

**The Role of Jewish Music in Building a Nation:  
Composer, Cellist and Researcher Joachim Stutschewsky  
(1891-1982)**

In May 1938 Joachim Stutschewsky stepped down the ship “Tel Aviv” to the shores of Palestine. He carried with him his cello, his personal archive and a very clear vision regarding the role of music in building a Jewish nation in Eretz Israel.

Soon after his arrival Stutschewsky expressed his views on musical education in an official document, an open letter dated September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1938 that was addressed to all music schools and music teachers in the country.<sup>1</sup>

The letter was written upon the appointment of Stutschewsky as chief inspector of music at the Va’ad hale’umi, the General Council of the Jewish Community in Palestine, a position to which he volunteered.<sup>2</sup> He held this position for nine years, until the establishment of the State in 1948. I shall first focus on an interpretation of this document in its original context and then analyze it in comparison to the Music Education Program of Israel published online in 2011 by the Ministry of Education.

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Stutschewsky, *Chaim Lelo Psharot: Korot Chayav shel Musikay Yehudi* [Life without Compromise: Memoirs of a Jewish Musician]. Tel Aviv: Poalim, 1977. Pp. 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> The Va’ad Leumi acted as the temporary leadership organization of the Jewish community in the Yishuv.

In his manifest “Mein Weg zur jüdischen musik” My Way to Jewish Music, published by Jibneh in 1935, Stutschewsky concluded: “Jewish Musician: your faith is to live and create as a Jew. Learn to feel and appreciate your Jewishness.”<sup>3</sup>

Joachim Stutschewsky’s vision regarding music in Palestine encompassed:

1. Music Composition, both art music and folk songs “*Zemer Eretzraeli*,” that would bear a particular Israeli-Jewish sonority.
2. Music Performance Institutions - orchestras, choirs, chamber groups, soloists - that would integrate in their programs works in Jewish style; and means of dissemination - radio stations; music publishers, etc. that would spread Jewish music.
3. Educating music audiences, young and adult on Western music as well as Jewish musical traditions.

To understand his position we must stress that throughout his career in Israel Stutschewsky was at the forefront of musical composition,<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> J. Stutschewsky, "Mein Weg zur jüdischen music"[My Way to Jewish Music] Vienna:Jibneh, 1935. Translated into Hebrew by Meir Stern:

מוסיקאי יהודי: גורלך הוא להיות וליצור כיהודי. למד לחוש להעריך ולהאזוב את היהדות; מלא את תפקידך הקדוש כלפי עמך. עמך קורא לך, דורש את ישותך! קבל על עצמך סוף-סוף את כל האחריות לפני הגאונות של עמך ותיצור מעומק המעמקים את עולמך העצמי החדש.  
p.24

<sup>4</sup> See my dissertation: Racheli Galay, *Joachim Stutschewsky (1891–1982): Works for Cello and Piano in the Jewish Style*, Evanston: Northwestern, 2007.

education, and research related to the Eastern *Ashkenazi* musical culture, including Hassidic,<sup>5</sup> chazzanut, and klezmer<sup>6</sup>. Back in the 1930's to the 1970's performers and composers who immigrated to Israel from Europe, especially from Germany, tended to stay away from such materials. In their search for a new musical language rooted in Judaic sources they looked to the East. They believed that the Oriental melos, whether that of the Yemenite Jews, the Babylonian (Iraqi) Jews or the local Palestinian Arab, was better suited to express the experience of the new cultural landscape of Eretz Israel. Other composers refrained from quoting folkloristic sources and leaned towards contemporary music styles and techniques. Stutschewsky's opus on the other hand was all inclusive: he wrote music inspired by Ashkenazi, Yemenite and Sephardic traditions, and later on works in contemporary music styles.

Let us analyze the Main Points raised by Stutschewsky in his letter to the Music Schools and Music Teachers of the Jewish community in Palestine.<sup>7</sup> The letter opens with a statement from which a deep frustration emerges: “Unfortunately, the tremendous change in the people's acknowledgment of its own music, a development of the last thirty years, did not reciprocally occur among Jewish musicians.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Stutschewsky's pioneer field research: Joachim Stutschewsky, *120 Chassidic Melodies*, Tel Aviv: Hamerkaz Letarbut, Histadrut, 1950. And J. Stutschewsky, ed., *Hassidic Tunes*, vl. 1–3. Tel Aviv: IMI, 1970, 1971, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> See Stutschewsky's groundbreaking research on the topic: J. Stutschewsky, *Ha-Klezmerim, Toldotehem, Orach Chayehem ve Yezirotehem* (Klezmorim: Their History, Folklore, and Compositions). Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1959.

<sup>7</sup> My translation from Hebrew. Bullet points and bold to emphasis are mine.

Especially, I must mention, in Eretz Israel, Jewish music is not valued, sufficiently recognized, and promoted.”

- **Music listeners lack mainly the tradition of listening to Jewish music.**

Jewish Music is obviously unknown to listeners, foreign, and listeners' ears are not used to its sound. Therefore, the default reaction is resistance. Although the crowd is not foreign by nature to Jewish music, they are mainly untrained to listen to it, nor sufficiently educated upon it.

- **The responsibility of our music educators** – is to change the society's reception to Jewish music, to turn around their opinion, and to evoke a deep appreciation to it.

**Clearly, a laudable educational undertaking is being done by music schools across the country. However, as far as Jewish music is concerned, few are the schools that dedicate themselves to this mission.**

**Culture is strongly intertwined with Education and Youth.**

**Moreover, the future of Jewish music depends on the informal relation that would be planted in the young hearts. And here stands out the role of music educators.**

**All forces should be gathered for the enterprise of Jewish music----- to foster a new generation of Jewish music listeners, whose hearts are dedicated to the music....**

**Jewish music should be integrated organically within [general – R.G.] music education from its start, both in vocal and instrumental studies.**

**The study of Jewish music should be an integral part of general music history and repertoire curriculum.** It is advised to carry out this mission according to the following plan:

1. **Folk Music Studies** (Eastern Jewish music [*muzika yehudit mizrachit*], Western Jewish music [*muzika yehudit ma'aravit*], and Israel music [*muzika eretz-Israelit*] [**Singing oriented – R.G.**]:

a) **Through public sing-along gatherings, demonstration, and singing in class.**

b) **Through explaining the content of a unique poem or a dance-song.**

c) **Through comparison of Jewish folk songs to folks songs of other nations (Arab, Hungarian, German, Russian, Czech, etc.)**

**2. Study of Niggunim (Sephardic, Mizrahi, Hassidic, Yemenite, etc.):**

**a) Through playing recordings of *niggunim* and discussing their characteristics.**

b) Through a course dedicated to Synagogue singing

**3. Studies of Jewish Music Repertoire [Instrumental studies oriented – R.G.]**

**a) Integrating in a systematic way into the education curriculum [Jewish - R. G.] musical pieces.**

b) The special value of Jewish music would be analyzed through comparisons of general musical works to Jewish works of similar genre.

c) The work of every Jewish composer would be inserted into our life and creation.

**d) Organization of [*Nishfey muzika*] musical evenings** (internal, specifically to each musical institution) **by teachers and students as one (who will together compose the music)**; these would be forwarded by short talks that would explain the music performed; nonetheless it would be advised to repeat the works that are harder to understand. These repetitions would help in deepening the understanding of Jewish music. The level of understanding would rise.

**e) The students themselves will give short lectures about Jewish composers.**

---

In addition, Stutschewsky enclosed to this letter a **list of instrumental Jewish music**. He mentioned the lack of easy pieces for beginner cello and violin players.

The reception of this letter among music educators was disappointing. Only the Music Seminary in Haifa thanked Stutschewsky and agreed with his proposals. Stutschewsky confronted two main obstacles. The first of these obstacles was the dominating ideology of *Shlilat Ha'Galut*, the Negation of Exile that was widespread among the leadership. This rejection of the “old” or “Ghetto Jew” stereotype and the traditional Ashkenazi culture was embraced by the political branch of the Zionist establishment from modern anti-Semite European discourses. The ruling Zionist leadership promoted instead the new, secular, and physically strong Jew, the *Tsabar* (native Palestinian and later on Israeli Jews). This desirable image dominated the public sphere of the emerging *Yishuv*. Stutschewsky's position basically subverted such views. The second obstacle was the poor infrastructure for music education in Palestine at the time that the letter was issued. Small budgets were allocated for music education (such as the purchase of musical instruments, scores, the commission of arrangements, music teacher training, etc.).

Much has changed since Stutchewsky's letter found its way to the desks of the music teachers in Jewish Palestine. The state of Israel was founded and its institutions are well established. The "Negation of Exile" paradigm has sharply declined, and discourses about Education, Culture and the Arts stresses the contemporary rhetoric of multi-culturalism, pluralism, and the maintenance of subcultural ethnic music capitals. Such discourses acknowledge cultural variety in Israel, encouraging the student to listen, explore, perform and create the music of his heritage as well as the music of the others.<sup>8</sup>

The following paragraphs from the contemporary plan for music education are a sort of delayed answer to Stutschewsky's frustration back in the autumn of 1938:

The multi-cultural reality in the State of Israel in the second millennia is characterized, among other things, in a rich variety of musical cultures; This variety presents a challenge to music education. --  
-----The arts in general, and music specifically, are a faithful expression of cultural identity, and therefore they serve as a fine stage for discussion of such questions as "Who am I?" "Who are we?" Since music classes present informal ways to experience and encounter the

---

<sup>8</sup> The Pedagogical Secretariat at the Ministry of Education, Music: A Program for High School (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades). Jerusalem, The Website for Planning and Developing School Programs, 2011. P.10-11

[http://cms.education.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/AEEAC505-C3C9-4449-A5F0-C1F3C5AFADA6/142368/Misradhinuch\\_mozika562011.pdf](http://cms.education.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/AEEAC505-C3C9-4449-A5F0-C1F3C5AFADA6/142368/Misradhinuch_mozika562011.pdf), accessed 17.7.2013

Translation from Hebrew to English is mine.

culture of the “other,” the music class may become an agent of cultural pluralism, of bringing hearts together, and of internalizing the values of consideration, openness, and respect to the other and to the different.

The great challenge presented by our complex reality leads to a curriculum that is culture-based. Two basic principles should guide curriculum writers in designing the music program and choosing the appropriate repertoire:

1. Representing faithfully the cultural mosaic in the Israeli society, and thus - finding a practical definition to the various circles of identity in the Israeli society.
2. Finding an alternative definition to the widespread dictionary of music classification according to type (art, folk, popular) as well as classifying music by geographic affiliation (Western, Eastern, etc.)

Contemporary insights introduced a significant elasticity to the concept of Cultural Identity, and transitioned it from a closed and one-dimensional perception to an open one, according to which every individual in the society may relate herself simultaneously to several cultural layers. This open conception of cultural identity may present a fitting initial platform for designing a program of multi-cultural curriculum in the Arts and in music, in such a complex and multi-faceted society as Israel's.

In this spirit, probably every student in the State of Israel may find her place in the following integrated system that consists of several identity circles:

1. The “Public” level – [Relating to civil aspects]
2. The “Community” level – in this circle would be expressed more specific characteristics of the identity such as Jews, Arabs, secular, observant, and orthodox, as well as the specific ethnicity (Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Russian, Ethiopian and others).
3. The “Universal” level – in this circle would be expressed aspects of our identity as citizens of the world, in this regards – the canons of the world’s cultures.

### **What Happens in Practice?**

Pluralism and multi-culturalism do exist in Israel in the fields of research, documentation, preservation, performance platforms, and education plans.<sup>9</sup> Most important, students are aware of cultural variety, and many are open-minded and curious to learn and explore the different culture expressions. From this perspective, the concept of “Negation of the Diaspora,” if it ever existed as a grass-roots force, has certainly lost its appeal.

---

<sup>9</sup> Supplemented by up-to-date music instruction books *Solmania*, *Shorashim ve Shirim*, *Ha-Sulam Ve-Hamakam* *Ba-Masoret Ha-musikalit Ha-aravit*

And still, Western classical music, Jazz and rock still predominate in the state-sponsored music- education system in Israel, as well as in the institutions of higher education. There are few exceptions to this rule. The Jerusalem Academy for Music and Dance, for example, has developed a substantial Department of Oriental music, a code name that basically means mainstream contemporary Arabic urban music. Yet, Jewish music traditions folk and art, and especially instrumental genres are still missing from the curricula.

On the websites of leading conservatories, High-Schools for the Arts, orchestras and different music institutions the “buzz” words are *Metsuyanut* (Excellence) and *Bein-leumiut* (International). There is no mention to Jewish or Arab musical cultures at all. In the *Recital Bchinat Bagrut Be'muzika* (matriculation recital exam in music) there is a mandatory composition by an Israeli composer. However, this concession is not sufficient in order to make the presence of local music tangible.

## **Conclusion**

The two documents explored here, written seventy years apart, show a paradox: there is indeed a big change in the philosophy of music education expressed in a move towards multiculturalism mostly through

folkloric expressions while at the same time there is still a denial of the musical expressions of Jewish nationhood in the language of Western art music. Recalling Stutschewsky's call from 1938 - Jewish art music is still not taught side by side with Western classical music. If at all, its teaching is limited to Max Bruch's Kol Nidre, and the works of Ernst Bloch. The work of a long line of Jewish composers active since the early 1900s who follow the national Jewish drive and sought inspiration in folk or devotional music (Joel Engel, Joseph Achron, Solomon Rosovsky, Michail Gnessin, Alexander Krein, Joachim Stutschewsky...) is widely ignored. This narrow approach replicates itself in the professional Israeli concert circle. In conclusion, the call of Stutchewsky is still pertinent in our days, in regards to the knowing and appreciation of Jewish art music corpus, as well as appreciating its role in engaging the curiosity of the listeners and performers to its sources.