

“Israeli” Moments in Foreign Music

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Herzl Shmueli's book on Israeli songs opens with the definition of its repertoire: melodies – a meaningful and significant section of the entire repertoire (that is, not the entire repertoire) composed in Israel – that are “Israeli” due to several features, that provide them a special sound, distinct from both European and East-European-Jewish melodies and from Oriental ones.

Shmueli's choice of 800 songs for his corpus focused on those that sounded to him *intuitively* as “Israeli”, striving to bring into consciousness the features that caused them to sound Israeli. My current project follows a similar methodology, selecting for study various musical excerpts that intuitively have an “Israeli sound” for me, but with one profound twist: the pieces I study are not Israeli at all. Usually, it should go without saying that the foreign Israeli-sounding excerpts do not express Israeliness nor are they influenced by Israeli music. Some pieces may have influenced Israeli music directly, but usually they must be understood as sharing with Israeli music sources of influence, participation in global trends or perhaps aesthetic aims. What makes the sources of influence I shall present today peculiar is that paradoxically, their counterparts within Israeli music express self-identity.

Although I perform also a consciously search for pieces with musical features ascribed to Israeli music, it is my intuition that eventually decides whether the piece really sounds “Israeli”. The shortcomings of intuitive methodology are obvious – if

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your intuitions are different than mine, how can I persuade you? - but it has also advantages. My selection is eventually “cleaner” than that by Shmueli, as it consists solely of passages that stroke me unexpectedly: “wow, that sounds Israeli”.

The kind of “Israeliness” I search for is similar to that Shmueli wished to find, albeit I shall concentrate on art music. Our model will be the naïve branch of the Mediterranean school in Israeli music, partly overlapping with Hirshberg's category of “Popular Nationalism”. Menachem Avidom's *Symphonie Populaire* is a paradigmatic work of this genre. Example 1 brings two passages from it.

Example 1 AUDIO 1 + 2: Paradigmatic “Israeliness” in Israeli concert music, based on the naïve branch of the Israeli Mediterranean school: Menachem Avidom, *Symphonie Populaire*

2nd movement (Pastoral)

The image shows a page of a musical score for the 2nd movement (Pastoral) of Menachem Avidom's *Symphonie Populaire*. The score is for Oboe, Gong/Tam-Tam/Piccoli piatti, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncelli, and Contrabbassi. The tempo is Adagio (♩ = 60). The Oboe part is marked "espress. e sostenuto". The percussion parts are marked "sempre p". The string parts are marked "sempre p PIZZ.". The score is in 3/8 time and consists of 60 measures.

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3rd movement (Scherzo – Hora)

DOUBLED BY STRINGS

Allegro giocoso

Flauto *f*

Oboe *f*

Clarinetto in si^b *f*

Fagotto

Corni in fa *mf*

Trombe in si^b *mf*

Trombone

Our first international example comes from Vaughan Williams’s overture to the incidental music for Aristophanes’s play *The Wasps*.

Example 2 AUDIO 3: Typical “Israeliness” in Vaughan Williams, overture to *The Wasps*

Solo *p*

Solo *p*

p

p

Several questions arise when noticing “Israeliness” in an English example. First, there is a need to understand the musical features of the excerpt. Most conspicuous is its use of the Dorian mode. Modal composition is a famous trait of the Israeli Mediterranean

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school, but its relations to modal composition in 20th-century Western art music has never been examined thoroughly.

Then we have to consider whether any Dorian excerpt would sound reminiscent of Israeli music. I find it to work to a limited degree, but not to the same extent as *the Wasps* passage. The famous lion melody from *Le Carnaval des Animaux* is not that “Israeli”.

Example 3 Audio 4: Dorian passage with less “Israeli” flavor: Saint Saens, Marche Royale du Lions from *Le Carnaval des Animaux*



So what makes *the Wasps* excerpt more “Israeli”? Perhaps the combination of simple rhythms, a mostly stepwise melody and some specific idioms. The accompaniment is at least partially dissonant, but Israeli concert Mediterranean music is no less indebted to a mild modernism. The combination of a folk-like Dorian melody and a truly harsh accompaniment takes place in Example 4 from Stravinsky's *the Rite of Spring*

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Example 4 Audio 5: Dorian “Israeli” phrase with harsher accompaniment: Stravinsky,
Le Sacre du Printemps

The image displays a page of musical notation for Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. It features three systems of music. The first system includes a piano accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes and a dynamic marking of *pp*, and a flute part (Fl. c-a) starting at measure 27 with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and the flute part. The third system shows the piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a marking *con Rda.* at the bottom right, and the flute part starting at measure 28 with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The notation is in a Dorian mode, characteristic of the 'Israeli' phrase mentioned in the text.

A second working question is whether the Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky in some works and the Mediterranean school in Israeli music are interchangeable products of a single larger musical style, perhaps neo-Classicism. But attention: neo-Classicism is manifold, and only portions of it intersect with Israeli music. The general knowledge of neo-Classical procedures is rather poor, but it is definitely not the case that the entire output of Vaughan Williams, for example, sounds “Israeli”. In the *Wasps* overture, the passage immediately preceding the Israeli one sounds like that:

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Example 5, Audio 6: A non-“Israeli” passage from Vaughan Williams, *The Wasps*

The image shows a page of a musical score for three instruments: Clarinet I (Cl. I), Bassoon I (Fg. I), and Violins I and II (VI. I and VI. II). The Cl. I and Fg. I parts are written in treble and bass clefs respectively, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The VI. I and VI. II parts are written in treble clefs with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The Cl. I part is marked 'Solo' and 'p scherzando', with 'simile' markings above it. The Fg. I part is also marked 'Solo' and 'p scherzando', with 'simile' markings above it. The VI. I and VI. II parts are marked 'p'. The score is numbered 60 and includes the publisher information 'R. & H 8836'.

This passage has a mood fairly close to the next, Israelist, one, but it is not reminiscent of Israeli music. The pentatonic segment typical of the British Isles and the implied augmented triads detach the excerpt from core Israeliness

A third working question: Since the passage in the *Wasps* does not aim to express "Israeliness", what does it express. According to Tovey, the *Wasps* overture combines English folklorism and pastorage with Archaic depiction of ancient Athens. Any of these apparently distinct stylistic frameworks can serve as a point of reference for Israeli music, which, Like Zionist culture in general, claimed both to return to rural life and to recover the Biblical golden age. Rural titles abound in Israeli music, as for example Mark Lavry's *Five Country Dances* and Haim Alexander's *The Reapers from Six Israeli Dances*. Along with the pastoral tradition, agricultural references also point at yet another global context, demonstrated in Example 6 (Audio 7 and 8) ["Israeli" sound in a Social Realist work: Myaskovsky Symphony no. 12 (audio only, 2 excerpts)].

We heard two excerpts from Myaskovsky's 12th symphony, the *Kolkhoz* symphony, a paradigmatic representative of Soviet Social Realistic music. The movements have agricultural titles, not currently available for me.

Soviet Social Realism has a negative reputation. After all, the totalitarian Soviet regime advocated a kind of music that expresses serenity and optimism ruling out

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depiction of the enormous suffer it caused. In the political domain, any similarities between the previous government of the old left in Israel and the Soviet regime are far outweighed by the differences, but in the musical domain affinity is indeed present both in the actual works and in their reluctance to be explicitly emotional. More specifically, Soviet social realism is an important context for understanding certain Israeli works with political connotations such as Yehezkel Braun’s *Praise Song for the Workers’ League*. Marina Frolova Walker ridiculed Myaskovsky’s Kolkhoz symphony as the ultimate worthless product of Soviet music. In its own terms, however, this work is an extremely well crafted masterpiece. I can reflect on my own positive estimation of the work as potentially biased by my ideological support of the Zionist ideas associated with works it reminds me of, but Frolova Walker’s negative estimation might also be biased by her resistance to the extra-musical context.

Along with moral issues, there is another problem with connecting Israeli music with Soviet Social Realism. If Israeli music is related to a tradition from Russia, what remains of its task in expressing our local identity? Does it remain Mediterranean after all? Well, some non-Israeli Mediterranean music sounds very similar.

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EXAMPLE 7, AUDIO 9: “Israelism” in a Mediterranean non-Israeli work

Nikos Skalkottas, “Kretikos” from *Five Greek Dances*

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Kretikos" by Nikos Skalkottas. The tempo is marked "Allegretto moderato". The score is written for a string quartet, with four staves: two violins, two violas, and two cellos. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). It features a melodic line in the first violin and a rhythmic accompaniment in the other instruments. The first system concludes with a double bar line and two first endings, labeled "1." and "2.". The second system begins with a measure number of 10 and also features two first endings, labeled "1." and "2.". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Again, before generalizing about a pan-Mediterranean style, keep in mind that the dances surrounding Kretikos (the piece we heard) are not that “Israeli.” Foreign “Israelist” excerpts that do express nationalism of other nations come from a wide range of cultures only loosely related to our location, from Bartókian Hungarisms to the work of the Armenian-American composer Alan Hovhaness.

So what makes Kretikos sound Israeli? Along with the natural minor, it has some typical syncopatic rhythms, reminiscent of horas. Avidom’s realization we heard of a symphonic scherzo as a Hora is emblematic. Example 8 shows the archetypic hora in Israeli music,

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EXAMPLE 8 AUDIO 10: Paradigmatic Hora: Hora Nirkoda, Marc Lavry

The image displays a musical score for 'Hora Nirkoda' by Marc Lavry. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has four staves: two vocal staves (soprano and alto) and two piano accompaniment staves (treble and bass). The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The vocal parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment provides a steady accompaniment. Hebrew lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The second system continues the piece, including first and second endings. The tempo is marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano).

Example 9 shows exactly the same rhythm and contour.

9. EXAMPLE 9 AUDIO 11: Hora rhythm with the same contour in Sibelius, Violin Concerto

The image shows a musical score excerpt from Sibelius' Violin Concerto. It features a single staff with a violin line. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The rhythm and contour of the melody are similar to the 'Hora Nirkoda' example. The tempo is marked 'p' (piano).

Is this an Israeli moment in Sibelius? Analytically, the parallelism with an Israeli icon is exact, but the ear lets doubts remain more than in previous examples. This doubt points at an important lesson: whereas in the comparison of literary texts intuitive decisions are unacceptable, in comparison of musical excerpts less conscious inputs are central.

Rhythm and contour alone can invoke “Israeliness” in the more modern excerpt in Example 10.

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EXAMPLE 10 AUDIO 12: “Israeli” rhythm and contour in a more “modern” work:

Jindrich Feld, *Quintetto Capriccioso* (1994–95), 1. mvt., fast part

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first movement of Jindrich Feld's *Quintetto Capriccioso*. The score is in 2/4 time and is marked "un poco calmando" and "Allegro giocoso (♩ = 120-126)". The music is written for five staves, including a grand staff for piano and two staves for strings. The notation includes various dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. A circled number 30 is visible in the bottom staff.

In all the examples we heard, the composers' acquaintance with Israeli music was out of question. When Jewish composers are involved, the case might be different. Large portions of Milhaud's *Sacred Service* for Sabbath eve, sung in Sephardically pronounced Hebrew, sound very close to Seter Sabbath Cantata.

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EXAMPLE 11 AUDIO 13: Affinity to Israeli music in Jewish non-Israeli music: *Milhaud*,

“Adon Olam” from *Service Sacre pour la Samedi*

Modérément animé

mf 105

A - don - o - lam a - sher - ma - lakh, Be -
A - don - o - lom a - sher - mo - tach, Be -
A - don o - lam a - sher - ma - lakh,
A - don o - lom a - sher - mo - tach,
A - don - o - lam a - sher - ma - lakh, Be -
A - don - o - lom a - sher - mo - tach, Be -
A - don o - lam a - sher - ma - lakh,
A - don o - lom a - sher - mo - tach,

Modérément animé

mf

PS

Detailed description: This image shows a page of a musical score for 'Adon Olam' by Milhaud. The score is in 4/4 time and marked 'Modérément animé'. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Hebrew. The page number 105 is indicated in a box. The music is written in a style that incorporates elements of Israeli music, as noted in the text.

S. - te - rem kol yet - sir - ni - vra - Le - et - na - a - ssa Ve - 'hef - tso - kol,
- te - rem kol yet - zir - ni - vro; Le - es - na - a - soh Ve - chef - tzo - kol,
C. Be - te - rem kol yet - sir - ni - vra Le - et na - a - ssa Ve - 'hef - tso
Be - te - rem kol yet - zir - ni - vro; Le - es na - a - soh Ve - chef - tzo
T. - te - rem kol yet - sir - ni - vra - Le - et - na - a - ssa Ve - 'hef - tso - kol,
- te - rem kol yet - zir - ni - vro; Le - es - na - a - soh Ve - chef - tzo - kol,
B. Be - te - rem kol yet - sir - ni - vra Le - et na - a - ssa Ve - 'hef - tso
Be - te - rem kol yet - zir - ni - vro; Le - es na - a - soh Ve - chef - tzo

110

Detailed description: This image shows the continuation of the musical score for 'Adon Olam' by Milhaud, starting at measure 110. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Hebrew. The page number 110 is indicated in a box. The music continues with the same style as the previous page.

East-European Jewish idioms are remote from the Israeli ones, which were created in opposition to them. In the music of Bloch, for example, even in *Suite Modale* few passages only sound related to Israeli music.

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10. EXAMPLE 12 AUDIO 14: Faint affinity to Israeli music in in Jewish non-Israeli music: Bloch, *Suite Modale*, 2nd mvt.



The image shows a page of a musical score for the second movement of Darius Milhaud's Suite Modale. The score is written for a chamber ensemble consisting of Flute, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo marking is 'L'istesso tempo'. The music features a mix of melodic lines and harmonic accompaniment, with dynamic markings such as mp and p.

Usage of Yemenite tunes is of course different. When Joseph Achron, a clear representative of east-European diaspora, works on the tune of *Esh'ala Elohai*, the raw material remains influential throughout the violinistic virtuosic passages, in a manner rather similar to treatments by Lavry.

- EXAMPLE 13 AUDIO 15: Jewish non-Israeli treatment of Yemenite melodies: Achron, from Violin Concerto no. 1 op. 60 2nd mvt. Improvisation on Yemenite themes [*Esh'ala Elohai*]



The image shows a page of a musical score for the second movement of Joseph Achron's Violin Concerto No. 1. The score is written for Violin I and Violin II. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music features a mix of melodic lines and harmonic accompaniment, with dynamic markings such as mf and accents. The score includes measures 30, 35, and 40.

My abstract promised also a glimpse into popular music. Time limits prevent it, but you may youtube the Nick Kershaw song in the last example. The Israelite

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associations it raises are not merely analogous to those found in concert music, but rather embody the very same characteristics.

Example 14. “Israelism” in a British Rock song: Nick Kerhaw, *The Riddle* (1985)

The image displays three staves of musical notation for the song "The Riddle" by Nick Kerhaw. The music is written in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains a melodic line with a mix of quarter and eighth notes. The second staff shows a bass line with a prominent eighth-note pattern. The third staff continues the melodic line, ending with a double bar line. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests, characteristic of a rock song's structure.

I have raised today many questions but few answers. Global contexts strongly challenge the uniqueness of Israeli music as expressing our national identity, but concluding that Israeli music is a total fiction is no less absurd. My final table [See Appendix] attempts to compare attributes ascribed to Israeli music with other related lists, but I must leave it without discussion.

Scholars like Dahlhaus emphasize the decisive task of context in creating an atmosphere of national music that lack of uniqueness of any combination of actual musical features. On the one hand, the very existence of quasi-Israeli moments in music that has no relation to Israeliness proves that what can be perceived as expressing our national renewed *Volksggeist* might eventually be drawn from other, basically European, traditions. On the other hand, the very possibility to identify as quasi-Israelist very specific moments totally out of context might indicate that the content of the music itself should nevertheless stand at the core of our investigation.

We have encountered today many "isms": Folklorism, Archaism, Neo-Classicism, Social Realism, Nationalism expressing other nations; one might add Gebrauchsmusik. The precise intersection of such extra-musical stylistic frameworks with intra-musical styles still requires enormous further research.

17. Comparison of technical devices in: Max Brod, *Israel's Music* (1951), pp. 57–58; Avner Bahat, Treatment of Jewish Oriental Folk Melodies in Israeli Art Music (M. A. Thesis); Carl Dahlhaus, *19th Century Music* p. 306 (“Technical devices of folklorism or exoticism regardless of milieu being depicted”); Ralph Locke, *Exoticism in Western Music* (2009), pp. 51–54

	Brod	Bahat	Dahlhaus	Locke
texture		Unisono	bass drones, pedal points	bare textures
		Pre-harmonic polyphony		
melody		mostly stepwise motion		
	ceaseless variations [Schoenbergian developing variations??]	Paraphrase		
		small melodic range		
		Ornamentation of central tones		quirk ornaments
	neglect of the aug. 2nd			

	Brod	Bahat	Dahlhaus	Locke
scales	Return to the ancient modes		Dorian sixth or Mixolydian seventh	Aeolian, modes and harmonies that were considered non-normative in the era and place where the work was composed
			pentatonicism	pentatonic
			raised second and augmented fourth	
	neutralization of boundaries between major and minor [Hindemith?]			Breaking down the distinction between Major and minor
			non-functional chromatic colorations	intense chromaticism, chromatic alterations, complex & inherently undefined chords

	Brod	Bahat	Dahlhaus	Locke
harmony		avoidance of triadic chords		
rhythm	irregular beat			
rhythm	obstinate repetition	repetition of melodic segments	ostinatos	Distinctive repeated rhythmic or melodic pattern; static harmonies
rhythm, timbre		Changing parameters of the original melody while preserving notes		
rhythm, timbre		instrumental recitative [*contradicts my "Israeliness"]		instrumental lines that are the presumed equivalent for melismas; chanting
timbre	oboe and clarinet, tambourine			