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HUGO WEISGALL, A JEWISH MODERNIST

EMILY WIGOD

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Investiture for the Cantorate

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music
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Advisor: Dr. Mark Kligman

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Introduction

To claim Hugo Weisgall as "one of our own", a Jewish composer, might seem problematic to some. Not much has been written on Weisgall in the context of Jewish music. Unlike many other Jewish composers, he did not attempt to compose a complete musical service until quite late in life. More importantly, he rarely attempted to incorporate "Jewish tunes" or *nusach hatefila*, even into the music he composed that others might specifically designate as "Jewish." His earlier style has been considered a fusion of nontonal neoclassicism with certain influences from the Second Viennese School, such as Alban Berg, and his later music as more closely approaching the Second Viennese School. In terms of style, Weisgall described his own approach thus, "Generally my music is considered complex....It is texturally thick and multifarious; rhythmically disparate; and [it] has harmonic lines that move all on their own. It is what is commonly called atonal, but it is not nonmelodic."[1]

Indeed, although he was chairman of the cantorial program at the Jewish Theological Seminary for over forty years, according to its archivist, the Seminary has nothing in its archives on Weisgall. "As you know," he wrote me, "he (Weisgall) was mostly a secular composer." (Interestingly, much of the information for this paper was received through the Milken Archive, also an arm of the Jewish Theological Seminary.)

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[1]Levin, Neil W. (2006). Program Notes for Hugo Weisgall's *Esther* [Recorded by Julia Gondek, Ted Christopher, Seattle Symphony; Gerard Schwarz, conductor] in *Jewish Operas, Volume 2* [CD recording 8.559450]. Canada, Naxos. [CD recording LC 05537] New York, Milken Archive of American Jewish Music.

Many have observed that he seemed to keep his classical music world and his Jewish role completely separate.

There is an explicit assumption of assimilation here. In *Bloch, Schoenberg and Bernstein*, David Schiller examines the topic of assimilation in Jewish art music of the 20th Century. He observes that simply by being in a concert genre Jewish music assimilates into Western tradition.[2] This means that any piece of Jewish art music "assimilates" to a certain extent. He recognizes that having the definition of Jewish music include the contribution of the Jewish composer within surrounding non-Jewish society can be problematic because " the notion of art music is alien to a communal tradition in which music and prayer are linked."[3] Also, in considering a Jewish American composer, one needs to consider how not just Jewish music but also Judaism itself affect the composer's body of work. One needs to consider how secular cultural and political context affect a composer with deep European roots—e.g. text, language and social structure and how does this then shape Jewish music.[4] How does one become part of the American collectivity without giving up Jewish identity?[5]

On the subject of his Jewish identity, Weisgall says,

> There was never any question of the fact that I was Jewish. The degree to which that colors my life has probably changed over the course of the years. But I think the line has consistently been that I don't feel a conflict between my Jewishness and anything else, that's the point. I was always able to function Jewishly in my own way, without ever feeling any conflict. I don't... though I sometimes used to laugh and say, "Gee I were wish I were part of the majority," but I knew perfectly well that I didn't mean that. But I... there is no conflict. That I feel, that I am aware

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[2] David Schiller, *Bloch, Schoenberg and Bernstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

[3] Ibid., 3.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Ibid., 5.

> of. Now, I do find it strange that I perhaps am not making more Jewish works, the way so many of my colleagues have. But I just haven't. I haven't written that many works. And if someone asks me, "What are your Jewish works?" And I say, "Well practically everything I do is Jewish, because I'm ipso facto Jewish." That's all. It's nothing else I think about. I've never had a quarrel with it. I've never blamed my lack of success or misfortune on the fact that I was Jewish.[6]

Weisgall considers his work to be Jewish because he was a Jew. However, he has not composed much "Jewish music". The reason he has not composed, for example, more works for synagogue, is that he knew that his style was not likely to be accepted, and his sense of identity is too strong to be compromised. One interviewer describes the problem here.

> He has done some psalm settings, but, he points out ruefully, 'That's commercial stuff which unfortunately doesn't get sold. I'd like to do a big synagogue service, but I won't write it unless someone commissions it and guarantees a performance, because my music isn't that easy.[7]

Albert Weisser observed that there was a universal plane in Weisgall's non-Jewish works" death, alienation, terror, anxiety, fear and trembling, and moral desolation, which finds special force when viewed as the Jewish condition in the first half of the Twentieth Century.[8] Indeed, the concept of "creative alienation" as a specifically Jewish response to modern times had been developed by Eugene Borowitz. He described the American Reform Jews of the 1960s as "no longer infatuated with the mode of the American 'melting pot'." He defined creative alienation as implying "sufficient

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[6]Hugo Weisgall, "Interview with Hugo Weisgall", interview by Neil Levin with Deborah and Jonathan Weisgall, 1995, video interview transcript, Milken Family Foundation, Santa Monica California.

[7]"Composer Scores Esther Back to Life at City Opera", *The Forward*, December 6, 1993, p.19.

[8] Albert Weisser, "Jewish Music in Twentieth Century America: Four Representative Figures" (Ph.D. diss..The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980), 1-2.

withdrawal from our society to judge it critically, but also the will and flexibility to keep finding and trying ways of correcting it.....Jewishness offers a unique means of maintaining such creative alienation."[9]

For Weisgall, Modernism, in both form and content, was the technique by which he achieved creative alienation. "Modernism" has had a long and varied history, but almost all of its different incarnations could apply to Weisgall. The term started in the 19th Century with Richard Wagner, who coined the term to say that music has a purpose beyond itself in direct contrast to a definition of "modern" as "a cheap concession to popular and philistine taste." Modernist art had a redemptive quality that countered what Wagner defined as "modern"—those who try to exploit the spiritually corrupt aspects of modern life. Modernism at mid-century gained a new sense: to signify the revolutionary avant garde that rejects historical models and tries to penetrate beyond the surface—experimenting with form, tonality and orchestration to evoke new qualities of contemporary culture and society. [10]

In the Twentieth Century, Modernism came to imply that art reflects the logic of history. What is novel becomes dominant, but then is ultimately superceded, so that success with an established audience is not a criterion of aesthetic merit. Normative expectations regarding beauty in sound and timbre and meaning in musical expression were confronted. Alternatives to tonality were explored. The typical audience was seen as addicted to art as comforting entertainment and affirmation, unable and unwilling to

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[9] Eugene Borowitz, *The Masks Jews Wear: The Self-Deceptions of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 209.

[10] Leon Botstein, "Modernism, §1; Origins", *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press: 2007); available from http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html?section=music.40625.1; Internet; accessed 09 October 2007.

confront the transformative power and ethical character of true musical art. Especially after WWI there was a deepened impulse to use art for protest and criticism. Artists explicitly distorted traditional expectations to create an art that responded to the irrationality and cruelty of contemporary life.[11]

Here is a comparison between what Weisgall says about Modernism, and how David Schiller presents it. In response to a question, about how he defines Modernism, Weisgall says.

> ... I mean, it's not romantic. Romantic in the traditional nineteenth-century sense of the word. It takes into account what has gone on in the 20th century-- the violence, the hatred, the extreme...I mean, I can go down the list. *The Tenor* has this insane quality of a man killing...of a man killing his mistress or of the man's mistress dying. Then he steps over [her] and goes out. Now that's one bit of violence that occurs only at the end, but it does color the whole work.[12]

So here Weisgall sees Modernism in contrast to what has gone before it. Schiller presents Modernism as defined by Lyotard, " Nostalgic aesthetic of the sublime—the unpresentable put forth only as the missing contents, but the form because of its recognizable consistency continues to offer the listener solace or pleasure." [13] For example, as a Modernist work, Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw* has formal presentation (adherence to twelve tone structure) and an inherently unpresentable subject—the Holocaust. Similarly, In Weisgall's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the characters discuss the unpresentability of their own subject matter (incest, prostitution, child murderers, etc.) in a work that could at times be described as beautiful.

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[11] Leon Botstein, "Modernism, § 3: Aesthetic Aspects", *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press: 2007); available from http://www.grovemusic.com/shared/views/article.html/section=music.40625.3; Internet; Accessed 09 October 2007.

[12] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

[13] Schiller, 6.

By contrast, postmodernism puts forward the unpresentable in presentation, but "denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable....imparts a stronger sense of the unpresentable." For example, in Bernstein's Kaddish, he disrupts "good form" by mixing conventions in order to refer to the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Holocaust in the same breath.[14]

So Weisgall insists on the grandeur of Modernism whereas Bernstein seems to be saying that grand statements can no longer be made. And this seems to apply to the way Weisgall saw his Judaism:

> Now, certainly, I am not what is normally called an observant Jew. I am, however, a very committed Jew, and I find that a great strength. And a great... a large source of that which I do as a human being is that Jewishness. Now, what it is besides tradition, tolerance? It's a commitment, it's an acceptance of 5,000 years of Jewish history that I have voluntarily taken upon myself, and which I feel.[15]

It seems that that strength, grandeur, and persistence is similar to the way critics have described his operas:

> At a time when post-modernist taste is dominant and nostalgia and eclecticism rule, Mr. Weisgall's uncompromising modernism, his acidic melancholy and muscular dissonances make a compelling case for difficult music used for difficult purposes.... [*Esther*'s score's] power is unmistakeable.[16]

> It is generally felt that he has never received the recognition he is due. In all probability this is because of the style to which he has adhered for his entire career—a steely, uncompromising atonality....Weisgall's undoubted dramatic sense and the fluidity of his writing do contribute to a musical flow which if hieratic rather than immediate suffuses the score

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[14] Ibid., 7.

[15] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

[16] Edward Rothstein, "Esther Lives in Modern Musical Terms" in *The New York Times*, December 11, 1993, p.30.

with a sort of brilliance that is both bracing and uplifting.[17]

Schiller talked about the musicians he studied in their relationship to the Holocaust and how it determined their form. He says that with *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Schoenberg linked the survival of modernism with Jewish survival after the Holocaust. Certainly, the Holocaust did not define Weisgall as a Jew, but it did stimulate a resurgence of his activity as a composer to Jewish texts, particularly with *The Golden Peacock*. When he wrote *The Golden Peacock*, a classical setting of Yiddish popular tunes, it was in order not to give Hitler a posthumous victory—he wanted this music to survive through him. Thus the act of harmonizing Yiddish tunes in a modernist style in a post-modern, post-Holocaust period, argued for the survival of both.

Weisgall had derided the concept that using "Jewish" elements, like taking tunes from a Jewish anthology, necessarily made a piece "Jewish". A composer could take a "Jewish" element, but in order for a piece to be Jewish, it had to be qualitatively good. In Weisgall's case, it was his perspective itself that helped define his music as Jewish. In the thesis I will show how Weisgall used Modernism and assimilation to create a uniquely Jewish perspective in his music.

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[17] P.J.S .,"A Christmans Wreath" in *Opera News*, December 25, 1993.

Chapter One: Hugo Weisgall's Life

Hugo Weisgall was born in Moravia, in the village of Ivançiçe, on October 13, 1912. Moravia was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is now in the Czech Republic.

> My earliest memory of myself is singing in the choir on Yom Kippur in the year 1915...and...my great-uncle, Uncle Baeche, had received a telegram that day saying that his son was missing in action. And...Rosaneni, my great aunt, never left the house again. But that's my first memory of myself—in the synagogue, singing 'Omnam Kein—Ki Hine Kahmomer.[18]

On both sides of his family, Hugo came from four generations of cantors.[19] His mother was born in Vaguihey, Hungary and was intelligent and cultured. She encouraged her son to strive for intellectual horizons. [20] Her family had been a well-known Jewish family and had been good friends of Theodore Herzl. Lady's father had been a teacher in a gymnasium, very good in languages, and also a graduate of the most famous rabbinical school in Germany—the Hildesheimer in Berlin, and Hugo's grandmother was descended from the Chatam Sofer, the famous rabbi from Bratislava.[21] Hugo's father, Abba Josef, had been born in 1885 in the town of Kikel in Poland where the Jewish settlement dated to the 16th Century. Abba's father had been attached to Hasidic beliefs and practices, and Abba became well-known as an extremely charismatic

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[18] Hugo Weisgall, "Interview with Hugo Weisgall", interview by Neil Levin with Deborah and Jonathan Weisgall, 1995, video interview transcript, Milken Family Foundation, Santa Monica California.

[19] Albert Weisser, "Jewish Music in Twentieth Century America: Four Representative Figures" (Ph.D. diss.,The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980), 2.

[20] Ibid., 3

[21] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

and devoted cantor.[22] He was a very talented composer of synagogue music as well and gave markedly individual renderings of traditional synagogue song. [23]

Abba sang with provincial opera companies in his youth and later became proficient in German lieder. Hugo remarks on the transition of young Abba from itinerant singer, traveling with a light opera company, to cantor:

> And he, being a nice Jewish boy, he always got himself a meal for Friday night, and obviously went to the cantor of...whatever places they were in, and that's how....He became a cantor because that was something that he knew how to do.[24]

Hugo's parents met at the home of Uncle Bacche, Lady's uncle. Lady had left home, according to Hugo, because her mother treated her unfairly and did not send her to school with the other children in the family. Uncle Bacche was the cantor in Ivancice, and they met when Abba became the assistant cantor there. They all became very close. Abba was away fighting in WWI from when Hugo was 2 ½ until he was six, and Uncle Bacche became a father figure to him at that time. Bacche's family knew Sulzer, and he gave Hugo what was said to be Sulzer's tuning fork. Hugo sang in the choir, which was mixed, and used a female, non-Jewish organist from whom he started taking piano lessons when he was five. They sang Sulzer, Lewandowski, Naumberg, Levy, etc. and Abba took all of this music with him to the States. This intense Jewish and Jewish musical background must have given young Hugo a strong sense of identity, but also a certain amount of pressure to make his mark in the world and to be a leader in some way. He would become first and foremost an artistic composer, but this grounding in Jewish music could not fail to influence him to compose synagogue music as well.

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

Deborah Weisgall described Ivançiçe as "an extraordinarily beautiful place....and a valley, with gentle green hills coming up on either side....the synagogue was large and golden, with great limestone blocks."[25] There was just one small synagogue in the town which was, by Weisgall family reckonings, three hours north of Vienna and two hours south of Prague. The primary language is and was Czech, but all the Jews spoke German "except those who tried to be very patriotic and speak Czech."[26] According to Hugo, his native language was German, his mother's was Hungarian, and his father probably spoke Yiddish as a child, but soon forgot it. The children were taught in German because when Hugo started school, the country was Austria, and that was the official language of the government, but all the peasants spoke Czech. When Czechoslovakia became an independent country, "I was in a German school one day, and the next day, I was in a Czech school."[27] This multi-linguality would later cause Hugo, growing up in the States to have a sense of being from everywhere and nowhere. He would be conscious of the freedom and possibility in the States, but his background of other cultures would contribute to would cause him to be somewhat removed, to criticize and analyze Twentieth Century culture.

The family emigrated to the States in 1920, when Hugo was almost 8. His father had wanted to emigrate before 1918, but became the last of his family to do so because of Lady's ties to Ivançiçe. [28] One assumes that this would have been both through Uncle

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Alfred Balkin, "The Operas of Hugo Weisgall" (Ed. D. diss, Columbia University: 1968),11.

Bacche and Abba, as respectively Cantor and Assistant Cantor of the only synagogue in Ivançiçe. At first they stayed in the Bronx with Abba's father and then moved to Newark with an uncle. Evidently this period of time was Abba's last attempt at an operatic career, and Hugo said he did not remember even going to synagogue during that time.[29] In 1921, Lady, Hugo, and Hugo's younger brother, Freddy, jointed Abba in Baltimore, where he became cantor of Chizuk Amuno, where he would remain for the next half-century. Hugo himself spent over 20 years of his adult life devoted to Baltimore's cultural development. It was not until 1960, after the critical success of his opera, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, that he would leave Baltimore permanently.[30]

He was evidently a very independent youngster, who didn't like being told what to do, yet the very things he rebelled against would later become staples of his character. His mother's family had also emigrated to the States, according to Hugo, his maternal grandfather,

> thought I was very impolite. He said he objected to the fact that when I came into the room, I did not go up to the ladies' hands and pick up them, and kiss them on the wrist.... Well, I just didn't do it....it was an act of revolt. And my grandfather didn't mind telling me that he thought I was a bastard. He was very nasty."[31]

It was paradoxical that later he would say he felt more at home in the 19th Century, and would have fond memories of kissing Queen Elizabeth's hand (although he knocked something down backing up on the way out.)[32] Similarly, he recalls his father "forcing me to listen to music I did not like." He recalls lying on the floor and kicking his feet in response to an early recording of Stravinsky's Firebird Suite. His father felt that

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[29] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[30] Balkin,13.
[31] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[32] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

Hugo, "did not have the right not to listen."[33] At another time, he came back to Europe before the Anschluss. Laws were being enforced again the Jews. Evidently there was a bench Jews were not allowed to sit on, and he shocked his European cousins by sitting on it and saying "No, I'm an American. I don't have to pay attention to this."[34]

Hugo had always been interested in conducting and formed his own orchestra at fifteen. He wrote his own orchestral transcription of Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto in G Minor* because he couldn't find one available, although he had only seen the piano score and hadn't seen many orchestral scores. He also conducted children's groups and choruses without any technical training. His last year of high school, he successfully took the place of the teacher to conduct the high school orchestra.[35] This talent for leadership, had earlier (and perhaps throughout his life) manifested itself as a certain amount of bossiness. In response to a question about whether he had been "feisty or caustic" as a youngster (as he had been as an adult) he replied, "same way I'm sure.....I was a bit of a tyrant with my friends....Two boys were Reform Jews and I tried to convert Jewry, convert'em back. So I made 'em get down on their knees and swear that they were going to become good, God-fearing...."[36] His bossiness as a youngster would become the positive source for his social criticism once he reached adulthood.

Weisgall has said, "I consider myself a theatrical composer from the word, 'go'."[37] He is known for the literary merit of his compositions and for serious attention to

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[33] Balkin, 13.
[34] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[37] Weisser, 1.

dramatic detail.[38] He had liked to act, even as a child. "As a boy of ten or eleven he involved all the children of his neighborhood in a play he had invented dealing with the 'Knights of the Round Table', himself as King Arthur."[39] As a youth, he had acted in small repertory groups. He was the Rabbi H. Levick's play, *The Golem*. During the summers he conducted Gilbert and Sullivan and frequently appeared in the productions in leading roles—which he loved to do. He was a better singer than actor. At Hopkins, he played the title role in Strindberg's *The Father*. "And I was so good that when they reviewed the play, they didn't mention me."[40] He also appeared as the Umpire in the 1961 New York stage premiere of William Schuman's *The Mighty Casey*, for which he directed the stage action as well.

In 1928, when Hugo was a high school senior at Baltimore City College, he won the Boise Memorial Harmony Scholarship—a three year composition scholarship to Peabody Conservatory of Music. It was for a symphonic poem based on Goethe's *Dance of Death*. He was already enrolled in Peabody Preparatory Department and studying piano with Florette Gorfine and beginning harmony with Louis Cheslok. At the conservatory, he studied with Alexander Skalarvsky. He had problems at Peabody, "I never got along very well."[41] The Director Otto Ortmann, would not let Weisgall matriculate for the Artists' Diploma because, according to Ortmann, Weisgall had no

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[38] Neil W. Levin and Bruce Saylor, Program Notes for *Hugo Weisgall: T'kiatot: Rituals for Rosh Hashana, Psalm of the Distant Dove, Four Choral Etudes, A Garden Eastward*, [Recorded by Seattle Symphony: Gerard Schwartz, conductor: Ana Maria martinez, soprano; Kristen Okerlund, piano; BBC Singers; Avner Itai, conductor; Phyllis Bryn-Julson, soprano; Barcelona Symphony/National Orchestra of Catalonia; Jorge Mester, conductor] Naxos 8.559425, Milken Archive LC 05537, 2004. Compact Disc.

[39] Weisser, 8.

[40] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

[41] Balkin, 14.

talent and should try to do something else. Weisgall says he didn't write for a couple of years after, "cause I no longer had any faith in myself as a composer."[42] However, it could not have been that long of a hiatus, because in 1931, he won the Bearns Prize in composition at Columbia University for *Four Songs*.

Hugo's father was always very important in encouraging him in his musical pursuits, particularly in the larger world of classical music.

> And I showed my father these songs. He said, 'Send them along.' 'Oh, it's lousy stuff. It's not good enough. I'm not gonna send it along....They were sent along....And one Saturday afternoon, I was at Hopkins, and I looked in my mailbox, and there was this letter telling me that I had won the Beerens Prize....and my father almost died of delight....and the same thing happened when I got Phi Beta Kappa....except it was a Saturday afternoon, and in the heat of the day, he started to walk out to Hopkins, to be sure that I got notice of the Beerens Prize.[43]

Throughout the 1930s, Hugo was quite busy. Concurrently, he studied at Peabody, in Baltimore, at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, was a synagogue music conductor and choral conductor in Baltimore, and also studied in New York as well. While at Peabody, he was an undergrad history major at Johns Hopkins (1929-31). This ended when the department refused to accept his dissertation, "The Golden Legend, Jacobus Voragine." Without a BA, he was accepted as a grad student in the German language department of Johns Hopkins University graduate school. This resulted in his dissertation, "Primitivism and Related Ideas in 17th Century German Lyric Poetry", which was accepted, but not published, in 1940.[44] According to Albert Weisser, his scholarly pursuits in an area so far afield from music were stimulated to a large degree by an ongoing Jewish tradition which recognized intellectual distinction for its own sake as a

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[42] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Balkin, 20.

very high desideratum.[45] It is very likely that the impetus to achieve academically came from Lady, who was less impressed with his musical credentials and would have preferred higher social standing for her son. Typical of Hugo, however, his thesis subject, the cult of Marianism would be one liable to irk his parents, in particular, his pious mother.

All during this time, his father was the cantor at Chizuk Amuno in Baltimore, at that time, the most important conservative synagogue in the city. According to Hugo, Abba did a lot of pastoral work and life cycle services, bar mitzvah tutoring, etc. He wrote a *drash* every week and his children typed it out. Hugo was a boy alto from the inception of Abba's tenure there. They sang the Central European classic choral repertoire. Abba had very high musical standards, but also high liturgical ones—nothing (Halevy is cited as an example) was sung that didn't suit the liturgy. "My father wouldn't permit that."[46] During the Depression, his father's salary was cut and he had to sell tickets for the High Holidays to make more money. "And the rabbi didn't do anything, my father did it all. Worked like a dog."[47] Getting a view of clerical life from the inside could only add to the budding social critic's view of Jewish laity, and the function of institutional Judaism in general.

In 1932 he asked Lazar Saminsky, then Director of the League of Composers in New York, about studying with Arnold Schoenberg. Saminsky suggested Roger Sessions. In 1933, went to New York to meet Sessions, and they continued as student and teacher until almost the beginning of WWII. He wrote little music for Sessions. He

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[45] Weisser, 8.
[46] Interview
[47] Ibid.

learned about Stravinsky and Sessions' concept of music and styles. "Sessions showed me many great things about music although I wrote very little because I realized how little I knew."[48] Weisgall always admired his work and knowledge, and has been a friend for many years. Sessions etched an indelible mark on Weisgall's direction as a composer.[49]

During the 1930s, Weisgall was the musical director of Har Sinai Temple and wrote a lot of music, most of which has been lost. He conducted the all male Meyerbeer Singing Society, which then became the mixed voice Shirah: Society for the Advancement of Jewish Music. In 1935, they gave a performance of Salomone Rossi, two choruses from Jacob Weinberg's new opera, *Hechalutz*, *Three Palestinian Songs* by Weisgall, and the first performance in the United States of Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh*.

During this time, he wrote 3 dance works: *Art Appreciation* (1936), *The Quest* (1938) and *One Thing is Certain* (1938). All were in manuscript and then withdrawn by the composer. He also wrote two one acts: Night (1932), after a play by Sholem Asch, and Lilith (1934) after a play by Elman. According to Weisser, "Combining two of his deepest concerns, opera and Jewish music, he groped to invent nothing less than a new Jewish opera form."[50] Weisser posits that Weisgall would have developed more in the Jewish musical arena if there had been more of a native Jewish musical theater in the States at that time.

Weisgall considered the two one acts to be Straussian in concept. The style he described as a "combination of Puccini and Tchaikovsky, in our terms, relatively

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[48] Balkin,16.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Weisser, 11.

conservative."[51] In 1945, he played *Lilith* for Otto Luening and Douglas Moore, both of whom were impressed, and did not know why he had not been able to have it produced.

Weisser shows how Weisgall's Jewish music in the 30s moved to a more Modernist style. The *Mi Chamocha* (1934) uses the declamatory style of Bloch with 4ths and 5ths, as well as the choral sonorities of Lazare Saminsky. *K'felach Harimon* (1935) was an a capella setting of a Yemenite melody for SATB which incorporated subtle awareness of Near Eastern performance practices as rendered by Western musicians. And of *Yihyu L'Ratzon* (1935, rev. 1950), Weisser says, "Surely no composer before Weisgall had written Jewish liturgical music in such and advanced style....may be viewed as stemming from the highest type of cantorial utterances with harmonic and contrapuntal devices emanating from the 20th Century." Weisgall had originally composed the *Yihyu* as harmony exercise for Roger Sessions. So during this time, he was gradually proceeding toward a different musical identity.

He was sympathetic to the populism of Copland, Harris, and Thomson, etc. but he belonged to the generation after.[52] As opposed to nationalism, he was influenced by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartok, and Sessions. He incorporated jazz (as in the aria, "A Quiet Room" from *Six Characters*), and popular and traditional songs as parody or to create psychological association or atmosphere —but this was never meant to be central. His borrowing helped to reinforce the Modernist text.

Despite his high level of musical activity and academic achievement, he was constantly frustrated during the 1930s. He traveled constantly between Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia for his studies. He took a room in New York for a short time and

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[51] Balkin, 16.
[52] Weisser, 12.

worked with an opera company under Kurt Baum, but was unable to make a living and had to return to Baltimore. "I always had a job, and always had to make a living. I constantly hunted for the big chance which somehow or another escaped me. I couldn't make a living at one thing, and I kept hoping something would click—in Baltimore. It didn't."[53]

In December, 1941, Weisgall enlisted. He was soon assigned to Camp Ritchie for military intelligence training, partially due to his fluency in French, German, Italian, and some Czech. He rose through all enlisted ranks except master sergeant, and was commissioned as second lieutenant. He became an intelligence specialist—Assistant military Attaché to Allied Governments in Exile and was stationed in London.

Paradoxically, his military time helped his musical career blossom. It was a wonderful time for the Weisgalls. Hugo had married Nathalie Schulman while on leave in 1942, and Deborah would be born in 1947 (their son, Jonathan, was born in 1949, after they had returned to the States.) As an enlisted man, he was part of the Intelligence Department of the Governments in Exile, and became very effective at parlaying his many connections into musical opportunities. After being commissioned, he became an intelligence officer, and gathered "stories which were either true or not true....For instance, when I had lunch with the Queen of Belgium, and she told me all about her son, and how he really wasn't a Nazi, and was not a collaborator. But some difficult circumstances—she would tell me the story...."[54] She was interested in music and came to Hugo's concerts. Hugo wrote letters home to his family saying that he worked hard, partied a lot, and wrote a lot of music. He belonged to the Churchill Club, "it was an

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[53] Balkin, 20.
[54] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

elitist club....you had to have something special to be asked to join....it (London) was a fantastic society: Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, Britten, C.S. Lewis, everybody."[55] He met most of them, and kissed Queen Elizabeth's hand.

He promoted American music, and featured American works. The BBC Symphony under Weisgall performed his largest purely orchestral piece, *Overture in F—American Comedy Overture*. He conducted extensively in London with the London Philharmonic and London Symphony. Through connections with Marc Blitzstein, he became conductor of the United States Army Negro Choir, which toured throughout England and presented the European premieres of Earl Robinson's *Ballad for Americans* and Marc Blitzstein's *Freedom Morning*. He also guest conducted opera companies and orchestras in Belgium and Prague, introducing the work of Roger Sessions, Aaron Copland, William Schuman, Roy Harris, David Diamond, Walter Piston, Paul Creston, and Henry Cowell. In London he discovered an anthology of war poetry which inspired *Soldier Songs*.

Weisgall's sense of identification and loss regarding the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust was something that could be sensed in his work, in the dark topics he chose and the complicated, Modernist form wherein he chose to express himself. But in day to day relations, he seems to have had a more detached, ironic tone, as expressed here,

> When the leader of the Jews in London committed suicide, we knew that things were really bad....he wrote a note saying, 'You've done so little for us, there no...it's not worthwhile living. I am killing myself.' We had intelligence reports. But you couldn't tell. Because I swear, they made up the intelligence reports on the first floor and sent 'em up to the second."[56]

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

This contrasts strongly with the way Deborah Weisgall remembers her father telling her about going back to Ivançiçe after the war:

> "I went back after the war. Just after the war in 1945....I went back to look for my family, to see if anybody was left." My father swallowed. I wished he wouldn't go on. "Nobody was. Of course. The Nazis had used the shul for a stable. They had emptied it out, all the seats, the ark, all the silver, the Torahs. It was filthy; it stank; the floor was strewn with straw. And nobody knew what had happened. Nobody. Nobody would tell me what had happened to the Jews. Nobody even admitted that they remembered who they were. I asked for people by name, and it was as if they had not existed."[57]

During the immediate postwar years, Weisgall used his military diplomatic position to help many refugees and German concentration camp survivors. Without the approval of his superior officer, and at the risk of serious reprimand or worse, he ordered a delay in the sealing of certain Czech border areas so that as many people as possible would not be permanently trapped behind Communist lines.[58]

After the war, he declined several offers for permanent conducting posts in Europe. He founded and directed the Chamber Society of Baltimore and the Hilltop Opera Company, directed the Baltimore Institute of Musical Arts, and taught at Johns Hopkins University from 1951-7, all the while continuing to work with synagogue choirs. Most important to him was his forty-four year involvement with the Jewish Theological Seminary.[59]

Hugo comments wryly on his initial perceptions of the position. "It was talked up as being a serious academic job. And here I thought I was gonna have a conservatory or

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[57] Weisgall, Deborah. *A Joyful Noise: Claiming the Songs of My Fathers*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999.

[58] Levin and Saylor, 4.

[59] Ibid., 5.

something."[60] He then found out that it was only one half day a week. Typical of Weisgall, he put much more into it than that. He established and pushed through the curriculum. From its opening in 1952 until his own retirement in 1996, he was chairman of the faculty. He was the de facto co-director especially with regard to musical as opposed to Jewish guidelines. Hugo wanted to institute a broad worldview of music and a wider view of what the cantor should know and do.. He decided to make it more than a conservatory type training, and instituted an Ethnomusicology department. "I insisted on, first of all, that we teach comparative nusach. And that we do these ethnomusicology things, and that we make the students believe that it's ...more than getting up on a Friday night or Saturday and davenning the service." He fought to hire and retain Johanna Spector, an ethnomusicologist who had collected an archive of thousands of recordings of Jews from very varied backgrounds.

Weisgall wanted to emphasize the high culture of Western music in the curriculum. "The idea was to train not only a hazzan, but a good musician, with some knowledge of the general repertoire, like lieder and (?). Not necessarily opera. But also to know that there's such a thing as chamber music, but not to let it bother you too much."[61] He encountered a lot of opposition. One of his interviewers mentions that he had seen a huge amount of Hugo's correspondence devoted to planning and thinking about the school. He also gave lectures on Jewish music throughout the 1950s and '60s. In additions, he taught graduate level composition and was doctoral dissertation advisor for Herman Berlinski and Miriam Gideon.

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[60] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[61] Ibid.

Recognition in the States was hard for Weisgall. Retrospectively, he wished he had stayed in Europe.[62] He had received many conducting offers before he left Europe. He would have had an instrument not only for concerts, but also recording. It was not until the premier of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in 1959 that he began to get the kind of recognition he deserved, and not until the 1993 New York City Opera premier of *Esther* that he received his greatest critical success. Yet he was surprisingly prolific for a modern opera composer, and wrote eight operas with enormous breadth of vision, musical invention, theatrical excitement and contrast of subject matter. He created a musical theater of ideas personified in living characters. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Athalia* and *Nine Rivers from Jordan* can be considered a trilogy—they are couched in universal terms, but relevant to Jewish historical and existential boundaries.[63] The thematic material of *Six Characters*-- ambivalence, illusion, and reality—echoes the ongoing Jewish problem of self-identity and authenticity. [64] The libretto for his fifth mature opera, *Athalia* (1964) was adapted from Racine's biblical tragedy and includes texts drawn form the Psalms and a synagogue chant is used as a cantus firmus toward the end. [65] It is a contemporary exegesis with political, social, and moral gravity. It could be considered a *midrash* on Biblical text.[66] His next opera, *Nine Rivers from Jordan* (1968), dealt with issues pertaining to the Holocaust, collective guilt, the collapse of the European order, Zionism and the state of Israel and theological conceptions. The score drew on many aspects of Weisgall's personal musical and religious experience, and at

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[62] Balkin, 23.
[63] Weisser, 15.
[64] Weisser, 16.
[65] Levin and Saylor, 5.
[66] Weisser, 16.

one point incorporated a well-known Pesach melody.[67] In another place, he used a melody for *Shir Hamaalot*.[68] According to Weisgall, *Nine Rivers* "attempts to deal with the unprecedented problems caused by the circumstances of the Second World War."[69] In response to being asked if it could be seen as a Jewish opera, Weisgall responded,

> ....that's what it is. I'm sure the librettist, Denis Johnston, who is an Irish Protestant, didn't think of it that way, but then he couldn't have known what I would do with it. O yes, I know it was Jewish....I deliberately influenced the writing of the libretto....I don't think it an accident that perhaps the most sympathetic character is (Master Sergeant) Abe Goldberg....[70]

Weisgall was known to say that in order for a piece to be considered "Jewish music" it had to be "good music". With *The Golden Peacock*, he effectively achieved this end. The Golden Peacock is a setting of seven mostly Yiddish folksongs. Weisgall used the original melodies as a starting point for a sophisticated art song cycle that presents Yiddish folk music within a 20th Century, Modernist frame of reference. Chromatic piano parts are derived from motivic details of the tunes and the vocal line is treated in order to retain the basic substance within the context of contemporary musical vocabulary and expressionist dissonance.[71] It has been compared to Bartok's Hugarian songs and Britten's English songs.

Weisgall rarely quoted cantillation or prayer modes, although he was completely fluent in them, having sung in the choir as a child, becoming music director at his father's Conservative synagogue in his youth, and frequently functioning as a cantor as well. He would take Jewish songs he found interesting—*Maoz Tzur, Amar Rabbi Akiva, Eli Tzion,*

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[67] Levin and Saylor, 5.
[68] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[69] Ibid., 16
[70] Weisser, 16.
[71] Levin and Saylor, 5.

and would frequently use familial melodies composed by or associated with his forbears and incorporate them into the musical texture.[72] *A Garden Eastward* (1952), with text by Moses ibn Ezra is a symphony for voice and orchestra that incorporated some of these melodies on a grander scale.

Weisgall had always wanted to write a service, and had frequently lamented the fact that major Jewish composers were not commissioned to write major Jewish works.[73] He wrote an open-ended series of about a dozen short chamber pieces called, "Graven Images." Weisgall used parts of the music he had written for a 1966 CBS documentary, "Of Heaven and Earth" which dealt with ancient artwork by Jewish artisans. Among them are "Holiday Dances" which refer to Jewish festivals. And one is a Stravinskian setting of Psalm 29 in Hebrew for solo voice (or chorus) and piano.[74]

It was not until the 1980s, that Weisgall was commissioned to write a complete synagogue service, *Evening Liturgies* for Temple Emanu-El in New York. It was to be a Reform Friday evening service according to the Union Prayer Book, scored for baritone cantor, mixed chorus and organ. It turned into a complete debacle, and the work was never performed there. Weisgall states his feelings about this and his problems in writing liturgical music in general:

> Someone said that it was inaccessible and terribly difficult. Well those are two very good reasons (to cancel the performance). And if that's true, there's nothing I can do about it. And I'm not being arrogant, because I really don't want to write things that can't be done. But I am being quite careful as to the texts I select. I try to make it as easy as possible without pandering, and I hope we get some good music out of it....[75]

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[72] Weisser, 16.
[73] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.
[74] Levin and Saylor, 5.

[75] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

The New York City Opera premiere of *Esther* (1993) was Weisgall's greatest critical success and the crowning achievement of his artistic career. In describing the audience response to Weisgall at the curtain calls, Anthony Tommasini wrote, "You would have thought that Verdi had risen from the dead."[76] In the New York Times, Edward Rothstein said, "the composer's triumph could not have been more complete."[77] Rothstein viewed *Esther* as a compelling case for not shying away from difficult music in the service of serious purposes.

By the time of his death in 1997, Hugo Weisgall had garnered a number of honors. He had published articles on American Impressionist painting and contemporary music and composers and lectured widely on Jewish and general musical topics. He had been President of the American Music Center from 1963-73. He had won three Guggenheim fellowships, the Lifetime Achievement Award form Opera America in 19994, and the William Schuman prize form Columbia University, the first award in the arts from the National foundation for Jewish Culture and several honorary doctorates. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1975 and served as its president from 1990-3. He also directed the first term of the composer in residence program of Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1988.[78]

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[76] Levin, Neil W. (2006). Program Notes for Hugo Weisgall's *Esther* [Recorded by Julia Gondek, Ted Christopher, Seattle Symphony; Gerard Schwarz, conductor] in *Jewish Operas, Volume 2* [CD recording 8.559450]. Canada, Naxos. [CD recording LC 05537] New York, Milken Archive of American Jewish Music, 26

[77] Ibid.

[78] Levin and Saylor, 5.

The projects on Weisgall's desk at the time of his death reflected the diversity of his interests: beginnings of a second set of settings of Yiddish folk melodies, operatic versions of two plays by Jean Anouilh, and a new opera based on John Hersey's novel *The Wall*, about the Warsaw Ghetto. He was also sketching out a group of liturgical settings for a conservative service.[79]

[79] Ibid.

Chapter Two: Analysis of Psalm of the Distant Dove—A Canticle in Homage to Sephardi Culture

The *Psalm of the Distant Dove*[80], a song cycle for voice and piano, was commissioned by the Friends of the Library at the Jewish Theological Seminary and was premiered there. It concerns the relationship between God and Israel, as represented by the image of the dove. In Mediterranean literature, doves are associated with lovers, and fidelity, because they do not leave their mates. In the Tanach, the dove is associated with the initial Noahide covenant and God's promise to Noah and all living beings. The cycle alternates three songs called "Preludes" from Song of Songs and *Songs of Songs Raba* with poetry from the Golden Age of Spain. The poetry is taken from three poets: Samuel HaNagid, Yehuda Halevi, and an anonymous poet.[81] In the Modernist framework that Weisgall provides for it, the work illustrates an example of Victor Turner's third phase of Western society, the method of redress.

In his four-phase analysis of culture and ritual, Victor Turner argues social life is characteristically pregnant with social drama, the public breach in the normal working of society. As human beings, we are programmed for cooperation, but prepared for conflict. In the first phase, the drama erupts. In the second phase, cultural modes of understanding assign meaning to the conflict and attempt to cope with it. Turner says that in Western society, phase three, the method of redress, the public way of assessing social behavior, has moved from the realm of law and religion to the arts. Theater probes the weaknesses

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[80] 1992, Theodore Presser.

[81] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982),10.

of the community, calls it leaders to account, portrays conflicts and suggests remedies.[82] It has both the investigative, judgmental and punitive character of law and something of the sacred, supernatural character of religious action.[83] All of Weisgall's works have this quality, but in *Psalm of the Distant Dove*, Weisgall uses a specifically religious format. Instead of society, it is God who is questioned and put on trial.

The song cycle was written in English, with the translation by Raymond P. Scheindlin, a professor of medieval literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Weisgall could have chosen to write it in the original Hebrew, which his initial audience, for the most part, understood. However, as he has said, he is attracted by words, ideas, and drama, and must have felt he could express this most forcefully in English. Despite the fact that he was using historic texts, he wanted to show that what he was saying was of current importance to its American Jewish audience. A theology of absence prevails throughout the *Song of Songs Raba* texts and the Yehuda HaLevi text. Theology of absence is a term used in post-holocaust terminology to describe the terrible things that happen in the world, and particularly, to the Jews, in terms of God's temporary "absence." The Samuel Hanagid text describes circumstances similar to his own: a Jew comfortably living in a secular society, who laments the passing of time and of his friends. Weisgall was in his eighties when the cycle was premiered, and "Elegy", the one instrumental piece, was written in memory of his friend, the well-known composer William Schuman.

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[82] Turner, 11.
[83] Ibid., 12.

The cycle employs a free chromaticism, sometimes lyrical and sometimes extremely biting, characteristic of Weisgall's later works. In almost every song, there will be a brief, poignant entrance of extremely defined tonality, like the remembrance of a forgotten era. The exception is the third piece, which from the entrance of the voice is almost entirely tonal.

The first song text is taken from Song of Songs 2:10-12. In the original Hebrew, it is clear that the speaker is feminine, and the lover spoken to is masculine—"Ana dodi....kumi lach." In English, "My lover called: Rise up my love and come with me." In this way, a perfect equality is ensured in the English that does not exist in the Hebrew, because the verbs do not indicate the gender of the speaker or the lover. In fact, of all Jewish texts, Songs of Songs is perhaps the one that most nearly represents equality between the sexes and valorization both of the female, and of sexuality, which are inextricably linked in classic rabbinic texts, although generally not with a favorable association. The calling to Israel is emphasized: in measure 2 (see Appendix A, p.38), there is a fermata over the word, "called", and then a measure rest before the voice part comes back. Over the next 17 measures, the words, "rise up and come with me" will be stated three times, the last time in measures 20-21 (see p.39) with a clearly tonal, jazzy cadence that underscores the sensuality of the text. The multiple times indicate the importance of the call and the desire of God for Israel. The freshness and constant beat of the music (continuous eighth notes), seems to suggest urgency and beginnings—but the relationship between the lovers suggests a lack of knowledge of sexual difference in English. Martin Buber notes that it is seeing, and therefore, knowledge that is acquired

by Eve, and this is what makes evil possible.[84] So what is abstracted here is the call itself. At the same time, the call is a question, indicated by the dramatic rise of a major seventh for both the singer and pianist on the world "called" in measure 2 (see p.38). The state that is recalled is a *gan eden*, idyllic state, before the knowledge of good and evil, before knowledge of sex, and before knowledge of difference. This is the first text referred to. The second text is the Song of Songs itself. Then the third text is L'cha Dodi, because of its emphasis on "rise up", which implies that Israel is going to be redeemed, or lifted up. In Isaiah's times, it prefigures the return from captivity, and in later times, it also implies a return to Zion, and the idea that despite difficult times, God is going to be faithful to God's side of the covenant. "V'kol hator nishma b'artzeinu"—literally, the voice of the dove is heard in our land is translated as "the doves have come again", and is repeated. The emphasis on the numbers of doves and their returning seems to imply the multiplied hopes of Israel.

Seeing as this work was commissioned by the Friend of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and was first performed there, one can assume certain expectations of the audience. The audience knows that the figure of a dove is associated with the concept of covenant—God's promise not to bring destruction to the earth anymore. The audience also has particular associations with the Song of Songs as both a celebration of sensuality and also as a metaphor for God's relationship with Israel.

In the next piece, "Song", Weisgall uses poetry by Samuel Hanagid, the famous Golden Age poet, statesman and military leader. This poem uses the imagery of Song of

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[84] Laurie Zoloth, "Killer Mothers, Feminist Ethics, and the Problem of Evil" in *Women and Gender in Jewish Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Songs—"Days of cold are past" and "Doves are sighted in the land". The end of winter signifies hope, and the doves again represent faithfulness, but here the relationship celebrated and mourned is one of friendship—one of equals. The speaker pleads with friends to "be true"—in other words, to be like doves. In the first poem, the speaker was called, and invited to "rise up". Here, the speaker is the caller, calling his friends on a lateral plain to come to his aid, "do not fail a friend." The divine call is followed by a human call, that somehow seems more real. It seems to correspond to the feminist "ethics of care"—the friends will respond morally to the representation of a friend in need, not for some abstract conception of moral good, but in response to Levinas' "naked face of the Other". Of course, the speaker is not in desperation, he is inviting his friends to come drink with him. At the end of the song, he alludes to his distress "Wine, red as the tears for friends that are gone."

The third song, "Prelude", is taken from Song of Songs Raba 1:15. Once again, the trope is faithfulness: "The dove knows her mate and never, never changes him for another. Israel know God, knows God as her mate forever, forever, forever." The repetitions of "never" and "forever" hint at some of the rest of the material in Songs of Songs Rabah 1:15 that indicate a very painful, and in fact, abusive relationship that will be indicated later in the song cycle: "As the dove puts forth her neck for slaughter, so does Israel, as it says 'For They sake are we killed all the day' (Ps. 44:23)....Just as the dove, even if its young are taken from it, never abandons its cote, so Israel, although the Temple is destroyed, have not ceased to celebrate three festivals every year." But the song has a very peaceful quality that reflects its chosen words. It is the one piece in the cycle that is entirely tonal from the moment the voice enters (see p.40, measure 6).

In "Song", with text by Judah Halevi, the body of Israel as dove is directly compared to a battered wife. "Her lover hurt her, left her, she might have died". Clearly, Halevi is reacting to the problems of Jewish persecution by both Muslim and Christian authorities during that period. As an officer in the diplomatic corps during WWII, and one who attempted to help fellow Jews find relatives in POW camps after the war, Weisgall must have had similar concerns. He uses Halevi's words to indict an omnipotent God who allows terrible things to happen to innocent, faithful people. The rhythm of the music is slow initially: mostly quarter and dotted quarter notes in the accompaniment to express the sad, stunnedness of the wounded bird. In measure 16 (see p.41) on the word "died, it starts a pattern of 16^{th} notes in the left hand to indicate that the dove is starting to get angry, and in measure 19 (see p.41), the right hand starts using 16^{th} notes as well, to indicate her increasing anger before "she swore she'd never breathe his name again" in measures 21-3 (see p.42). In measure 33-5 (see pp.43-44), there is a status change "whether her lot is shame or glory", which seems to imply that Israel has not yet been "married" to God, and needs a final verdict from him on what the answer will be. Now the plea to "Come God, now" in measures 36-37 (see p.44), is to God, as the accompaniment becomes faster and more punctuated. In the first song, God asked Israel to come, and Israel came. In the second song, the speaker asked his friends to come, and they came. In this song, God is desperately asked to come, but does not.

The next piece, "Elegy" is a piano solo, an elegy for fellow composer, William Schuman, the last in a series of short piano pieces that Weisgall had composed upon the death of friends. The piece is clearly an expression of personal sadness, and seems to

relate back to the earlier Samuel Hanagid piece. It seems to be a respite from the anger to reflect upon personal feeling.

The next piece, "Prelude", is from Song of Songs Raba 1:15 again, and includes the problematic passage: "Birds struggle at the hands of the slaughterer, but the dove puts out her neck to be slaughtered." The piece is not as angry as the Halevi piece, but more mournful. The last words "We are slaughtered all the day, we are slaughtered all the day, all the day" is an ironic echo of the earlier Song of Songs Raba 1:15 quote: "Israel knows God, knows God as her mate forever, forever, forever." Clearly God is not holding up God's side of the covenant.

The text for the final song, "Song", is part of an anonymous Sephardi kina sung on Tisha B'av. It contains reference to the Christian persecutions against Jews in Spain between 1391 and 1412, and contains various biblical references and quotations and in Hebrew is an acrostic spelling out the first name of its author: Benjamin. Here Israel, the faithful dove, is left by God, her father, to die in a trap, separated from her children. The accompaniment moves with driving eighth notes which then seem to pick up and drag the voice like an unwilling victim, when it enters in measure 6 (see p.45). "Oh God" is repeated three times, and the second two (measures 8-9) seem to bounce up and down like a body being dragged upon the road. Israel is completely isolated, prevented from nurturing, unnurtured by God, and in fact, tortured.

In the next image, Israel is seen as a child, who wandered away from her home, her nest, and got lost. She is left to be exposed to the elements—"in the frost of the night, in the heat of the day" (measures 35-39). "You left her, God, you left her, God in the

hands of the beast" (measures 47-52). Nature is not seen as joyful, as it was in the first two songs that quoted Song of Songs and Samuel Hanagid, that mention budding trees and roses. Nature is a threatening force with whom God is complicit. The speaker is tired of the carnage he has witnessed. Nature, and life, becomes something to be endured, not enjoyed :"Summers and winters have come and gone." But still he, like the dove remains faithful: "I bend to his yoke."

In the last stanza, God seems to be imaged as both absent lover, neglectful parent and covenant breaker: "If only she could have the eagles wing [to fly to her lover]...." This is a reference to God's instructions to Moses before covenanting with Israel in Exodus 19:4, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to me." Eagles teach their young to fly by carrying them on their wings for short periods, but God refuses to help the dove in this way, thus it seems that God is not interested in creating or sustaining the covenant. If such a supernatural act could happen, the speaker "would forget my pain."

Interestingly, 29 years earlier, Leonard Bernstein had also written a piece of Jewish art music, also representing the ideas expressed in Songs of Songs and *Song of Songs Raba*, but his narrator come to very different conclusions, according to David Schiller. In this case, the narrator is identifies herself as "Havatzelet ha-Sharon", 'the Rose of Sharon'. Similarly, although *Song of Songs Raba* portrays God's neglect as 'benign', because it is ultimately directed towards Israel's salvation. God's neglect is also portrayed as withholding and potentially violent. Through the course of the script, the speaker decides that the cost of accepting a gendered relationship with God is too high.

She collapses both the gender and the power dichotomy between them. In the Finale, she reconstructs their relationship as one between equals, sharing the work of creation:

> My Image, my Self…
> We are one, after all, you and I:
> Together we suffer, together exist,
> And forever will recreate each other.[85]

Some similar kind of a theological leap is unavailable to the speaker in *Psalm of the Distant Dove*, who remains unhappily faithful to the traditional image of an omnipotent God. In this round of the trial, God stands accused, but the speaker remains with God.

[85] Schiller,141-2.

Conclusion

As I have shown, Hugo Weisgall's work and life were deeply imbued with a sense of Jewish identity and music. He was the son of a famous cantor and descended from a line of many others. He had spent his youth in synagogue choir, and for much of his life was music director of a synagogue. He was perfectly capable of performing as *baal tefila* in a Conservative service and did so on many occasions. Yet even in his works for synagogue and on Jewish texts, he rarely used any recognizably "Jewish" elements.

Because of this, Weisgall's music is defined as "assimilated. One can assimilate into a larger culture, thereby losing one's identity. Assimilation has, in general, been regarded by Jews as a bad thing—at the extreme, there is total absorption within the host culture. Judaism disappears, and assimilation is thus considered a partner in the Holocaust.

David Schiller notes that A.Z. Idelsohn considered the assimilationist tendencies in Jewish music to be an attack on Judaism. Idelsohn felt the Western music was "corrupting Jewish music."[86] On the other hand, Hannah Arendt had said that a Jewish cultural atmosphere would be inconceivable without an amalgam of old traditions with new awareness.[87] Schiller observed that once the drama of assimilation was over, so would be the story of a uniquely creative and original Jewish role.[88]

Hugo Weisgall used the technique of Modernism to employ the language of Western classical music in a new way, influenced by his understanding as a human being

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[86] Schiller, 8.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid, 11.

and a Jew. What Hugo Weisgall said musically required the acrid subjects he chose and his difficult, at times quasi-atonal style. He refused to make his music more palatable, because this did not correspond with his vision. Life in the Twentieth Century had revealed some terrible things about human nature, and terrible things had happened to the Jews. Hugo Weisgall chose to express this through his music. He was a staunch Modernist.

As I observed previously, David Schiller had argued that Arnold Schoenberg re-asserted Modernism after WWII and managed to identify the survival of the Jews after the Holocaust with the survival of Modernist aesthetics.[89] In a similar way, Weisgall remained true to his Modernist impulse throughout his life, and explicitly linked it with Judaism in *Psalm of the Distant Dove*. In the earlier part of his long career, he would be accused of being too advanced and then in the latter half of being too dated. It was a hard road to hoe. In a letter he wrote in 1963, he was quoted as saying, "All that I can honestly say is that it's a damn tough job, writing music. I suppose it always has been....I try to do the best I can at all times. I think I am as self-critical as one can be and yet continue writing."[90] Fortunately this did not stop him from creating a small body of Jewish music that is sincere, erudite and illustrative of the challenge to faith in the Twentieth Century.

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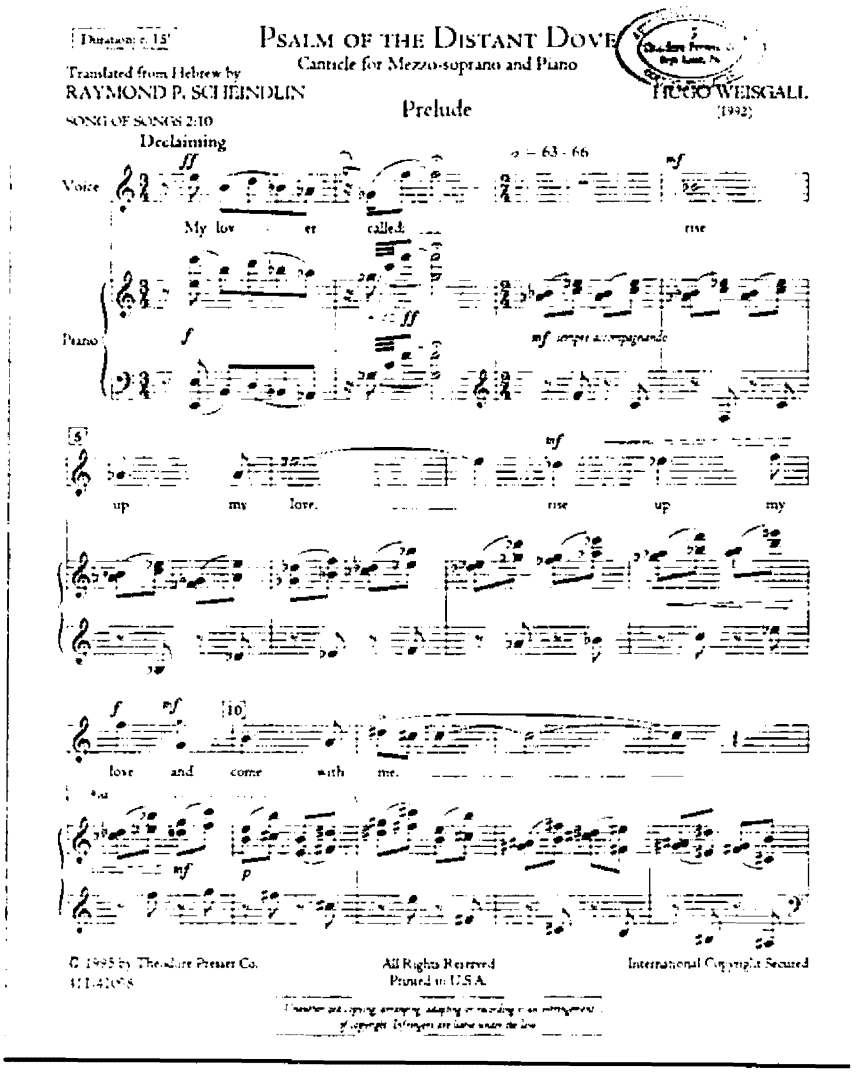
[89] Ibid., 6.
[90] Interview with Hugo Weisgall.

Appendix A



PSALM OF THE DISTANT DOVE

Canticle for Mezzo-soprano and Piano

Translated from Hebrew by
RAYMOND P. SCHEINDLIN

HUGO WEISGALL
(1992)

SONG OF SONGS 2:10

Prelude

Declaiming

Voice

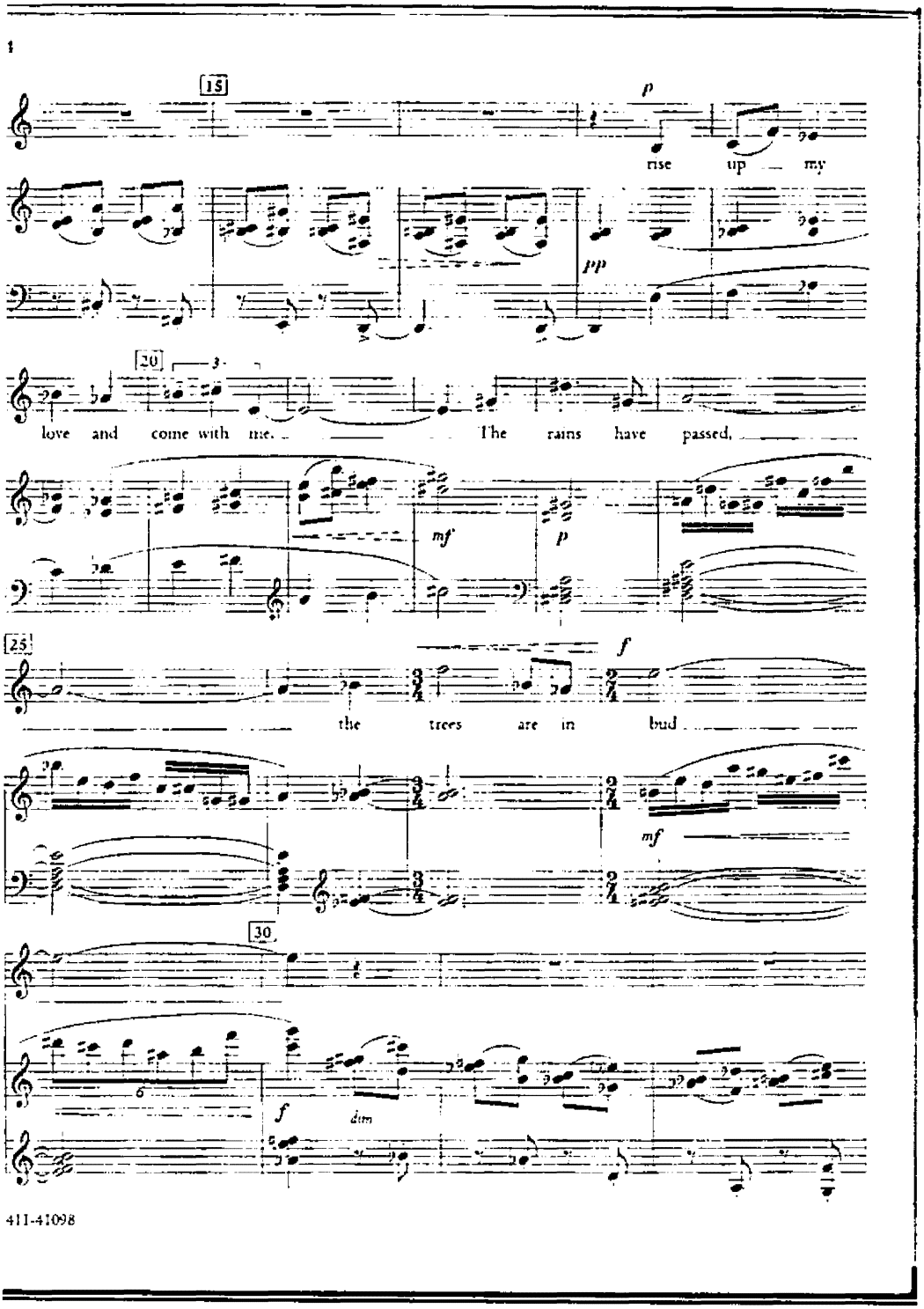
Piano

My lov - er called: rise

mf sempre accompagnato

up my love, rise up my

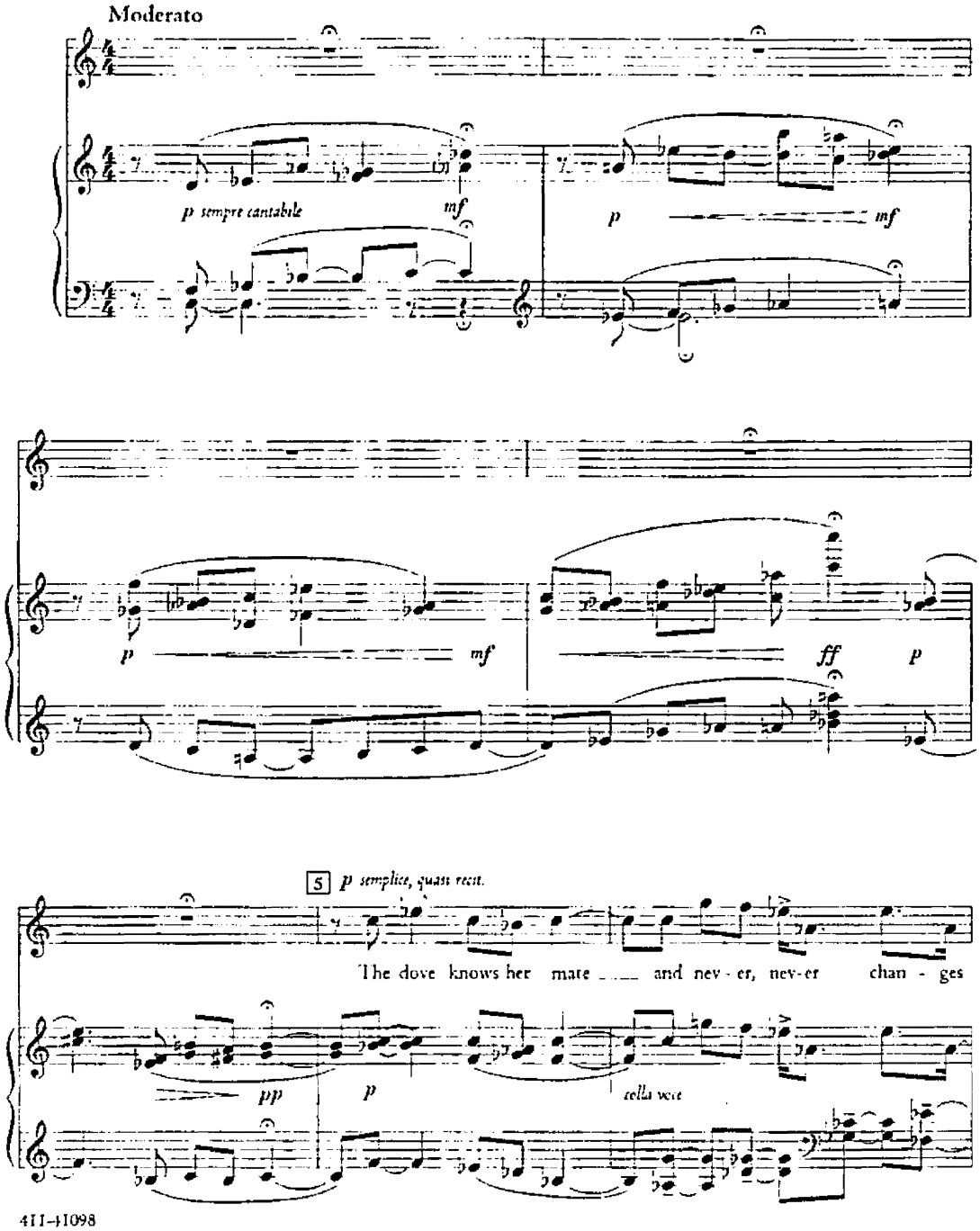
love and come with me.


15
p
rise up my
pp
20
love and come with me. The rains have passed,
mf
p
25
f
the trees are in bud
mf
30
f
dim

411-41098

Prelude

SONG OF SONGS, RABA I:15



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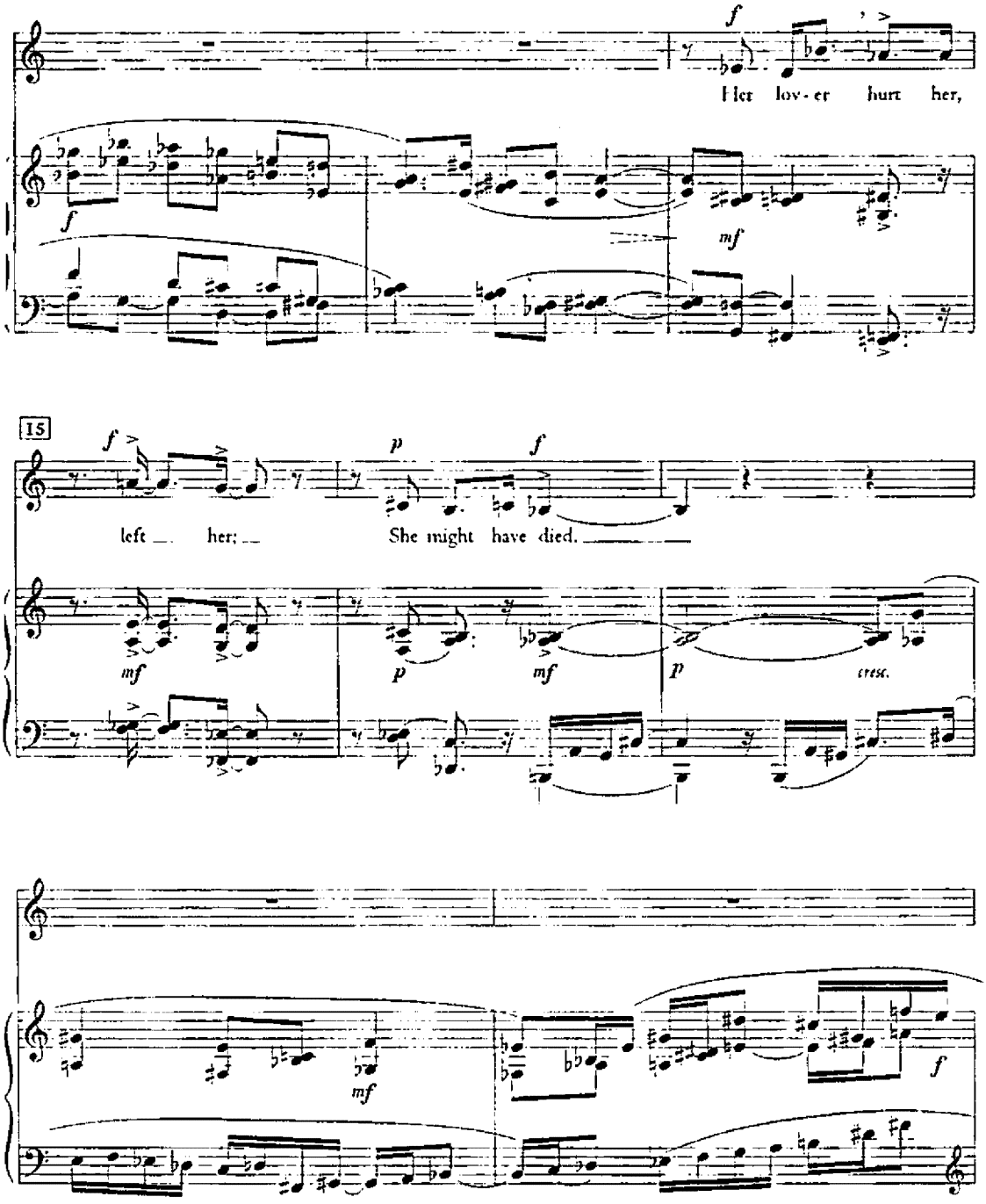
14


f
Her lov - er hurt her,
f
mf
15
f
p
f
left her; She might have died.
mf
p
mf
p
cresc.
mf
f

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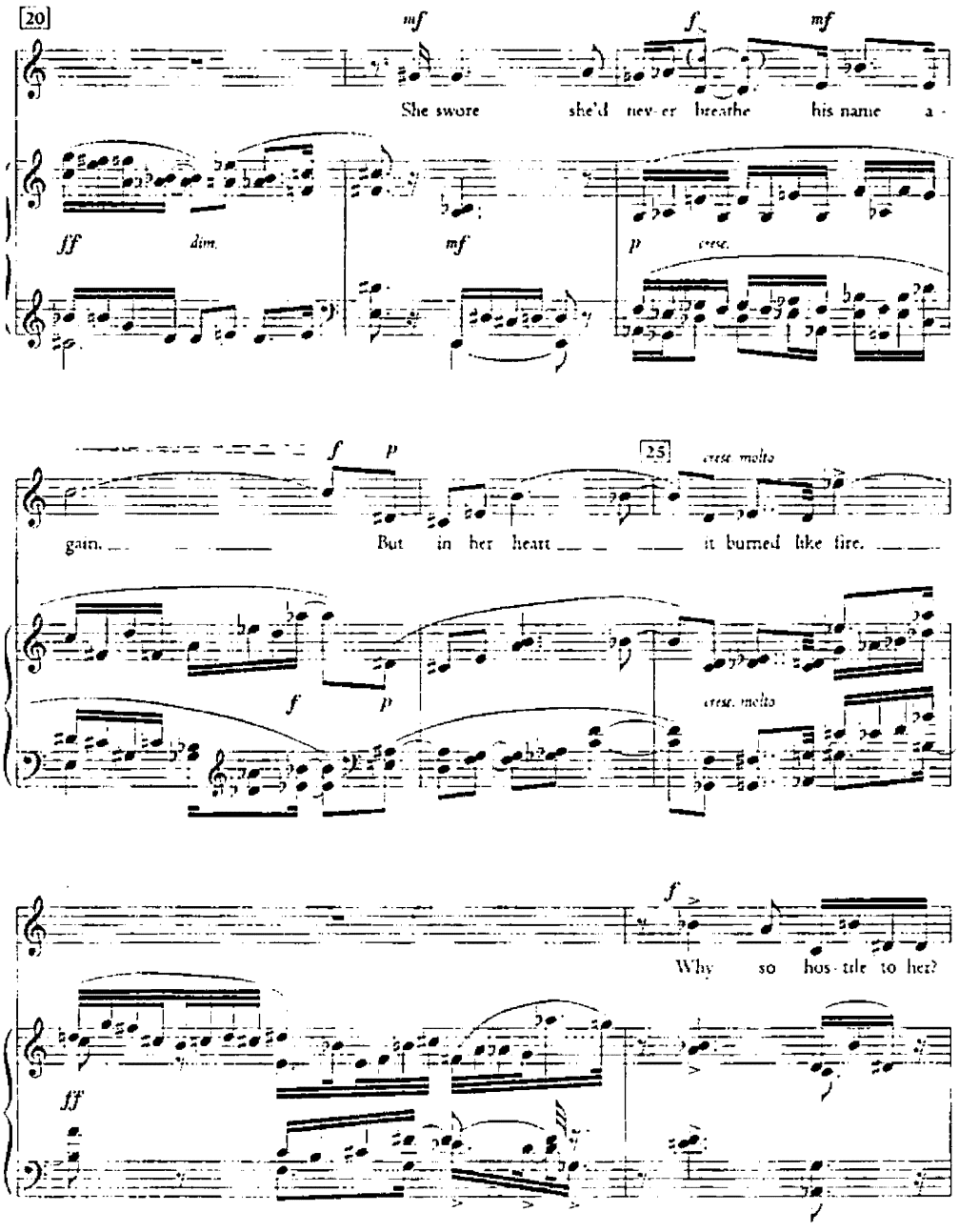
20
mf
f
mf
She swore she'd nev-er breathe his name a -
ff
dim.
mf
p
cresc.
f
p
25
cresc. molto
gain.
But in her heart it burned like fire.
f
p
cresc. molto
f
Why so hos-tile to her?
ff

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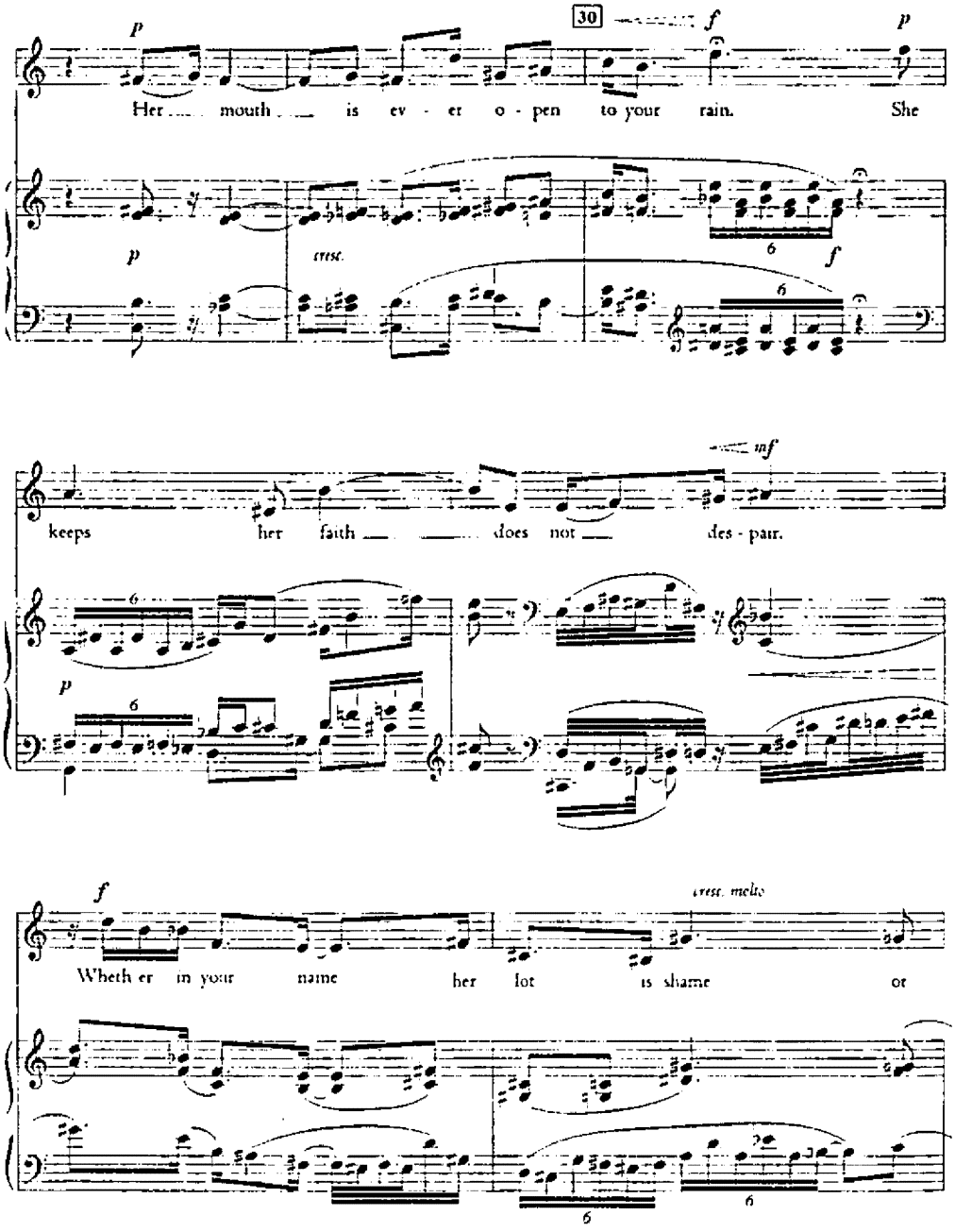
30
p
f
p
Her mouth is ev - er o - pen to your rain. She
p
cresc.
f
keeps her faith does not des - pair.
mf
p
f
Wheth er in your name her lot is shame or
cresc. molto

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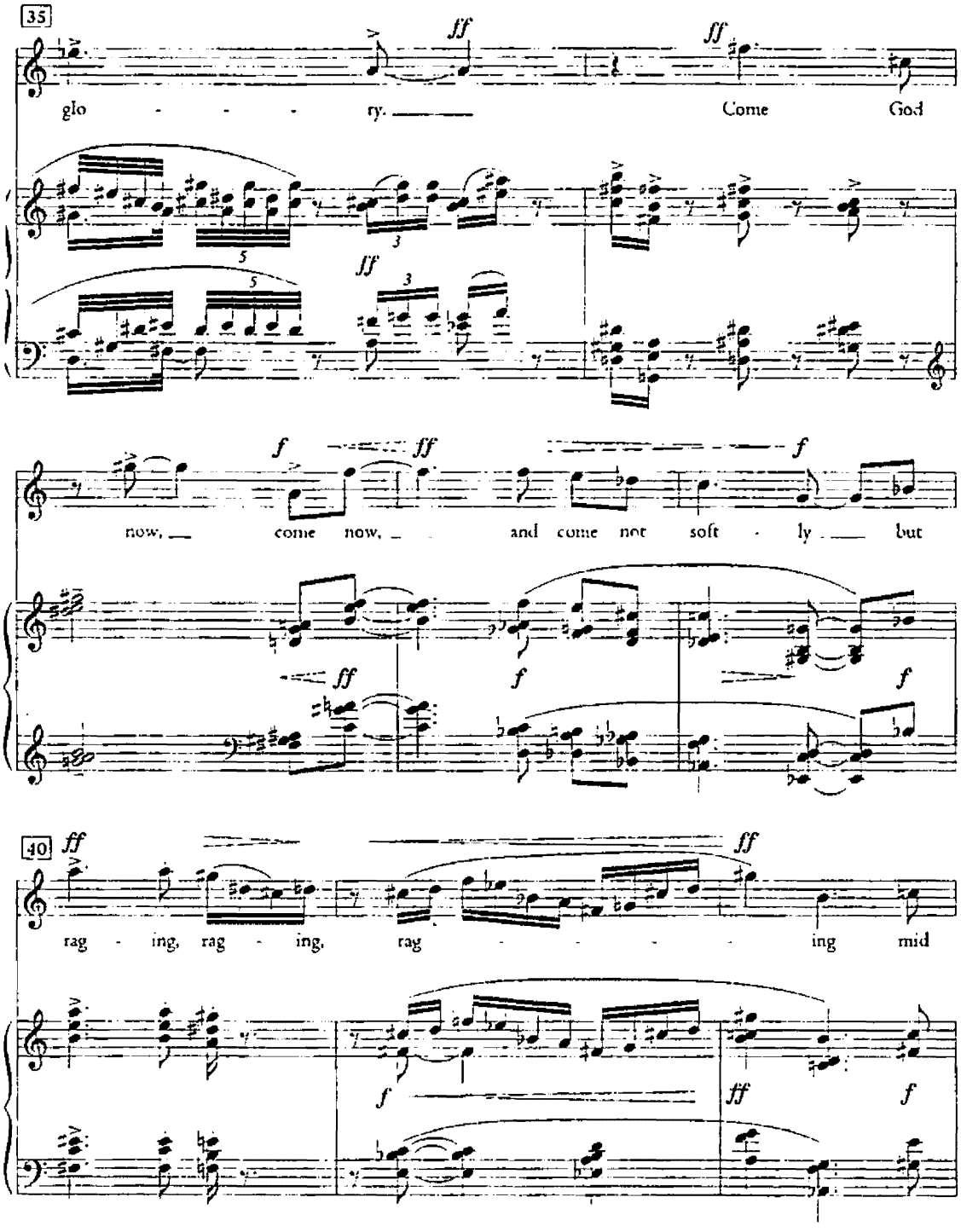
35
ff
ff
glo - - - - ry. —— Come God
ff
f
ff
f
now, — come now, — and come not soft - ly —— but
ff
f
f
40
ff
ff
rag - ing, rag - ing, rag - - - - - ing mid
f
ff
f

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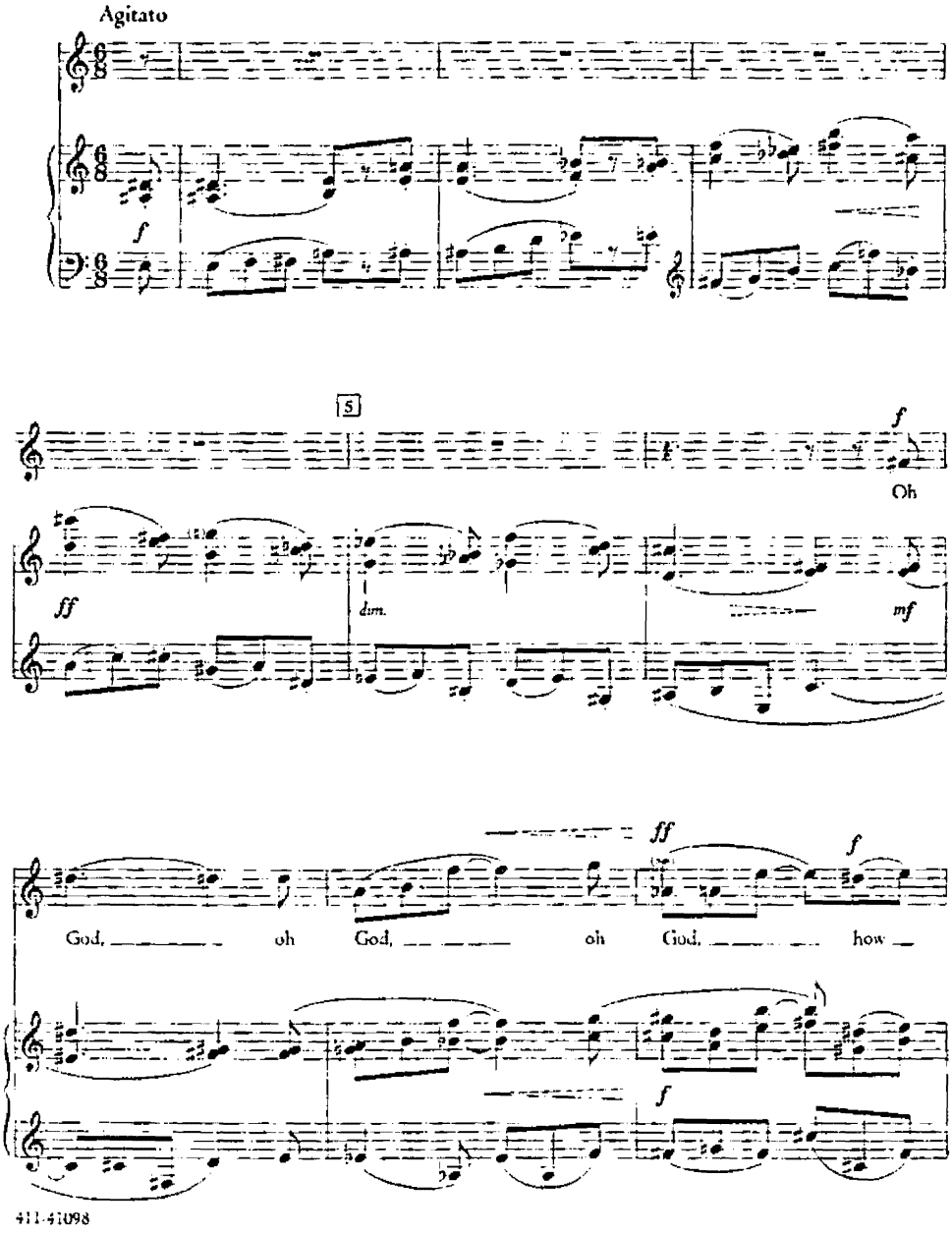
ENJAMIN (?)



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