

The Pianist. In 2007, Poland's great film director Andrzej Wajda made a film about the Katyń massacre. The premiere of *Katyń* took place at the National Opera in Warsaw in the presence of the Polish president and first lady, the prime minister, the Catholic primate, Lech Wałęsa, assorted historians, novelists, composers, and victims' families, as well as film stars and movie celebrities. More than two million Poles—one in twenty—went to see *Katyń* during the first two months of its release.

Contemporary Polish interest in the war has several sources. As they re-enter Europe, join the European Union and NATO, and participate again in the arguments about the fate of the continent, many simply want explanations: why are Poles poorer than West Europeans, why were they outside the mainstream for so long, why do they have so far to go to catch up? Why was Warsaw so comprehensively destroyed, even more so than Berlin and Dresden? Why were so many of the country's educated elite murdered, during and after the war? A part of the answer to these questions does indeed lie in the history of the war and the postwar Soviet occupation. The widespread effort to illuminate that past is laudable.

Equally laudable is modern Poland's search for heroes. Pilecki's improbable life story—a volunteer for Auschwitz, murdered by the communists—has made him into a kind of cult figure among young people. Karski is equally revered. The many heroes of the Warsaw Uprising and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are also now memorialized in street names and monuments all over the city, as they should be. When Herling died in 2000, his obituaries ran on the front pages of newspapers. Irena Sendlerowa, who smuggled some 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto, has been the subject of documentaries and plays. Modern Poles want their own children to know the biographies of these outstanding compatriots, and rightly so.

But not all the emotions evoked by the memory of the Second World War in Poland are quite so positive. The war also evokes anger, grief, and a sense of victimization—not to mention hatred of Germans, of Russians, and of the West Europeans who so blithely walked away from the battlefield in 1945 and declared victory. In recent years, some politicians have tried to capitalize on that hatred, channeling it into anti-German, anti-Russian, or anti-Western rhetoric. Nowadays, Polish xenophobia and nationalist paranoia is usually directed not at immigrants and minorities, as it is in much of

the rest of Europe—and as it was, historically, in Poland as well—but rather at rich and powerful outsiders who are allegedly manipulating Polish politics from behind the scenes, just as they did in the 1940s, as well as at “traitors” within the system who are masquerading as loyal Poles but really work on behalf of foreign interests. At times these suspicions burst into the open, as they did following the plane crash that killed Lech Kaczyński, then the Polish president, in 2010. The president was on his way to visit the monument to the Katyń massacre. Despite numerous investigations and clear evidence that the crash was an accident, a portion of the population will always believe that this

crash was planned: after all, such betrayals have happened before.

In the end, the only cure for this kind of historical paranoia is more history: history based on archives and memoirs, history that incorporates different points of view, history that seeks, as far as possible, not to impose the politics of the present onto the past. In fact, Poland is producing quite a lot of excellent works of history at the moment, and eventually these will surely drown out the conspiracy theorists. In the meantime, *The Eagle Unbowed* is one of the first books to make comprehensive use of the many new sources in English, putting a complicated story into a clear narrative. I hope it is not the last. ♦

David Nirenberg

DARK COUNTERPOINT

THE MUSIC LIBEL AGAINST THE JEWS

By Ruth HaCohen

(Yale University Press, 507 pp., \$55)

IN NOVEMBER 1934, Privy Councillor Wilhelm Furtwängler, vice president of the Third Reich's Music Chamber and conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, imprudently took to the pages of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* to defend the composer Paul Hindemith against the charge of “Jewishness” with which Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister for propaganda and enlightenment of the people, had justified a prohibition on the performance of his work. Yes, Furtwängler admitted, Hindemith had played viola alongside Jewish musicians in the Amar Quartet, but whatever performances he might have given alongside Jews after the Nazis' rise to power were purely the result of contractual obligation, not sympathy or affinity. And yes, he had on occasion produced works of questionable taste, such as music for the one-act play *Murder, the Hope of Women*, but these were un-representative juvenilia. “If one were to attempt a profile of the composer Hindemith on the basis of his works,” wrote the famed conductor, “one would have to characterize him as decidedly of the ‘German’ type. His genealogy is, after all, purely Germanic. And the solid

craftsmanship and sterling native quality of his work are entirely German, as is the modesty and reserve manifest even in his infrequent emotional outbursts.”

Goebbels responded before a crowd of thousands in Berlin's sports stadium. According to the account in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* of December 7, 1934, the State Orchestra, conducted by Peter Raabe, opened the event with strains of Beethoven. These introduced an actor's recitation of Hitler's words from *Mein Kampf* on the subject of art and the *Volk*. Then more music, this time Hans Pfitzner's “From the German Soul.” (Pfitzner would himself soon come under suspicion of “Jewishness,” for his collaboration with the Jewish conductor Bruno Walter, and for his unwillingness to provide a replacement for the “Jewish” Mendelssohn's score to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.) And after this orchestrated preface Goebbels stepped up to the podium to thundering cries of “Germany Awake!” and rendered his verdict: Hindemith is an “atonal” noisemaker who, motivated by materialism, composed “lurid strains of dissonance . . . with complete musical ineptitude. . . . We are vehemently opposed to seeing this type of artist identified as German. As far as we are concerned, the fact that his heritage is of pure Germanic blood is more dramatic evidence of the festering depths to which the Jewish-intellectual infection has already penetrated the body of our *Volk*.” Hindemith remained proscribed, and Furtwängler resigned (or was fired) from his post.

The Hindemith Affair is not mentioned in Ruth HaCohen's remarkable book,

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perhaps because none of the principals involved were actually Jewish. But it does provide a striking confirmation, even an extension, of the book's important thesis: that Western music, both Christian and Classical, developed in relation—often in negative relation—to ideas about Jews and their music. The idea that Jewish music (or noise) was un-harmonious, insincere, manipulative, materialistic, or in some other way morally and spiritually dangerous: this idea helped to produce (and was also produced by) the Western musical tradition.

My formulation of HaCohen's argument is a simplification, even an impoverishment, of her thinking and erudition. When I refer to ideas about Jews and music, she would add that she is not talking only about ideas, but also about real Jews and real Jewish music. Indeed, one of the many virtues of her book is its demonstration of elements of "dialogue" and "reciprocity" between the music of Jews and non-Jews in Europe from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Moreover, my speaking of "Western music" in the abstract overlooks the extraordinary sympathy with which this musicologist analyzes the individual subjectivity of her protagonists, who include composers such as Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, writers such as Heine and George Eliot, and even literary and musical characters, such as Eliot's Daniel Deronda, Wagner's Parsifal, and Schoenberg's Moses.

But my simplified formulation does have this advantage: it stresses that although "the music libel against the Jews" is a way of thinking about both Jews and music, the one need not correspond to the other. The "Jewishness" of a musical work or a musician does not necessarily spring from the "real" Judaism of the piece or its creator, as the case of Hindemith reminds us. It stems rather from a Christian system of thought that understands certain kinds of human activity in the world as "Jewish."

THAT SYSTEM OF thought has a very long history. It is evident already in one of the earliest Christian texts, Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. In that letter and in others that followed, the apostle to the gentiles taught Jesus's followers to criticize circumcision and other attachments to what he called law, letter, and flesh as "Judaizing." (That term, which gained world-historical significance, is from Galatians 2:14.) Early Christians applied this logic to many different kinds of activities, including music. This is not to say that they always agreed. For some Church Fathers, music was too sensual

and carnal for the Christian, whereas others placed it at the center of Christian devotion. Precisely what was considered "Jewish" was open for debate, and changed with time, place, and the individual thinker. But what remained constant was the possibility of representing "incorrect" engagements with the world as "Jewish." As the poet George Herbert put it in 1633, "He that doth love, and love amisse, / This worlds delights before true Christian joy, / Hath made a Jewish choice / ... and is a Judas-Jew."

One consequence of this way of thinking is that every Christian is potentially "Jewish." Since no one in this world can do entirely without letters, laws, or things of the flesh, no one is entirely immune to the charge of Judaizing. This universal weakness had the effect of transforming "Judaizing" into a key term of Christian critique, a term that lost none of its power in the more secular languages of modernity. When Marx claimed in 1844 that so long as society continued to depend upon money and private property, it would "continue to produce Judaism from its own entrails," he was exploiting the logic of "Judaizing." Goebbels was exploiting the same potential a hundred years later, when he condemned Hindemith and Pfitzner as "Jewish" musicians, and Picasso and Otto Dix as "Jewish" painters. The vast majority of the capitalists Marx criticized as "Jewish," like the vast majority of the artists the Nazis classified in those terms, were not Jewish, either religiously or "racially."

Of course "Jew" and "Judaism" do correspond to a professed religion. There were composers who were Jews, but the classification of their music as "Jewish" did not derive simply from the facts of their biography, any more than the classification of a non-Jew's music as "Jewish" did. "Jew" was an abstract ideological term, a critical category, a concept with which Christian society made sense of itself and its world. As such it was part of a language of power, and power structured the contents of the term just as much as—and even more than—"real" Judaism did. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno, who were themselves forced from their university posts by the power of this language, "to call someone a Jew is a pretext to work him over until he resembles the image." Or in the blunter formulation of Hermann Göring, "It is I who determine who is a Jew."

This is not to say that the determination is infinitely flexible, or that "Judaism" is some floating signifier empty of meaning. The category of "Judaism" in musical thought has a history, just as it

does in economic and social and theological thought; and this history shapes the work to which the charge of Judaism can be put in any given place and time. HaCohen's book sets out to uncover this history of thought. But the book is not a history in the usual sense. "The search, in this case, is conducted through modes of experience that have survived—however transfigured—in essentially different historical phases." The goal is to recover these modes of experience (or "Dasein planes," to use HaCohen's Heideggerian term), and to string from them a narrative held together not by historical causality, but by a theory—in this case, Freud's theory of trauma and traumatic memory.

GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE of the book's psychoanalytic orientation, it is both appropriate and moving that it opens with memories of the author's German-Jewish parents, and of a Jerusalem childhood nourished by German-Jewish fairy tales about princesses who can hear the singing of the stars. Then HaCohen takes up her history, beginning with the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. She characterizes this period as one of largely separate musical identities, with "sonic encounters" producing little musical exchange between Jew and Christian, but in which ideas about the musicality of the other—and especially Christian ideas about Jewish hostility to music—took on important roles in the definition of "collective Self" and "collective Other." Among the most important of these ideas was the Christian association of Jews with noise rather than music. The phrase "*ein Lärm wie in einer Judenschule*," "a racket like that of a synagogue," plays a central role in this book, and it is in the Middle Ages that HaCohen locates its birth.

The charge of noisiness was not only an aesthetic one. In HaCohen's Middle Ages, Christian harmony and Jewish dis-harmony were posed in an intractable antithesis, one with extensive social and cultural consequences. Their mutual hostility was performed with heightened emphasis during the competing holy days of Easter and Passover, holidays whose rituals were punctuated by frequent outbreaks of Christian violence against Jews. Sometimes this violence was linked to accounts of ritual murder—the charge that Jews murdered Christian children—and sometimes music was presented as a specific motive for slaughter. Geoffrey Chaucer's Prioress tells a tale of a young boy who learned by heart the Marian antiphon

Alma redemptoris mater (“Mother of the Redeeming Spirit”) and sang it every day as he walked through the Jewish quarter, until one day an anti-antiphonal Jew, irritated by the music, slits his throat and throws his body in a privy. Then the Virgin makes the corpse sing so loudly from the pit that the Christians come running. Miraculously resuscitated, the boy tells his story, and all the Jews of the town are killed. It is this story that inspires the book’s powerful title.

And yet the “sonic spheres” of medieval Christians and Jews may not have been quite as separate as HaCohen suggests. It is certainly noteworthy that despite long centuries of co-habitation, medieval Jews never borrowed the musical notation of the surrounding Christian culture from which they borrowed language, art, architecture, ritual practices, dress, cuisine, and so much else. But some of the Jewish impermeability perceived by HaCohen is the result of her choice of sources, which are largely religious and liturgical, and from German speaking lands (known to Jews as Ashkenaz). In other genres and in other places we find much more exchange. Jews sang Christian troubadour songs in thirteenth-century Mediterranean towns. Jewish moralists such as Jacob Anatoli inveighed against “the songs of the uncircumcised,” which he claimed—sounding like a 1950s anti-Elvis preacher—led Jewish girls “into the path of harlotry.” In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Catalan courts, there were Jews teaching music and dance. And in the sixteenth century we find *conversos* providing musical pleasure to princes in Italian and English cities. (*Conversos* were converts from Judaism or their descendants, who were often treated by Christians as if they remained essentially Jewish.) Even in Ashkenaz, a troubadour such as Susskind of Trimberg can suddenly appear, wearing his Jew’s hat in a medieval manuscript of German love songs.

In fact, in some places the soundscape of the medieval world was not so different from the one that HaCohen ascribes to contemporary Israel-Palestine, in the lyrical page with which her book concludes. As in today’s Jerusalem, church bells might mingle with shofars and *Adhan* calls in fourteenth-century

Valencia. There, too, “sonic encounters” were sometimes conflictual, sometimes utopian, and often a blend of the two. Medieval Muslim communities routinely paid their Christian overlords for the privilege of projecting the muezzin’s call to prayer over a landscape conquered in Jesus’s name. When, in 1228, the Franciscan Friars of Mallorca charged that the chanting of the Jews in their synagogue offended Christ’s ears, harmony was restored by a payoff to the Friars: a sonic version of what we would call a shake-down or a licensing fee. Even Christians—



Sabbath liturgy, Parma Psalter, late thirteenth century

such as the blacksmith in Barcelona whose hammer-strokes “disturbed the divine office”—could find themselves forced to pay off neighboring priests. And we should not forget that in medieval Iberia the three religions forged a music that—as any fan of Jordi Saval knows—provides basic repertoire for the modern “musical dialogue” that HaCohen celebrates in the last paragraphs of her book.

But even if the medieval musical world was not as sharply segregated as this book suggests, the examples of musical enmity that emerge are powerful. Lorenzo’s lines

from *The Merchant of Venice* provide their climax: “The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not mov’d with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; / The motions of his spirit are dull as night, / And his affections dark as Erebus: / Let no such man be trusted. Mark the Music.” Should we hear here an indictment of Shylock the Jew, who hates “the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife,” and commanded his daughter Jessica to close the windows lest the “sound of shallow foppery / enter my sober house”? And where does this

musical test leave Jessica, converted to Christianity by her love for Lorenzo? Does her last line in the play—“I am never merry when I hear sweet music”—suggest that Jews can never truly convert to Christian harmony? (The fact that the “Moor” Othello does not much care for music provides a non-Jewish example of a similar prejudice.)

It is important to remember that these examples of enmity were not the product of “real” sonic encounters: there were no Jews in Chaucer’s or Shakespeare’s England. But the questions they raise were real enough, if not for Jessica, then for the many Jews and converts from Judaism who would later struggle to articulate their relationship to Christian musical culture in modern Europe. HaCohen devotes two chapters to this struggle, and they are riveting. In them we see Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Halévy, Schoenberg, and other Jewish or convert composers exploring the musical possibilities of Judaism, assimilation, and conversion.

HaCohen is not afraid to generalize. “Most European Jewish-born composers,” she tells us, “did not follow the path of classical, abstract universalism.”

They opted instead for heterogeneous effects such as allegory and irony. “As inside-outsiders, the composers-writers intrigued by their Jewish origins tended to problematize categorization, often earlier and more powerfully than ‘insider’ artists did.” Rather than attempting to achieve a symbiosis with the past, like Chopin or Wagner, these “never-entirely-belonging artists” sought to demythologize and to fragment “the histories they took upon themselves,” in ways that could only “bewilder their middle-class audiences.”

HACOHEN'S BOOK is studded with such theses at the level of group, generation, and genre. (Its observations about oratorio as a genre would alone suffice to reward its close reading). Yet its most extraordinary contribution is not any particular thesis or generalization, but the multi-layered readings of literary and musical works through which HaCohen builds her individual case studies. In each we are introduced to the historical milieu of each composer and author. We learn, for example, about Mendelssohn's engagement with Goethe; about his conversion to Protestantism, and about the cultural and religious context of his project to recover Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* for the nineteenth century. We hear about his defeat (perhaps facilitated by anti-Semitism) in the elections of the "Singakademie," and after that defeat, of the academy's performance of Bach's *St. John's Passion* under a different

conductor's baton. But we are also led through a "theological-phenomenological" assessment of the two Passions, in order to see how they differed historically (the Gospel of John's Jews are different than those of the Gospel of Matthew) and musically (the structure of Bach's John is more monolithic and repetitive, his Matthew more dialogic and resonating) in the potential engagements with Judaism they could catalyze. And finally, we are forced to reflect on how the texts that Mendelssohn chose for his own oratorios (*Elijah, St. Paul*) and the music he wrote for them (compare the "Es ist genug" aria of his *Elijah* with the "Es ist vollbracht" of Bach's John) reflect specific struggles with the difficulties that the "Christian-ness" of music generated for German Jews and converts from Judaism in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Each case study takes us as through a magnifying glass into an unknown gem, many and mysterious facets gleaming in

a forest of reflection and delight. Consider HaCohen's chapter called "The Aesthetic Theology of Multivocality: Arnold Schoenberg among Alter Egos." The title already points to multiple mysteries. Aesthetic theology, we imagine, is meant to suggest a field every bit as fertile as its more famous cousin, political theology. Multi-vocality places us in a soundscape—simultaneously choral and psychoanalytic—in which many selves and voices resist reduction to unity or harmony. And alter egos, we suspect, will emerge not only from the composer's cultural context, but also from the music itself, as figures and motifs into which, as HaCohen shows us again and again, composers and authors project the vital questions of their being.

Schoenberg converted to Protestantism in 1898. This was something of a contrarian choice in the Catholic Vienna that he, Freud, and many culturally prominent Jews called home. His conversion was motivated, we may assume, by the same desire for "normalization within Gentile society" that HaCohen sees in the musical aesthetics of other early twentieth-century composers of Jewish extraction such as Mahler. Theirs was an "aesthetics of transfiguration, subverting fixed categorization." It prioritized "process over form, experience over object, and hard-won spiritual gratification over ready-made pleasure." The goal was to produce a music that overcame attributes considered "Jewish" in the aesthetics of the day (such as formalism, mimesis, and vulgar sensuality), and thus "transcended [Jewish] particularism and endorsed [Christian] universalism of a new kind."

This fruitful formulation only hints at the riches that follow. HaCohen begins her approach to Schoenberg through alter egos such as Freud, Kafka, and Freud's disciple Theodor Reik. In Kafka's story "An Old Manuscript," from 1917, she points to a scene in which a butcher, seeking to satisfy the constant demands for fresh meat by a ruthless and language-less band of nomads who have settled in his town square, brings out a live ox. "I lay for a whole hour flat on the floor at the back of my workshop with my head muffled in all the clothes and rugs and pillows I had, simply to keep from hearing the bellowing of that ox, which the nomads were leaping on from all sides, tearing morsels out of its living flesh with their teeth."

Through the bull's bellowing HaCohen links this scene, which Elias Canetti called "the loudest passage in Kafka's work," to the thinking of another Austrian Jew, the psychoanalyst and disciple of Freud Theodore Reik. Reik's essay "The

Waiting in the Midwest

17, a virgin, I clean motel rooms,
stripping down
the beds, dumping ashtrays,
cleaning until the bed, desk,
and bible

coalesce in a gritty harmony.
I clean because I'm the boss'
daughter
surrounded by women

who actually clean for a living,
others who actually fuck
for a living. For approval, I hope
for rooms

with stains and needles,
desk drawers documenting
who slept with who.

I approach sex backwards,
through its aftermath: the
threadbare comforter
slumping to the floor, the fit

of new sheets
taut as longing
across the bed. Again,

the room is ready,
waiting in the stillness
of a Midwest summer night.

I sit on the bed
and try to imagine a man
but cannot—

a clean room is a clean room,
a space straightening
endings and beginnings

into a line, arranging
ordinary days
into a history.

In the laundry room's glare,
I leave so much finished love
to spin in the rinse cycle.

Back in the office,
my father (who hates me cleaning)
reviews the key rack—

each number goes to a room;
the rooms with missing keys,
occupied. I tell him 21's done,

he returns the key to its hook.
A man comes in the office.

My father hands him the key
and deadpans, "These are the
good old days."

I see the woman waiting in the car
and look down at my hands that
made the bed.

ALLISON LEMNOS

Shofar,” written in 1919, is something of a commentary on Psalm 89:16: “Hail to the people who understand the sound of the horn, they shall walk in the light of your countenance.” His analysis, she explains, “capsizes the conventional Christian categorization of Jewish noise.” In the shofar’s blast, Reik saw the surfacing of repressed guilt at a primordial parricide: in this case, the young “Israelite” Ram god’s killing of the elder Egyptian Bull god. The shofar blast embodies, in Reik’s words, “the guilty conscience of the son who killed and devoured the father-god [and] instituted the law for the preservation of the totem. . . . Music is here the representative of morality.” According to this defensive interpretation, Jewish noise is indeed music—and music in the best ethical sense.

Readers will immediately recognize in Reik’s analysis of the shofar a link to Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, and a foreshadowing of his *Moses and Monotheism*, written after the Nazis’ rise to power, in which the elderly founder of psychoanalysis understood the Christian deicide accusation against the Jews as a repetition of a traumatic memory of the Israelites’ killing of their Egyptian leader Moses in the desert. But the linkages do not stop here. HaCohen turns now to the glissando sonorities of Schoenberg’s cellos in the Golden Calf scene of his oratorio *Moses and Aron*, in which she hears the bellowing voices of the Bull god on the verge of slaughter. And out of the musical and narrative tensions of the scene she begins to construct Schoenberg’s struggle with the basic oppositions of the theological aesthetics of his age. These oppositions, already encoded in lapidary Christian antinomies such as Paul’s “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life,” had long since been mapped onto the difference between “Christian” and “Jew,” and thence via countless cartographies onto musical “oppositions” such as dissonance v. harmony, surface v. depth, formalistic v. inspired, words v. music, epigone v. genius.

I have not gotten further than the first glittering facets of HaCohen’s treatment of Schoenberg, but I hope these give some sense of her sensitivity to analogy, and her power to build out of such sensitivity an account of the deep structures of musical thought. In this sense HaCohen, like Schoenberg, Reik, and many of the other protagonists she approaches with such sympathy, is herself “embroiled” in untangling “the stubborn resurfacing of dogmas and sentiments, embodying deeply ingrained imaginaries of the collective.”

In what comes closest to a statement of her methodological commitments, HaCohen writes that “such resurfacing syndromes were theoretically and clinically recognized by Freud and his school.” Trauma, repressed and recovered memory, the compulsion to repeat: these “resurfacing syndromes” from Freudian psychoanalysis serve her as analogies for history. Hence her willingness to recognize these syndromes not only in individuals (and in the literature and music that they produce) but also in the “lives” of collectives across long swaths of historical time.

There are reasonable objections to such methods. It is by no means clear that models derived from the individual can be adapted to the analysis of groups or societies. Psyche and memory may be very misleading analogies for culture and history. Moreover, Freud’s syndromes were themselves the products of a particular place and time. Perhaps we should not seek in them a universal explanation for continuity and change across history. And yet such objections, though valid, miss the beauty of HaCohen’s book, and the relief that it brings. For whether or not the analysis is historically true in every detail, it teaches us—like any good analysis?—something vital about our present and our past, and in doing so it allows us to love and to live our music in new ways.

THE LESSON IS STILL necessary today. “Jewishness” remains a critical term in the aesthetics and the politics of music (and many other topics), although it is used in different ways and different contexts than those that HaCohen so brightly illuminates. Perhaps the most important of those contexts, and certainly the most obvious, is that of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has animated a book such as Farag El-Antari’s *The Zionist Plunder of Arabic Music*. Published in Arabic under the auspices of the General Union of Arab Artists in 1997 and re-issued in 2001, the book stresses the corrupting effects of sonic encounters between Jews and Arabs. El-Antari describes the musicological efforts of the “Arab Music Conference,” held in Cairo in 1932, as a Zionist plot, facilitated by Egypt’s Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi (whom, we are told, was corrupted by both sexual and

economic relations with Egyptian Jews), to despoil Arabs of their music. The Jews, he claims, wanted to undermine the pan-Arab unity manifest in “songs of camel smithy . . . palm-tree pollenisation,” and other Bedouin music, which they wished to appropriate in order to give a false genealogy to the Psalms, much as they tried to deny the true Pharaonic origins of the harp in order to attribute its invention to King David.

Just as sinister as these early twentieth-century projects, according to El-Antari’s study, are more recent Zionist attempts to “infiltrate” Arabic music, such as the performance in 1993, at the Cairo Opera House, of Saint-Saëns’s opera *Samson and Delilah*. Saint-Saëns was not Jewish. (Remember, neither was Hindemith.) But he is complicit in the “Zionist plunder” because (according to El-Antari) his libretto was based on sections of the biblical book of Judges that proclaim Israel’s right to the lands of Palestine. This and other “Jewish” performances (such as the performance in June 1997, thirty years after the Six Day War, of Ernest Bloch’s tone-poem “Schelomo, Hebrew Rhapsody for cello and large orchestra”) represent the second Zionist attack on Arabic music, one that seeks to corrupt Egyptians from within.

In this rhetoric of infection, corruption, and theft, I hear symptoms of syndromes closely related to those HaCohen has discovered at the heart of European music, though perhaps even more fantastic, in that there are no “real” Jews or Zionists in Arabic music today, no Meyerbeers, Halévy’s, and Schoenbergs to serve as points of projection for the criticism of a Wagner or a Goebbels. The “music libel” is alive and well. That is one more reason, though a lugubrious one, to be grateful to HaCohen and for her extraordinary book.

Felix Mendelssohn once complained that “so much is spoken about music and so little is said. For my part I do not believe that words suffice for such a task, and if they did I would no longer make any music.” Lest our composers cease composing, let us grant that words remain in some sense insufficient to the task of music. Yet Ruth HaCohen’s words teach us a great deal: about Judaism and Christianity, about the harmony and the disharmony between them, and yes, *pace* Mendelssohn, about music. ♦

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