenor line does not



complement the melody with one, extended melody of counterpoint. Instead, the tenor voice repeatedly enters in two measure chunks (mm 27 and 28, 29 and 30, 31 and 32, and the cadence in measure 33 and 34) that actually break up the melody.

Finally, Shur liked to use radical, or just generally different, techniques in his compositions. We have already seen how he used a recitative, or declamatory, style of rhythmic spoken Hebrew in his *Hallel*. He uses two other alternative techniques in the *Hallel* as well. One is the use of spoken language over instrumental music. This was not an innovative technique, but it was unusual.

12 מִן הַמִּצָּר  
קָנָאתִי יְהוָה  
NARRATOR: In the press of troubles  
I called upon God. God's  
answer was to set me free.

עֲנֵנִי בַמִּדְבָּר זֶה  
יְהוָה לִי לֹא אֵיבָא מִתָּה בַעֲשֵׂה לִי אֲדָמָה  
With God for me I do not  
fear; What can people do to me?

יְהוָה לִי בְעֵזְרִי  
God is among  
my allies.

50

(Strings)

וְאֲנִי אֶרְאֶה בִשְׁמָנִי  
I will see the defeat  
of my foes.

טוֹב לִחְסוֹת בִּיהוָה מִבְּטַח בָּאָדָם  
Better is to rely on God  
than to trust in people.

טוֹב לִחְסוֹת בִּיהוָה מִבְּטַח בְּבָנָדִים  
Better is to rely on God than  
to trust even in the highly placed.

55

(Guitar)

כָּל-גּוֹיִם קִבְּלוּנִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי אֲמִילֵם  
All nations have beset me; I swear by the  
name of God that I will best them.

קִבְּלוּנִי גַם-קִבְּלוּנִי  
They beset me even  
surround me;

קִבְּלוּנִי כְכִבְּוִרִים  
דְּלַכְוִי בְּאֵשׁ קִוְצִים  
I swear by the name of God that I will  
best them. They have come upon me  
like bees; they shall be extinguished  
like burned stubble;

60

(Strings)

As seen above, the alternative expression of purely spoken words over music fit into the modern, radical style of Bonia as well as the 1970s. Still, there is another component of why Bonia might have used such a technique. We must remember that, when the psalms of the Hallel are used liturgically, they are like a Latin mass – it is a block of text that need to be gotten through as part of the worship service. So not only was spoken word over music a “hip” concept in 1975, it offered a way to get through a significant portion of the text very efficiently.

## **The Music: Conclusion**

Bonia Shur's music was as unique as his personality, and his compositional style is a direct reflection of his life. His formative years spent in the Russian Army during WWII, his time in Israel where he found his Israeli identity that never left him, and then his life in America and at HUC that set him in a position to compose liturgical music – all of these are reflected musically in the music he wrote. His time in Russia meant his first efforts of composing and arranging were done in the service of a nationalist music culture, and the Russian music he worked with already moved him away from mainstream western schools of composition. In Israel, his spiritual home in life, he found his spiritual home in music. Mediterranean style gave him the true nationalist sound he was looking for, the base he could use to create his own distinct music. Finally, as Director of Liturgical Arts at Hebrew Union College, he was in place to set his original compositions to liturgical texts and to draw on existing liturgical melodies to use for arrangements.

## Conclusion

*At a time when more and more American synagogues defend their use of banal and inane tunes as a means to “get the congregation singing,” it is refreshing to find that there are alternate choices, which have musical validity.<sup>140</sup>*

Bonia Shur had a sharp mind, a radical heart, and the soul of an artist; he was one of the most truly unique human beings I have ever met. If one were to compress everything that Bonia was into a single word, it would probably be “improvisation.”

Bonia possessed sheer animal energy, unyielding will, and raw (if not academically trained) intellect. His spirit was unbreakable. Forged in his early years to help him survive events and situations that brought death to so many during WWII, his unbreakable spirit was built on his ability to improvise. Tied in with this was the reality that Bonia was an artist to his core. It was how he interacted with the world, and at the heart of that interaction was a level of adaptability – or improvisation – that came from being able to go through any situation and come out on top. Bonia always had a venue through which to express his music. In every part of his life, he found outlets that let him live as the composer he was, and that let his music come to life in performances. Whether it was creating a small ensemble in the

---

<sup>140</sup> Charles Davidson, “Bonia Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice,” *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995): 50.

hospital while recovering from shrapnel wounds taken in the war, creating a new vocal and instrumental ensemble on a kibbutz, or putting together a choir and ensemble for another annual performance of his *Hallel* in Cincinnati, he got his music out there. Wherever he was, he adapted, improvising with what he had, a way to exist as a musician.

At the very time when camp-style music could have been the only substitute for formal, Western, church-sounding synagogue liturgical music, Bonia Shur – in the prime position of HUC Director of Liturgical Arts – was in place to provide an alternative (as cantor and composer Charles Davidson, quoted at the beginning of this section, wrote so insightfully). Further, his alternative was unique. His music for the synagogue is inherently Jewish and skillfully composed. It bridges the gap between complexity that demands musicianship to perform, and congregational participation. And above all, his music is as unique as he was. The same chain of events in Russia, Israel, and the United States that forged Bonia as a person also forged him as a musician. His journey gave him the authenticity and validity to alter a generation of Jewish music for the synagogue.

## **Bibliography**

### **Interviews:**

Interview of Bonia Shur by Cantor Yvon F. Shore (21 November 2010).

Interview of Bonia Shur by Jim Stoloff (20 June 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Robert Barr by Jim Stoloff (18 July 2012).

Interview of Cantor Yvon F. Shore by Jim Stoloff (7 November 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Edward Goldman, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (28 August 2012).

Interview of Samuel Greengus, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (10 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Greg Marx by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Kenneth Kanter by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Michael A. Meyer, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (5 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Susan Talve by Jim Stoloff (12 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Sam Joseph, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (11 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Richard Sarason, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (19 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Mark E. Washofsky, Ph.D., by Jim Stoloff (24 July 2012).

Interview of Rabbi Kenneth Ehrlich by Jim Stoloff (6 December 2012).

### **Physical Sources**

Bonia Shur, *Diary of Bonia Shur 1941-1945: Life Lessons from Behind the Eastern Front*, ed. Limor Shur (2012), Kindle Edition.

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ben Haim, Paul."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Klose, Friedrich."

*Bonia Shur: The Man and The Music* by Jim Stoloff

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Idelsohn, Abraham Zevi," by Edith Gerson-Kiwi.

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, IX, 1: Russia SFSR, Russian art music."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich."

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, VI, 1: Latvia, art music."

Kimberly Veenstra, "Paul Ben-Haim: Father of Modern Israeli Music," *The Ohio State Online Music Journal* 1(2) (Autumn 2008).

*Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist And President of the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2005), 196.

*Selected Prayers for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*, ed. Bonia Shur (Cincinnati: Summer 1975).

*Bi-Weekly Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (Cincinnati: August 1982).

*Music Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (1989).

*Music Companion: Anthology of Liturgical Music with an Emphasis on Congregational Participation*, ed. Bonia Shur (1992).

American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati s.v. *The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*, Series 2: Alfred Gottschalk, Box A2b-27: Faculty topics 1970s-1980s. Call number MS-20: A2b-27.

Charles Davidson, "Bonnie Shur: An Authentic Jewish Voice," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24:1 (May 1995).

HUC Cincinnati Choir Book, no title page (1975-80). Shared from the personal library of Kenneth Kanter.

*Service of Dedication of the Scheuer Chapel: HUC-JIR Cincinnati, OH*. Service written and arranged by Eugene Mihaly and Jakob Petuchowski. Music composed and arranged by Bonia Shur. Borrowed from the personal library of Kenneth Kanter.

Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984).

*Bonia Shur: The Man and The Music* by Jim Stoloff

*The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Nationalism in Music."

Arthur Farwell, "Nationalism in Music" in *The International Cyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, 9th ed., editor Oscar Thompson (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1964), 1446-1451.

Robert Fleischer, "Three Generations of Israeli Music," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 18(4).

Max Brod, *Israel's Music* (Tel-Aviv: 1951), 57.

### Online Sources

Mordechai Zalkin, *Daugavpils*, translated from Hebrew by Michael Aronson (YIVO Institute for Jewish Research: 2010),  
<<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Daugavpils>> (9 April 2013).

*Jewish Encyclopedia*, online edition, s.v. "Dvinsk,"  
<<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5380-dvinsk>> (9 April 2013).

Constance Whippman, *The Jewish Families of Dvinsk: The Jewish Community of Dvinsk (Daugavpils)* (Latvia SIG: 2001)  
<<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/latvia/DvinskFamilies.htm>> (9 April 2010).

*Biography: Israel 1949-1960*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography>> (9 April 2013).

*Biography: Los Angeles 1960-1967*, < <http://boniashur.com/biography>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Jakob J. Petuchowski Papers Manuscript Collection No. 653: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0653/>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Ben Zion Wacholder Papers Manuscript Collection No. 829: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0829/>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Alexander Guttman Papers Manuscript Collection No. 663: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0663/>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Werner Weinberg Papers Manuscript Collection No. 668: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0668/>> (9 April 2013).

David Weisberg, Society of Biblical Literature Forum Archive: Matitiah Tsevat 1913- 2010 <<http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=866>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Alvin Jay Reines Papers Manuscript Collection No. 786: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0786/>> (9 April 2013).

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion online faculty directory <<http://huc.edu/faculty/faculty/rivkin.shtml>> (9 April 2013).

A Finding Aid to the Eugene Mihaly Papers Manuscript Collection No. 739: Biographical Sketch <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0739/>> (9 April 2013).

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 15 September 1998 <<http://huc.edu/news/mirsky.html>> (9 April 2013).

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 2002 <<http://huc.edu/newspubs/pressroom/2002/wernerpr.shtml>> (9 April 2012).

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion News Center, 2012 <<http://huc.edu/news/article/2012/huc-jir-mourns-the-death-of-cantor-william-sharlin-zl>> (9 April 2012).

The Chronicle: HUC-JIR/LA Historical Timeline 1947-2002 <<http://huc.edu/chronicle/60/latimeline.shtml>> (9 April 2012)

HUC-JIR Four Centers of Learning: New York <<http://huc.edu/about/center-ny.shtml>> (9 April 2013).

American Conference of Cantors, Biography of Stephen Richards <<http://www.accantors.org/acc/files/Stephen%20Richards%20bio.pdf>> (9 April 2013).

*Celebrating the life and music of Bonia Shur*, 23 September 2012 <<http://americanisraelite.com/archives/20337>> (9 April 2013).

Assaf Shelleg, "Israeli Art Music: A Reintroduction" *Israel Studies* 17(3) (Fall 2012): 119-149 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/israelstudies.17.3.119>> (12 October 2012).