

Daniel Jeremy Silver Collection Digitization Project

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What Does Judaism Think About Music?, 1984.

What Does Judaism Think About Music Daniel Jeremy Silver April 1, 1984

This morning, in honor of Jewish Music Month, we had intended to present some of the first art songs composed to accompany synagogue liturgy. The composer was Solomone Rossi (1570-1630). Unfortunately, the Malach ha-Mavet has visited us these last few days, our Music Director's grandmother died on Friday; so we have postponed Rossi's service, and my comments on it, until next week.

But since many of you came prepared to think of themes musical, I thought we might profitably spend these few minutes pondering a basic theme involving our tradition and its attitude towards music: what does Judaism think about music?

We tend to assume that everyone is in favor of music. The Greeks described music as a gift of the gods. Music was the senior Muse. Classic education was divided into seven major divisions and music was one of these. The Greeks looked on music not only as a proven and important method of cultivating the spirit, but as a discipline necessary for the cultivation of the body. In measure as a person understood and internalized the rhythms and harmonies of the universe, they developed a grace which affected how they stood, bore themselves in public, and measured their speech, every aspect of their deportment.

The most famous of the Greek musicians was Orpheus. Orpheus' harp and song, we are told, could charm and pacify wild animals. Once the animals heard his song they would come from their lairs and hutches to sit at his feet and listen peacefully to his melodies. Orpheus first appears in Greek legend as an Argonaut, one of the companions of Jason in the search for the Golden Fleece. The other Argonauts were soldiers. Orpheus' only weapon was his harp and his voice, but these weapons could subdue enemies impervious to more conventional weapons. One day the companions needed to pass through a narrow mountain defile, but found their way barred by a fire-breathing dragon. The soldiers hurled their spears, but his thick skin couldn't be pierced. Orpheus picked up his harp and began to sing. His song was a sleep-inducing melody and soon the dragon lay quietly on the ground and the companions filed by in safety.

Music has its charms and many of us use music to soothe the tired spirit.

It's been a long, pressure-filled day. When we come home we put a favorite tape or record on our set and soon the cares of the world begin to slip away and we slip off into a half hour of refreshing sleep.

As Jews, we know we come from a music-loving people. The modern concert stage would be a much less exciting place if it were denuded of the Jews who conduct major symphony orchestras or appear regularly as soloists. I love Isaac Stern's description of a musical exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States: "It is very simple; the Soviet Union sends us its Jewish violinists from Odessa and we send to the Soviet Union our Jewish violinists from Odessa."

Music has always played a significant role in Jewish life. In Biblical times worship in the Temple was accompanied by music. The Psalm speaks "of singing the Lord a new song" and in Jerusalem these sacred songs were accompanied by timbrel, lyre and harp.

The question I put before you is not whether Jews have liked and used music, that goes without saying, but a rather more complex one: whether or not music is an unmixed blessing. Has music perhaps another less benevolent side? At the turn of the century an eccentric, but successful, American publisher, Albert Hubbard, wrote a commonplace book, A Thousand and One Sayings, in which he set out his great wisdom. Among his sayings was this one: "Music is the only one of the arts which cannot be put to base use." This is the proposition that I'd like to examine. Despite all we feel about music, we know it to be false. There is truth behind the medieval legend of the Pied Piper who used his music to lead children from their homes to their death. Hitler used music at Nuremberg. Generals routinely know how to use the bagpipe or the drum or the trumpet to mesmerize their troops before battle. Music has its charms, and some of its charms can be fatal.

I find it surprising that many rarely think of music's darker side - of the many ways music affects our emotions and so exerts in so doing a baneful influence

over our lives.

While the Greeks, Egyptians and Babylonians taught that music was a gift to man from the gods, our ancestors assumed that music was a human art. Among Adam's immediate ancestors Genesis lists a certain Jubal who is described "as the father of all those who play the lyre and the flute." The Biblical myth assumes that music is a human creation. Seen as a human art, music understandably takes to itself all the contradictions which are part and parcel of human nature.

Scripture contains stories which underscore the healing powers of music. The most famous of these deals with David and Saul. As a youth David was skilled at the lyre and song. Saul, as king, was beset by dark forces which regularly disturbed the mind. Saul was not only burdened with the cares of government but bedeviled by black, dark thoughts: melancholia. At times only David's singing could soothe the troubled monarch. "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit of God came upon Saul, that David took a harp and played with his hands, so Saul was refreshed, and all was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

The Bible also includes stories which reflect less well on the peace of music. One day when Saul was a much younger king he chanced on a group of ecstatics descending from a mountain shrine. Some of the group were dancing and prophesying. Others were playing on cymbals, the lyre and the flute. It was a mad scene and Saul was caught up by the contagion of this music. He began to dance, to sing, and then to speak with tongues. Later, the seer Samuel commented to the king: v'nedachta le'ish aher, "You were changed into a totally different being."

Music can calm and music can excite. Music can help us regain control and can cause us to lose control.

Music has many powers, not all of them beneficial, so the question that any serious religious tradition must face is how to make the most beneficial use possible of music's power. In ancient times Jews had to decide what kind of music to use with their ritual. We know little about the ceremonies of the First Temple; but the Priestly histories, the Talmud and Josephus tell us a good bit

about Temple ceremony during the six centuries between the Babylonian Exile to the final destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. During much of that period the Levites acted as a male choir and their singing was enhanced by an orchestra consisting of men who played on the <u>nevel</u> and the <u>kinor</u>, two kinds of harps: one apparently had seven strings, the other, ten. In addition, one or two men were responsible for the cymbals which were apparently struck to indicate that a particular phrase or part of the service had ended.

Because we are insatiably curious about the past, archeology has developed a sub-specialty, devoted to recreating the music of ancient times. The earth has yielded up those ancient instruments which were made of non-perishable materials: bells, cymbals, bone clappers and horns of various types. To recreate the instruments made out of perishable substances - the drums, the harps - the scholars have carefully examined the pictures of these instruments found on Greek vases and in Egyptian tombs and have built full scale models. Occasionally, archeologists have been able to do even more. In 1924 Sir Leonard Wolley was excavating at Ur. In the third millenium B.C.E. Ur was one of the major citystates which grew up in the area where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers come together before they pour into the Persian Gulf. One day, while walking around his dig, Wolley noticed a hole in the ground. It looked like another animal hole and a less conscientious archeologist would have paid no attention. Fortunately, Wolley did. He had his people prepare hot wax which he poured down the hole. When the ground was cut away, they found the wax had solidified and filled in the space which had once been occupied by an ancient harp 3-1/2 feet wide and 3 feet tall. They had "found" a third millenium B.C.E. lyre. Craftsmen quickly built a wooden harp identical to the wax mold and some time later, guided by inscriptions from various cuneiform tablets which had been found and deciphered, musicologists were able to play and sing some of the music which was heard in the temples of ancient Ur. They did not find this old/new music appealing. It was high-pitched and rather nasal. The ancients did not attempt to compose intricate music. A

series of tones were sung over and over again and the text was fitted to those repetitive moldulations of sound. There was no harmony. Instruments and voices sang the same musical line. There was no attempt to orchestrate, to compose, in the modern senses, but there was variety. The Bible mentions 19 different musical instruments and others are known from other Middle Eastern inscriptions.

When a movie director wants to induce a certain mood he fills the sound track with some appropriate music. A certain kind of music prepared us for a battle scene and another kind of music for a love scene. The ancients also used music to set the mood. Where they differed from us is that they believed that a specific set of notes would evoke a specific emotion. It was commonly believed in the ancient world that certain juxtapositions of sound induced a predictable emotional response. One melody was the specific evocation for piety, another for love, and another for physical courage. Ancient musicians did not compose. They simply sang their lyrics to well-known melodies. We do not know which melodies our fathers used in their ceremonies. We do know something of those they rejected. Arousal melodies and those suggesting physical passion, frequently heard in Canaanite shrines where fertility rites were common, were not heard in the shrine of Jerusalem where such rites were not admitted.

A careful reading of Scripture reveals that the prophets never inveighed against the use of music in worship nor did they denounce the homespun music of Israelite farmers and herdsmen. On the other hand, they did denounce the music of the banquet hall and the theater, the melodies of vulgarity and indulgence. We find Isaiah saying: "Woe to those who at their banquets have lyre and harp, timbrel, flute and wine; but who never give a thought to the plan of God." Amos put it this way: "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion. . . those who lie on ivory beds. . .feasting on lambs from the flock. . .humming snatches of song to the tunes of the flute. . .accounting themselves musicians like David." There were the tunes associated with the psalmist and there were songs which seduced and diverted the rich and the powerful as they encouraged them to help the

poor of the land whose sweat for a crust of bread made their indulgences possible. Music which allowed the rich to forget their responsibilities was contemptible; but music which welled up naturally from the human soul or spoke of the beauty of God's universe and of God, the music which accompanied the ceremonies in the shrine, was not only acceptable but consecrated.

When the rabbis took over the leadership of Jewish life, they took a rather dim attitude towards most instrumental music. As you know, the synagogue set aside all instrumental music. The service was chanted and the chanting was unaccompanied. The rabbis claimed that this rule existed as a sign of Israel's mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Those who worshipped were to always be reminded of the Exile, of God's judgement, and of the lost glories of Zion. Worship could not be fully orchestrated until the Exile was ended and Israel celebrated God again in The Temple. Actually, the sages' attitudes towards instrumental music seems to have had other motivations as well. They associated music with the theater and the banquet hall, and in the Greek world the theater as well as the banquet hall was associated with bawdiness, violence and wantonness. Increasingly, music once taken so seriously was seen simply as a distraction, a rabbi observing: "When music enters the door destruction enters the house," obviously a moral rather than a musical judgement. Now I know parents who would nod vigorous agreement with the literal meaning of this observation. A child has become a member of a rock and roll band or has taken up drums and, truly, when music enters the house, destruction enters the door. But most of us hearing this moralism are somewhat put off by the rabbi's negativism. We are conditioned to consider music as something delightful, full of charm, one of the great pleasures of our day. Most parents have their built-in hi-fi equipment and most of our children have their own tape deck. When we drive we turn to the music station which plays the type of music we desire. We have never seriously considered music a darker side.

I want to read to you a paragraph from one of the great philosophers of

antiquity, Plato:

New styles in music quietly insinuate themselves into manners and customs and from there become a still greater force. . . They go on to attack laws and constitutions, displaying the utmost independence, until it ends by overthrowing everything, both in public and in private.

I can hear some of you thinking: how can a supposedly wise man speak so excessively? Music has nothing to do with laws or constitutions. Some music may be a distraction, but, surely, it's not subversive. But recall that Plato was a citizen of the rather austere culture of classical Athens, a member of a community which set great store by civic duty, rectitude and personal responsibility. In all his writing Plato emphasized the duties of citizenship, virtue and selfcontrol. Plato worked for an Athens governed by sober-minded, dedicated citizens, There was another Athens, an Athens which enjoyed Dionysian and Bacchanalian rites in which these not fully-disciplined citizens gave themselves over to musical excess, wine and passion, and danced themselves into ecstasy and madness. The more sober-minded, like Plato, saw music as the immediate cause of such excess and knew the intoxicated as unreasonable and irresponsible men who were a threat to the society of reason he sought to encourage. Music stimulated the emotions which broke down self-control and led many to act in unreasonable ways.

Woodstock has gone down in history as a great love feast, but many similar musical experiences have encouraged not only mindlessness but drugs and violence. Plato and the rabbis taught a determined morality which saw danger in the appeal of music, the appeal of music to the passion. In their considered judgement music was subversive to social order. Music encouraged withdrawal from duty and immoderation. It appealed to the senses rather than to high-mindedness. Plato respected the music which accompanied the recitals of Homer's epics. The rabbis revered the Torah chants; but both knew that most music was not used for such sacred ends. Indeed, in their minds music did in fact subvert the social order.

Remember that the counter culture which was so popular in the late 60's was

not only determined to end the war in Vietnam but free America of the traditional moral restrictions. It looked towards a society in which people would be restricted by institutions or social conventions. Recall that music was looked on as the hammer which would break open the shackles of the past. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, Pete Seger and Bob Dylan were the Pied Pipers who would lead us into this wonderful new world. Their music broke the rules and was directed not to the mind, the mind represented the past and the institutions people wanted to break away from; but to feeling, emotion and passion. They sang of breaking away, of being genuine, of not being bound by the laws of a corrupt society. To read Plato against our own experience is to recognize that he spoke with some insight: music can be subversive to the laws and forms of society.

We are citizens of the most musically saturated age the world has ever known, Music is everywhere. All we need is to turn on the radio or the record player or the tape deck and we are surrounded by music. In the ancient world you needed a musician and their music was limited to the reach of an instrument or the human voice. Our music is electronically amplified. Music today does in fact fill many minds to the exclusion of all other stimuli or thought. We use music to avoid silence and the need to think. As I drive through the city I often see joggers with Walkmasters over their ears and I often wonder what, if anything, is going on in their heads. When I walk into a home where music resounds from the walls I wonder whether music sets a mood or is being used as an anodyne, a way of not thinking about the heavy problems of the real world. When the music is on you don't have to think. When music is turned on loud, you can't think. I believe it to be true that the incredible appeal of music to our generation lies precisely in its ability to preclude thought. Music also draws us away from others and into ourselves. In many ways music is destructive of community. I can't communicate in a room where the music has been raised above a certain decibel level. In my more suspicious moments I sometimes wonder what it is that has made our generation so musically involved. Is it simply that we can buy all kinds of

music-producing machines? I think not. I think we use music to drown out our fears of the many problems of our time. It's too painful to think so we turn to music to fill our minds and forestall the power of silence to force us to think. I'm not sure I'm right, but I place the idea before you as one worthy of some serious thought.

Neither the rabbis nor Plato set out to prohibit music or to destroy mankind's natural love of song. Plato went to the theater. The same rabbis who said that when music enters the home, destruction enters the house, helped to create an entirely sung liturgy. Again, the issue was music for what. The rabbis, I suspect, sought the music which springs naturally from the heart. Today, unfortunately, most congregants sit and have music played to them; but in the early synagogues there was no choir and no cantor. Music was produced by the congregation or there was no music at all. The rabbis did away with instruments in part because not everyone plays an instrument. We listen to instrumentalists. The the worship of God should involve us thoroughly and actively. Everyone has a voice. In the early synagogues there were no instruments; no cantors; no virtuosi. Everybody sang the well-known, simple melodies. Early synagogue music didn't have a great deal of variety, but it had full participation. you couldn't sit back and be sung to. You couldn't sit back and listen. If you didn't ahve a good voice you hummed a lot. If you could sing you sang. There was a sense of naturalness and the appropriateness of the music.

When I think of music I can't get out of my mind the image of the crowded Berlin concert halls in the 1930's and early 1940's, filled with Gauliters and high Nazis officials and their wives, listening to Von Karayan and others conduct Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Music does not inevitably develop nobler sentiments. Music is not necessarily a means of moral improvement which is why I worry about the fact that today music increasingly dominates our lives, and I wonder at what cost. I have a terrible feeling that for many music has become so dominant a factor in their lives that it has drowned out thinking time and encouraged an

impulsiveness and emotionalism which inevitably stands in the way of our more serious concerns. The attitude of the rabbis to music is best described as a love-hate relationship; which is to say that music is not always beneficial. Music simply is. The test is one of effect and affect.





TEMPLE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION NEWS

April 3, 1984 FIRST TUESDAY

Back by popular demand!

Our "Gourmet Rabbis" will treat our tastebuds with some delectable Passover recipes.

Please join us with Rabbis Berman and Sandmel for a lovely program at The Temple Branch.

Delicious lunch at 12 noon Program at 12:45 p.m.

Gift Shops Open

Members \$3.50

Guests \$4.00

For reservations call Mildred Englander - 561-8939

HELP! HELP!

Please look to see if you can find one or more of those fabulous satin quilts which were made by The Temple Women's Association back in the 20's, 30's, and 40's. If you were a bride in those days you probably had one or two of these precious quilts in your trousseau.

Please look in your trunks, ask your friends, phone your grandmother. Then telephone the Branch at 831-3233 — we will pick them up for the Display and Decorating Committee.

Handknit sweaters are the hottest fashion trend. Learn to make your own Spring and Summer creations. We have arranged for an outstanding professional teacher to show you how. She will teach to knit or help you with your current projects.

There will be a minimal fee and classes will be held on Tuesday mornings at The Temple Branch from 10-11:30 a.m. If you are interested, please call Faith Becker at 831-3233 to register.



The TMC
Invites you to Celebrate the Second Night of Passover
At a Seder
With Rabbi Silver

Tuesday, April, 17th at 6:30 p.m. at The Temple Branch

Adults - \$18.00 Children under 10 - \$8.00

Phone reservations to The Temple Office 831-3233 Reservations Limited to 125

Confirm by a check payable to: The TMC and mail to The Temple Branch 26000 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood, Ohio 44122 NEW STYLES IN MUSIC QUETTY INSINDER THEMSTEDS.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Temple Bulletin, University Circle at Silver Park, Clevaland, Ohio 44106.

Friday Evening Service — 5:30 - 6:10 — The Temple Chapel Sabbath Service — 9:00 a.m. — The Branch

PRAYER AND THE NOITUTION

will speak on

SING UNTO THE LORD BNOS OLO NA

will speak on

Rabbi DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

> April 8, 1984 10:30 s.m. The Temple Branch

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

April 1, 1984 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch

DATED MATERIAL DO NOT DELAY

Second Class Postage Paid at Cleveland, Ohio

SUNDAY MORNING SERVICES

Published bi-weekly except during the summer vacation

The Temple
University Circle at Silver Park
Cleveland, Ohio 44106
791-7755

THE TEMPLE BULLETIN
(USPS 537580)

WRHS

FIRST FRIDAY

OUR 11TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

8:15 P.M.—
THE TEMPLE
BRANCH.
ELLEN BONNIE
MANDEL
AUDITORIUM.

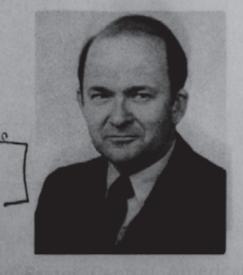
Kiddush and Candle Lighting.

April 6, 1984

The Wilbert J. and Sara R. Levin Memorial Lecture

RICHARD N. HOLWILL, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Inter-American Affairs

* Mr. Holwill is the liaison between The State Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, The Congress and the business community. He is currently assisting in the implementation of the Caribbean Basin Initiative and works closely with officials from The Departments of Commerce, Transportation, Agriculture and Energy on their concerns in Latin America.



- * Mr. Holwill's topic will be The United States Central American Policy.
- * After the question and answer period, an Oneg Shabbat will conclude the evening.

YOUR TEMPLE CALENDAR — Clip and Save

26000 SHAKER BOULEVARD 831-3233

SUN	MON	THEC	WED	THURC	ED!	CAT
SUN		TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
APRIL 1 No School SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi	2	TWA FIRST TUESDAY Passover Recipes by our GOURMET RABBIS 12 noon - lunch 12:45 p.m program	Midweek	Jen Workstop ne rel. Read Sandra Classes Resume		Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m Branch School Resumes
Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak on "SING UNTO THE LORD AN OLD SONG"		Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m Branch Temple Young Associates Board Meeting - 8 p.m.	Lunch with		FIRST FRIDAY Richard N. Holwill 8:15 p.m Branch	
SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch	9	TWA Activities 10:00 a.m Branch	TWA Board Meeting 10:00 a.m Branch	12	13	Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m Branch
Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak on PRAYER AND THE CONSTITUTION		Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m Branch	HS	IICAN JEWISH C H I V E S	Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel SACRED SERVICE	
SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver	16	PASSOVER SERVICE 10:30 a.m Branch Conducted by Temple Seniors	18	19	Darius Milhaud 8:00 p.m Main Temple	Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m Branch
will speak on THE HAGGADAH — THEN AND NOW		Lunch and Entertainment for Seniors to follow TMC SECOND SEDER 6:30 p.m Branch	MIDWEEK CLASS	E S	Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel THIRD FRIDAY FREEDOM SEDER 6:00 p.m Branch	
SERVICE 10:30 a.m. The Temple Branch Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver will speak	Last Day PASSOVER SERVICE HEBREW GRADUATION 10:30 a.m Branch	TWA Activities 10:00 a.m Branch Fellowship & Study Group Rabbi David Sandmel 10:30 a.m Branch	Midweek Classes Resume	26	27	Shabbat Service 9:00 a.m Branch Bat Mitzvah RACHEL HIBSHMAN 11:00 a.m. The Temple Chapel
					Service - 5:30 p.m. The Temple Chapel	