

After emigrating to America in 1939, Castelnuovo-Tedesco taught and composed in the Los Angeles area. Among his later works of Jewish inspiration were *Sacred Service for Sabbath Even* for cantor, mixed choir, and organ; some additional organ selections for Jewish weddings (for the Conservative Cantors Assembly in 1951); and *Naomi and Ruth*, an oratorio based on the biblical story.

The pride that the American Jewish community might have expressed in the Jewish musical contributions of these three adopted sons was muted by the relative unfamiliarity of their milieu: Schoenberg's atonal music was simply foreign to the ears of most Jewish listeners, and the exotic Jewish traditions of Milhaud and Castelnuovo-Tedesco did not resonate with listeners of Eastern European background. One must also acknowledge the unhappy reality that American audiences of the twentieth century were largely disinterested in contemporary music, no matter how accessible or ethnically oriented it might have been. It took the panache and considerable musical accomplishments of a native-born *wunderkind* to bring American Jewish audiences to a proper appreciation of Jewish music on the concert stage.

Leonard Bernstein: Jewish America's Favorite (Musical) Son

American audiences of all backgrounds swelled with pride as Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) became the first native son to overcome the European hegemony over conducting positions with ranking world orchestras. Bernstein was only 26 when he captured America's heart—and respect—by stepping into the breach created by an ailing Bruno Walter and leading the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in a critically acclaimed concert. The previously anonymous, young assistant conductor was catapulted by that success into a career unprecedented in the history of Western music of any sort. Excelling in every venue he touched, Bernstein won praise as a conductor, pianist, teacher, and composer of a wide variety of musical forms.³⁹

Bernstein's musical successes were as much a personal victory for him as they were a source of vicarious accomplishment for America. Bernstein had pursued his musical education over the strong objec-

tions of his father, who had urged him toward more conservative pursuits.⁴⁰ Interestingly, despite (initially) frustrating his parents with his career choice, he did observe one important family tradition: The Jewish heritage that had been inculcated in him from his youth remained an important aspect of his personal and musical identity.⁴¹

A year before his 1943 conducting debut, Bernstein completed his first symphony,⁴² though the work did not receive its premiere until 1944. At the conclusion of that season, the New York critics awarded Bernstein's Symphony No. 1 their highest accolade, pronouncing it the most impressive new work of the year. One wonders how the critics might have received the work if they had also appreciated its considerable Jewish musical content.

Bernstein subtitled his symphony "Jeremiah," signaling his intent to tell the story of the prophet who had led Israel in the sixth century B.C.E. Jeremiah's testimony is recorded in the biblical Book of Jeremiah, and in Lamentations, a series of five poetic odes written by Jeremiah as witness to the horrible destruction of the First Temple and the exile of the Jewish people into Babylonian slavery.⁴³ The symphony's three movements are labeled, not with the customary Italian titles announcing form or speed, but with the names of the three "chapters" in Jeremiah's life: "Prophecy" (his own), "Profanation" (as the people rejected his message), and "Lamentation" (as the prophet's warnings came true). The didactic intent of this symphony could have been satisfied with these programmatic titles, but Bernstein endowed each movement with unique Jewish musical significance as well.

The theme of the first movement is based upon a juxtaposition of two unrelated excerpts from traditional Ashkenazic *nusah*: the concluding motive of the *Amidah* mode used for the distinctive "amen" cadence that defines segments of the festival morning service, and a lesser-known idea from the *Kerovah* mode. While creating a technically correct, if somewhat esoteric, "Jewish" idea, the resulting primary theme of the movement is fittingly imbued with passion and pathos.

Amidah cadence *Kerovah* mode

Example 8.13 "Jeremiah" first movement theme

Regular synagogue attendees are accustomed to hearing passages from the Book of Jeremiah (and other prophetic books) chanted as part of the haftarah that follows the weekly Sabbath Torah reading. Indeed, since the rite of passage for virtually every child becoming a bar mitzvah⁴⁴ includes the recitation of at least part of the prophetic portion, the haftarah chant is not only well known to many Jewish listeners, but also part of many worshipers' personal musical experience.



Example 8.14 Haftarah chant according to Idelsohn

For Leonard Bernstein, that chant represented the “sound” of Jeremiah. When he arrived at the second movement of his “Jeremiah” Symphony, though, he intended to represent the prophet through the eyes—and voices—of the people who rejected his insistent entreaties that they mend their evil ways. The people mocked Jeremiah, throwing his words back at him with sarcasm and disdain. Bernstein used the traditional chant as the theme of his second movement, “Profanation,” but in depicting the people’s rejection of Jeremiah and his message, he gave it the jagged edges and jazzy rhythms that would later become a defining characteristic of much of his music.

Vivace con brio



Example 8.15 Second movement theme from “Jeremiah” Symphony

As unusual as it is for symphonic works to have programmatic content, it is even rarer for themes from one movement to reappear in subsequent movements. Nevertheless, Bernstein brings back the opening first movement theme near the end of the second movement. It is a moment of high tension, both musically and programmatically. The people have not only rebuffed Jeremiah’s prophecy, but

have been energized by their rejection of him and are now caught in an orgy of mockery and spiritual abandon. Rather than renouncing his people and leaving them to sow the seeds of their own destruction, Jeremiah tries desperately to be heard. As the orchestra reaches a frenzied crescendo, a lone French horn blasts Jeremiah's message. In the end, however, it is too late. The people are exhausted by their own debauchery, and Jeremiah is overwhelmed by his failure.

Jeremiah's Lamentations is a book of infinite sorrow. The once-glorious Temple has been destroyed, and the city itself lies "abandoned, like a widow" (Lam. 1:1). Jewish tradition proscribes even the most perfunctory synagogue *nusah* on the Ninth of Av, when the loss of the Temple is mourned. Only the recitation of Lamentations itself carries pitch, and this special Ashkenazic chant that evolved for the reading is a repetitive, mournful tune:

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G minor. The first staff contains the following notes: G4 (quarter), A4-B4 (beamed eighth notes), C5 (quarter), B4-A4 (beamed eighth notes), G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter). There are triplets over the first three notes and the last three notes. The lyrics below are: Ey- kha yash - va ba - dad ha - ir ra - ba - ti am. The second staff contains the following notes: D4 (quarter), C4 (quarter), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (quarter). The lyrics below are: haye - tah ke - al - ma - nah.

Example 8.16 Opening line of traditional *Eykha*

Bernstein's "Lamentation" goes beyond the implied program of the symphony's first two movements and quotes directly from the text of Jeremiah's elegy. The composer chose to let the time-honored chant stand almost untouched by his own creative urges, and the orchestra provides only sparse accompaniment to the excerpted passages. In a decidedly nontraditional move, Bernstein also chose to utilize a female vocalist to sing Jeremiah's laments. The decision highlighted Bernstein's insight into Jewish philosophy and his belief in a "feminine" side of God that nurtures and protects even while its stereotypical "masculine" side judges and rebukes.⁴⁵

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first two measures. The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a whole note G3 and a treble line with a half note G4. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next two measures. The vocal line continues with a quarter note D5, a quarter note E5, a quarter note F5, and a quarter note G5. The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a whole note G3 and a treble line with a half note G4. The lyrics are: "Ey - kha yash - vah ba - dad ha - ir ra - ba - ti am ha - ye - ta ke - al - ma - nah".

Example 8.17 Opening line of “Lamentation” from “Jeremiah”
Symphony, third movement

Shortly after the premiere of the “Jeremiah” Symphony, Bernstein accepted a commission from the Park Avenue Synagogue to compose a setting of liturgy for the Sabbath service. His “Hashkivenu” for cantor, mixed chorus, and organ was completed in 1945. An impressive work—at times melodious and haunting, at other times dramatic and demanding—it is Bernstein’s only work “for the synagogue.” Since its premiere, its rare performances have been primarily on the concert stage. “Hashkivenu” was also the last “Jewish” work Bernstein wrote for many years.⁴⁶ Then, in 1961, Bernstein began work on his third symphony, another programmatic work⁴⁷ that he subtitled “Kaddish.”

In Jewish tradition, the *Kaddish* is a doxology that praises God. A continuous refrain that glorifies God as the prayer proceeds, it func-

tions as a sort of liturgical divider between one section of a service and another. The *Kaddish* appears in a variety of forms, depending upon its position in the service and/or the occasion on which it is recited,⁴⁸ but its best known form is as a “mourner’s” prayer. Those who have lost a loved one are susceptible to doubts and questions about God’s wisdom and goodness. The *Mourner’s Kaddish* calls upon the recently bereaved to declare publicly (the *Kaddish* can only be recited with a prayer quorum of ten adults) their continuing belief in a “magnified, sanctified, and exalted” deity. It is also believed that the appearance of the deceased’s child in the synagogue to recite the *Kaddish* during the period following a death is testimony to the parent’s success in raising a respectful and devout child and will assure the decedent’s swift passage into the world to come.

The *Kaddish* Symphony is scored for speaker (again a female), soprano solo, adult mixed choir, boys choir, and orchestra. Bernstein wrote the speaker’s text himself and envisioned an era in which humankind was distanced from God and on the verge of self-destruction.⁴⁹ The speaker decides to recite *Kaddish*, her own *Kaddish*, fearing that there will be no one left alive to say it after her. She chides God for having promised never to destroy the world only to allow His children to do it for Him. God is alternately her father and her paramour (just as the rabbis understood a “masculine” God as the romantic partner of the “feminine” people of Israel). And she is all of humankind—a disobedient child and an angry lover. She calls God to a *Din-Torah* (a Torah judgment) for breaking Divine promises, but ultimately reconciles herself to Him and allows herself to again speak His praise.

Bernstein’s “libretto” is as replete with Jewish tradition as any text could be. Although all of the imagery derives from the Bible (and is thus accessible to all, albeit in its “Old Testament” form), the speaker’s identity and passions are driven by Jewish history and philosophy, and the *Kaddish* itself is a uniquely Jewish text. Yet there is not a note of “Jewish” music anywhere in the symphony. Indeed, in this composition, Bernstein made his only forays into an exploration of the possibilities of 12-tone music, a major leap outside the boundaries of accustomed Western practice and Jewish tradition.

Bernstein’s next major composition had a similarly enigmatic identity. The work, *Chichester Psalms*, written in 1963, takes excerpts

Musical score for "Adonai Ro'i". The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "A - do - nai ro - i A - do - nai ro - i lo eh - sar". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a steady eighth-note bass line.

Example 8.19 From "Adonai Ro'i"

Musical score for "Lama Rageshu". The score is in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "La - ma ra - ge - shu la - ma ra - ge - shu go - yim la - ma ra - ge - shu la - ma ra - ge - shu go - yim la - ma ra - ge - shu la - ma ra - ge - shu". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a steady eighth-note bass line.

Example 8.20 From "Lama Rageshu"

Why do nations assemble, and peoples plot vain things;
 Kings of the earth take their stand, and regents intrigue together
 Against the LORD and against His anointed?
 "Let us break the cords of their yoke, shake off their ropes from us!"
 He who is enthroned in heaven laughs: the LORD mocks at them.

In the midst of the men's impassioned outrage, the women return with their original melody—apparently oblivious to the agitation stirring in the lower voices. The men's section fades away and the women reprise their opening. Confidence in the providential powers of God appears to have held the day, with only a quietly bubbling instrumental coda warning of the turmoil that continues to lie just below the surface.

The concluding section begins with a lengthy instrumental pre-ambule, with melodic hints deriving from themes heard in the first movement's opening introduction. This segment seems literally and figuratively to be the aftermath of the "battle" just waged between the men's and women's voices. The instrumental section appears to be searching frantically for its own melody and, as the prelude churns through several keys, for its own sense of harmony. That "harmony," in both the musical and metaphysical sense, arrives with the reentry of the choir. The singers—women and men united once more—find the psalmist's answer to the strife in the world in a beautifully understated, unaccompanied chorale setting of the familiar text from Psalm 133:1: "How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together.... Amen."

Chichester Psalms was commissioned for an annual gathering of liturgical choirs from the English abbeys of Westminster, Salisbury, and Chichester and has been a popular part of the choral-orchestral repertoire since its premiere. It is short, varied, and accessible. Somewhat demanding, it can be successfully performed by a well-disciplined amateur ensemble. Although it is in a "Jewish" language, it speaks to universal human questions and emotions.

Bernstein's 1971 *Mass* appears to be as far from "Jewish" music as a composer could get. The unorthodox work, commissioned for the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., was vilified for its theological irreverence and, ironically, was criticized for being too obviously in the consistent musical style of Leonard Bernstein. The composer described the work as "a theater piece for singers, players, and dancers" and scored it for soloist (celebrant), mixed chorus, boys chorus, orchestra, marching band, and electric guitar. In addition to the musicians and dancers who appeared on stage, the work opened with a prerecorded tape of mixed choral singers and percussion played over loudspeakers positioned among the members of the audience.

Hi - ney mah tov u - mah na - im

Hi - ney mah tov u - mah na - im

Hi - ney mah tov u - mah na - im

Hi - ney mah tov u - mah na - im

she - vet a - him gam ya - had gam ya - had

she - vet a - him gam ya - had gam ya - had

she - vet a - him gam ya - had gam ya - had

she - vet a - him gam ya - had gam ya - had

Example 8.21 “Hiney mah tov” from Chichester Psalms

With so many forces and art forms at work, this “blasphemous” work was clearly confusing to traditional Catholics and had many Jews wondering what “their Lenny” was trying to prove.

At least one point Bernstein wanted to prove was that the Catholic liturgy had clear antecedents in Jewish tradition. The *Sanctus* section of the Mass has the boys choir singing “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts”—in Hebrew. *Barukh haba be-shem Adonai* (Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord) takes on a very different meaning in the context of Catholic worship, but Bernstein accomplished an important educational mission by juxtaposing the two traditions.

Bernstein realized a long-held dream with his 1974 ballet suite,

Dybbuk. For years he had toyed with the idea of writing a composition based upon Anski's play. He had also been eager to work again with choreographer Jerome Robbins, with whom he had collaborated on *West Side Story*. By the time he approached the project he added another ingredient to the mix, one that derived from the premise of the story itself and that Bernstein later claimed infused every note of the music—Kabbalah.

Bernstein drew a diagram of a cabalistic [*sic*] tree representing the emanations of the Godhead and called *sephiroth*, or numbers. The diagram embraces such spiritual and physical qualities as understanding, strength, grace, endurance, and glory. He noted that ten numbers plus 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet creates 32 channels of connection by which upper aspects of the tree could be connected with the lower. The name of *The Dybbuk's* heroine, Leah, consists of letters that add up to 36, which is also the number of unknown, just men—saints put on the earth to do good deeds. 36 is also twice 18, and 18 is the sum of letters for the word *hai*, meaning life. Life times, two equals Leah's and the suitor's life—an indication that the forbidden marriage must take place. The composer then worked at achieving 36's and 18's within the octave range, a scale with nine notes—a multiple factor of 18 or 36.⁵⁰

It is impossible for the listener to hear Bernstein's kabbalistic and arithmetic machinations in the music. What one does hear is a remarkable work, at once contemporary and original, yet infused with the folk spirit of Eastern Europe. Its movements honor the protagonists in Anski's play, but they also pay tribute to Bernstein's forebears and to his strong sense of connectedness to his Jewish heritage.

The workaholic Bernstein was often criticized for not focusing on one musical pursuit. Many felt that he would have achieved even greater success had he focused exclusively on either conducting or composing (and excluded the teaching and piano performance that remained an important and fulfilling part of his life).⁵¹ Bernstein's admirers recognized the multiple interests that drove the man throughout his life and the unique combination of talents that enabled him to succeed in so many venues. The Jewish community benefited as much as any segment of the music world. In particular,

Bernstein made an important contribution to the concert repertoire, demonstrating convincingly that music can have a decidedly “Jewish” agenda while retaining its “universal” appeal.

Steve Reich and “Minimal” Jewish Music

As the twentieth century drew to a close, increasing numbers of composers who previously considered themselves citizens of the global village returned to their own unique ethnic roots for musical inspiration. Just as it had been earlier in the century, it became fashionable once again for composers to create contemporary arrangements of popular folk songs or new compositions heavily influenced by traditional melodies. Still, such borrowings generally represented a Western view of Jewish culture, one missing any sense of ancient heritage or Eastern authenticity. When Steve Reich (b. 1936) decided to confront his history, he tried to get as close as he could to “the source.”

Reich did his homework. He learned that the Temple service had featured the singing of psalms but that the ancient tradition of psalm singing had been lost in the West. (It has been maintained among Yemenite Jews). He discovered that the Temple orchestra had featured stringed instruments with some winds and percussion but, again, that the actual tunes could not be traced. Freed from any pre-existing notion of what Jewish music “should” sound like, he set out to write a work based on the spirit of the Temple service and driven by the meaning and rhythms of its Hebrew texts. The result was *Tehillim* (Psalms, 1981).

Steve Reich’s *Tehillim* sets excerpts of the Hebrew psalms for four female vocalists and chamber orchestra. It is within the mold of his earlier, minimalist compositions⁵² yet builds on a wider base of musical material, again based upon Reich’s musical intuition regarding the needs of the texts. The first two segments are conjoined, as are segments three and four; only a brief interval (typical of more conventional, multi-movement works) separates parts two and three. The themes of each of the movements are treated canonically or in variations, and a rhythmic ostinato undergirds most of the music. The effect when the rhythm track stops is quite startling.