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Alexander U. Boskovitch and the Quest for an Israeli National Musical Style

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The period from 1931 to 1938 was marked by a major upheaval in the musical scene of the Jewish community of Palestine (the Yishuv). Scores of well-trained and fully professional musicians as well as a sophisticated and discriminating audience arrived from Central Europe to Palestine during this time, with the local musical establishment becoming dramatically more vibrant and diversified as a result. Within less than a decade, the Palestine Orchestra (nowadays the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra),¹ the Palestine Broadcast Service and professional chamber ensembles were all founded. There also came into being a community of some thirty migrant composers whose promising careers in Europe had been ended with the ascent to power of antisemitic regimes.² Upon arrival in Palestine they not only had to go through the agony of resettlement common to all immigrants but were immediately faced with the challenge of leading the way toward the formation of a national musical style. Yet the components and traits of such a style were shrouded in controversy and ideological polemics.

The immigrant composers constituted a group of individuals who had not previously known each other. Their personal and professional backgrounds were extremely varied, and they recognized no single authority. Hence, no compositional school was ever formed. Some of the composers concentrated on composition as a way of life, viewing "national style" as an inevitable outcome of undirected professional activity that could span several generations. Erich Walter Sternberg, who had immigrated from Germany in 1931, was one of those who defended a more individual style of composition:

I would like to express my thanks to Miriam Boskovitch, who allowed me full use of the Boskovitch archive, carefully kept at her home. The archive has recently been donated to the National and University Library in Jerusalem. Mrs. Boskovitch also provided me with rich information and valuable contacts with Boskovitch's former friends and students, whose generous cooperation is acknowledged. Avigdor Herzog kindly helped with the translation of documents in Hungarian. My research assistants, Roni Granot, Hana Stern and Michal Ben-Zur were a constant source of help. The research was carried out with the support of the Foundation for Basic Research, administered by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Several of the musical examples are reprinted with the kind permission of the Israel Music Institute, Tel-Aviv.

Composers from all corners of the earth, of different schools, find themselves an audience composed of many factions, each with its own taste and demands. In the present situation . . . one should not care whether one is requested to write folk music of the land of Israel, or a synagogue chant or tunes adorned with Russian color. One should go one's own way and speak the language that emanates from within oneself.³

But other composers felt obligated to take the role of ideologists whose duty was to establish the theoretical foundations of a new style through philosophical, aesthetic and ideological formulations, which were then to be followed by corresponding musical composition. Foremost among this second group was Alexander (Sandor) Uriah Boskovitch.

Born in 1907 in the Transylvanian city of Cluj (also known as Kolozsvar or Klausenberg), then part of Hungary, Boskovitch grew up in an atmosphere of cultural and linguistic diversity. The local Jewish population, which nearly doubled in size between 1910 and 1927 to some 14,000 individuals (some 13 percent of the total population), supported both Orthodox and Reform (Neolog) congregations and spoke a number of languages: Hungarian, Yiddish and Rumanian.⁴ In addition to the Jews, Transylvania's population consisted of Rumanians, Hungarians, Germans, Roma and Slavs. Following the First World War, when Transylvania became part of Rumania, Cluj underwent forced Rumanization. The Jewish community did not suffer at first, since the new government preferred Jewish to Hungarian ethnicism. Boskovitch's middle school years (1920–1923) came at a time when the local Jewish Tarbut school enjoyed a short-lived flourishing, its principal, Antal Mark, achieving an enviable level of cooperation between Zionists, progressive Orthodox and Communists.⁵ Within a few years, however, the government had imposed harsh conditions on the school that eventually led to its closing, and antisemitic outbreaks had become far more frequent.⁶

Boskovitch's family background was both Jewish and musical. According to a curriculum vitae he once wrote, the family had originated in the Moravian town of Boscovice.⁷ One branch of the family had settled in Budapest in the sixteenth century, while other members had migrated to Cluj. His grandfather was highly admired in the community as a great scholar, and his father was a moderately well-to-do tradesman who frequently led the services in the local Orthodox synagogue. Family members played chamber music at home once a week, with Sandor and his brother Zoltan playing four-hand piano arrangements of classical symphonies and string quartets. In addition to attending the Tarbut school, Boskovitch as a teenager became a member of Hashomer Hazair. Interestingly, it was the movement's insistence on strict ideological discipline that eventually caused him to quit.

In 1924, Boskovitch moved to Vienna for advanced piano and composition lessons. A year later, he returned home and enrolled at the University of Cluj, which he left after two semesters. He then left for Paris to study medicine, but turned again almost immediately to music. Sensitive and impressionable, Boskovitch's three years of intensive studies in Paris were crucial in forming his future attitudes and aesthetics. The most important influences on him were his composition teachers, Paul Dukas and the legendary Nadia Boulanger, and the pianists Lazar Levi and Alfred Cortot.

Upon his return to Cluj, Boskovitch became a coach at the fine local opera. The Italian government had sent the conductor Edmondo de Vechi to Rumania in order to improve the quality of Italian operas being performed there, and the two musicians soon became close friends. Trained by Vechi, Boskovitch became himself an opera conductor, leading performances of *La Traviata* and *La Bohème*. He also founded and conducted what became an excellent Jewish amateur orchestra, named after Karl Goldmark, that attracted intellectuals of the Cluj community and boasted performances with such great musicians as Bronislaw Huberman.

During the next few years, increasing antisemitism began to block Boskovitch's progress in the opera house; one of his performances, for instance, was canceled as a result of threats by Fascist students. Because of personal differences with the management, Boskovitch also resigned his post at the Goldmark Orchestra. At about this time, he had joined the Jewish Students' Relief Society, a group of young Jewish intellectuals—Zionists and Communists—who had united for the common goal of enhancing national Jewish self-consciousness among the Transylvanian Jews. As part of his activity, Boskovitch initiated a fieldwork project on the Yiddish folk songs of the Jewish communities in the Carpathian mountains. He never elaborated on the methods of his fieldwork; it appears as though he neither used any recording device nor made any systematic transcription but rather absorbed the sound and spirit of the music in context. In 1937, the group published an anthology of essays on contemporary aspects of Jewish life, titled *Kelet és Nyugat Közort (Between East and West)*.⁸ Boskovitch's contribution, based in part on his fieldwork, was "The Problem of Jewish Music," a mature reflection by an alert young musician that displayed his knowledge of the contemporary scene in general and Jewish matters in particular.

Although most members of the Jewish Students' Relief Society shared a Zionist orientation, Boskovitch had no plans to settle in Palestine, his own intention being to do further research and education within the Transylvanian Jewish community. Beginning in 1937, however, a combination of events led to his unexpected emigration. Boskovitch had just written his first major work on Jewish themes, a suite for piano titled *Chansons populaires juives* that consisted of arrangements of seven East European Jewish songs.⁹ Four movements of the suite were performed by his first piano teacher, Piroska Hevesi, at a recital in March 1937. Boskovitch submitted an orchestrated version of the suite to the great Jewish conductor, Yssay Dobrowen, who placed it on his coming program with the newly founded Palestine Orchestra. The orchestra invited Boskovitch to attend the premiere, and he was well received upon his arrival in February 1938. After the performance he decided to try to settle in Palestine; later he declared that the suite had "saved my life."¹⁰ Indeed, of the thirty-odd composers who immigrated to Palestine during the 1930s, Boskovitch was the only one who was brought there by a particular musical event, a fact that helped to establish his position in musical society from the outset.

In July 1938, Boskovitch appeared on a radio broadcast in a performance of piano pieces, three of which he had composed in Palestine. A few months later he completed the orchestration of four pieces titled *Four Impressions*, the last of which was an arrangement of the hora dance *El yivneh hagalil*. The suite was performed by the radio orchestra in December 1938 and once again in July 1942.

Boskovitch's first months in Palestine coincided with the economic depression that hit the country during the first stage of the Second World War. He shared rented rooms with friends (or else was forced, on occasion, to sleep on park benches) and practiced on a piano at friends' homes. One of his friends, Charles Eshkar, related that Boskovitch was "absolutely detached from material matters," his lifestyle being that of a bohemian artist.¹¹ After a short while Boskovitch was appointed music teacher at an elementary school and his economic situation improved, although the job itself was ill-suited to his personality.

Boskovitch and a close friend, the stage director M. Daniel, made a protracted attempt to start an opera company, which eventually mounted Jacques Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* in 1939. The critics praised the singers and the small orchestra, but the cramped stage and the general lack of funds limited the production and the company was forced to disperse after its only production.

Boskovitch flourished as a composer in the years 1940 to 1945, during which he composed the orchestral song *Adonai Ro'i* (*The Lord is My Shepherd*) (1943), The Oboe Concerto (1942), the Violin Concerto (1942), the *Suita shemit* (*Semitic Suite*) (1945) and its sequel, *Pirkei neginah livnei hane'urim* (*Suite for the Youth*) (1945). His reputation as a fine composition teacher was also established at this time, and he attracted many private students. In 1944, Boskovitch collaborated with his colleagues, among them cellist Laszlo Vincze, pianist Ilona Vincze-Krausz, violinists Alice and Lorand Fenyes and the composer and violist Oedoen Partos, to found the Academy of Music in Tel-Aviv, where Boskovitch served as a teacher of theory and composition. After a difficult initial period, the academy was integrated into Tel-Aviv University. In 1956, Boskovitch accepted the position of music critic for the prestigious daily *Haaretz*, which he held until his death.

The period between 1945 and 1959 has been termed "Boskovitch's period of silence" since he published no major compositions. The most significant event accounting for this silence was the composer's deep shock and grief over the murder of his parents in Auschwitz. Then, too, there is no doubt that he needed a respite in order to reexamine his musical style and aesthetics. Boskovitch was occupied at this time with his family (he had married in 1948), his many teaching obligations at the academy—which he considered a major national mission—his duties as a critic and his work on a book on Israeli music. In 1959, he returned to intensive composition, producing the symphonic poem *Shir hama'alot* (*Song of Ascents*) (1959), the cantata *Bat yisrael* (*Daughter of Israel*) (1960) (based on a poem by Hayim Nahman Bialik), the *Concerto da Camera* for violin and chamber ensemble (1961), the *Kinah* (*Lament*) for cello and piano (1964), and the large-scale *'Ada'im* (*Ornaments*) for flute and orchestra (1964). Boskovitch's vibrant productivity was cut short by the sudden onset of lung cancer. He died in 1964, leaving behind an unfinished choral composition and a nearly final draft of a book titled *Art Music in Israel*.¹²

Boskovitch's essay of 1937, "The Problem of Jewish Music," was his first formal grappling with an issue that was to become central in his musical life, and as such it bears close examination. It joined a debate that went back to Richard Wagner's infamous "Judentum in der Musik" (1850), which had belittled the extent of the Jewish contribution to world music by emphasizing the allegedly small number of

important Jewish musicians and the alien, imitative, and superficial quality of their work.¹³ Wagner's essay had sparked a long-standing controversy among musicologists. Among others, Heinrich Berl (a non-Jew), had accepted Wagner's racial criterion in that he, too, defined Jewish music as "any music written by a Jew," though he went on to argue that German music had and would continue to benefit from the infusion of the "Eastern" Jewish elements;¹⁴ while Gdal Salesky, a Jew, had countered Wagner with a list of no less than sixty-six composers and 248 performers of Jewish origin whose important contribution to Western music could not be denied.¹⁵ In each case, it was the musician's biography that counted rather than the nature and content of his music—an approach Boskovitch explicitly rejected: "When examining the question of Jewish music, we should not consider Jewish descent as a decisive factor. Composers of Jewish origin, whether romantics (Mendelssohn), neo-romantics (Mahler), or theater composers . . . are not more important to . . . present-day Jews than, say, Weber or Saint-Saens."¹⁶

Boskovitch himself defined Jewish music as "the expression of the Jewish spirit and mentality in sound." Conceding that any definition of Jewish spirit would be difficult to reach, he argued that this by itself was no reason to avoid such definition, since music by its very nature was irrational and intuitive. As an example, he cited Hasidic dances, which he claimed revealed more about Hasidism "than Martin Buber himself." Boskovitch also responded to Wagner's evolutionary interpretation of music:

European music after Wagner . . . reached a state of barrenness. This was the era of the epigones, of glittering but shallow virtuosity. The exhausted European music was revived by the Russians. Fresh blood of folk music penetrated the circulation of art music. The European major and minor tonalities offered new possibilities for the emotional expression of new music. The new Jewish music recognized the extraordinary significance of the folk song. . . . But there were problems. The Jewish popular melody had to be extracted from foreign, mainly German, Slavonian, Ukrainian, Polish, Rumanian, Hungarian and Persian-Caucasian influence.

With this argument, Boskovitch followed in the wake of Leonid Sabaneev, a contemporary composer and critic whose pioneer study in 1924 of the Society for Jewish Folk Music (founded in St. Petersburg in 1908) had been distributed and read enthusiastically in all Jewish musical circles.¹⁷ Sabaneev had considered the creation of a national school of art music as the third and final stage that would follow recognition of folk music and its systematic research. This last stage required recognition by what Sabaneev termed the "intelligentsia," since

so long as a man is wholly immersed in the atmosphere of the folk-life, he does not notice the style of his nationality or, more accurately, he is unconscious of it. To become alive to it he must get away from that state of existence, must contemplate it from the outside, as it were; only then [is he] capable of artistic transformation.¹⁸

Sabaneev's approach fully fitted Boskovitch's own training as a musician.

While Boskovitch supported Abraham Zvi Idelsohn's search for the origins of Jewish music in the traditional and pristine Jewish folk song—found in its purest form in the *neginot* or cantillation of the Bible—he also called for the organizing of a Transylvanian Jewish music society that would coordinate a large-scale project of

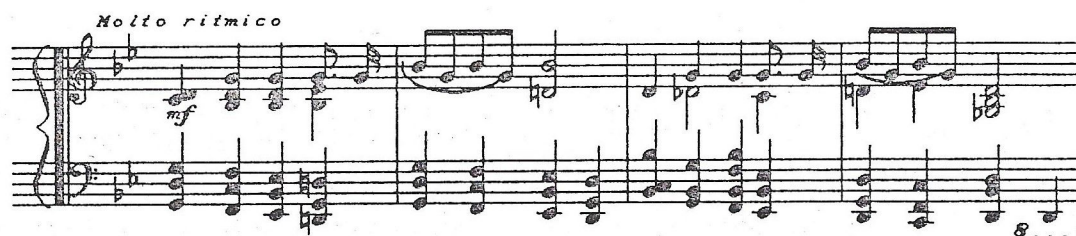


Fig. 1

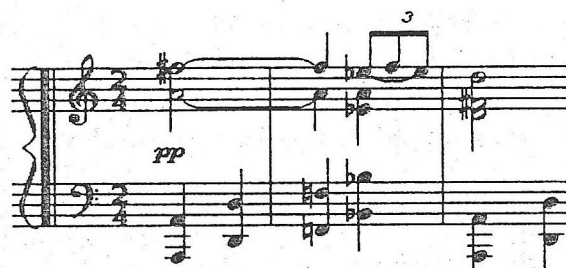


Fig. 2

research and publication of European Jewish folk songs, education of choral conductors and performances by Jewish choruses and orchestras. He advocated substitutes for polyphony, citing works of Bartók and Kodály as models, and noted with approval the musicological conference held in Cairo five years previously.¹⁹ Concluding his essay, Boskovitch appended his own arrangement of the Hasidic song “Yismah Moshe,” which he had heard in his field expedition (see Fig. 1). The close link between Boskovitch’s theoretical formulations and their musical realization was expressed in *Chansons populaires juives* (1936). In a lecture about the piece,²⁰ Boskovitch recounted that while he had encountered the actual songs during his fieldwork expeditions, he had used the same notation as had Fritz Mordecai Kaufman in his 1920 collection of Jewish folk songs.²¹ In *Chansons populaires juives*, the East European Jewish melodies are preserved unchanged in the arrangement but are enriched and colored with elaborate harmony and orchestration, as in the first song, in which the “Ahavah rabah” *steiger* (cantorial mode) with its typical augmented second is supported by a Bartók-like harmony of superposed fourths rather than by romantic harmony in the minor key (see Fig. 2).

The first reactions to *Chansons populaires juives* indicated that Boskovitch had touched a delicate nerve in his treatment of diaspora songs. Critic David Rosolio maintained that

the composer has attempted to unite two contrasting poles. On the one hand, simple Jewish folk songs, powerful in their expression and emotion, clear in their musical structure, and very typical of the spiritual life of the diaspora Jews—and, indeed, the selection of these particular songs as representative of the Jewish character was very successful—and, on the other hand, orchestral instrumentation that has nothing to do with the emotional affinity to the songs. The superimposing of instrumentation for the sake of mere color, with no organic connection to the musical contents of the subjects, is analogous to the grafting of an apple to a plum—failure is inevitable.²²



Fig. 3

According to Moshe Bronzaft (Gorali), however, “Boskovitch’s way was that of the modern composers Bartók and Milhaud (. . .)—to preserve the form and shape of the folk song and to provide it with a harmonic orchestral structure and background.”²³ In his next orchestral piece, *Four Impressions*, Boskovitch appeared to take an additional step away from the diaspora toward the emerging Jewish culture in Palestine. Although the first movement is an orchestration of a piano piece composed while Boskovitch was still in Cluj, the fourth movement is a folk-like arrangement of the hora “El yivneh hagalil” (see Fig. 3). Local critics were struck by the differences between *Four Impressions* and *Chansons populaires juives*; as noted by Menashe Rabinowitz (Ravina): “There is no diaspora-like tearful tune [in *Four Impressions*]. Everything is new.”²⁴

During the years 1941 to 1946, Boskovitch crystallized his new worldview, first expressed in a brief lecture he gave in Tel-Aviv in December 1943 at a cultural gathering of Jews from Hungary, and more fully in his article “Ba’ayot hamusika haleumit beyisrael” (“Problems of National Music in Israel”), published six years later.²⁵ Boskovitch’s point of departure was the romantic aesthetics that viewed music as an autonomous system whose affects could not be translated into the verbal medium. Boskovitch stressed the point that music does not describe actual objects but rather represents those human impressions derived from them. He thus rejected the simplistic, naive and vague local view of Israeli music as a direct expression of Mediterranean climate and scenery, while at the same time challenging the view of music as a universal language. Indeed, Boskovitch explicitly rejected the German view that art is free of time and place. Every great art, he believed, had its roots in a clearly defined small community, and only later could it affect ever-growing communities and societies. Boskovitch illustrated this point, in his 1943 lecture, with a comparison between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean region: in the North, he argued, the cold and misty environment leads to seclusion and melancholy—a situation that encourages the use of imagination. But under the blue skies and hot sun of the Mediterranean, things are more sharply delineated, and thus people are more grounded in reality.

Boskovitch made a further distinction between what he termed “static” landscape, the visual scenery of each country and region, and “dynamic” landscape, the combination of sounds within each language and its rhetoric. Having arrived from Europe, Boskovitch was engulfed not only with the scorching Mediterranean sun and the sand dunes of Tel-Aviv, but even more with the excited vocal gestures of Arabic and Sephardic Hebrew. Such a landscape, he believed, must be taken into account; Boskovitch rejected the transplantation of Western romantic orientalism and exoticism that found its expression in certain works written in Palestine, such as Jacob Weinberg’s opera *The Pioneers* (1924), in which the central aria of the heroine, Leah, betrays the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1909 *The Golden Cock-*



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

erel (see Fig. 4) or Verdina Shlonsky's early song cycle, *Images Palestiniennes* (1931), the first song of which is an exotic evocation of the Bedouin's call in the desert (see Fig. 5).

For Boskovitch, every artist carried within him a deeply rooted national heritage. Two shepherds, one Arab, the other Jewish, may play their flutes on adjacent hills in the Galilee, but their reactions to their surroundings would be different because of their different backgrounds. Similarly, music created in one period would be a total anachronism if written at another time. Boskovitch also rejected the notion that great artists are far ahead of their time. In his first essay, he noted that individual artists functioned within "the intellectual orbit of some great community. The pietism of Bach could not have been born in the Molieresque, French atmosphere."

Thus, according to Boskovitch, Israeli music could be written only by composers who lived in Israel. Composers abroad could compose Jewish, but not Israeli music, whereas Israeli composers could compose music that was both Israeli and Jewish.

Boskovitch applied his evolutionary approach of time and place not only to long-range processes but also to developments within the short history of music in Palestine and the new state of Israel. One case in point was his attitude toward the hora. When Boskovitch came to Palestine the hora was established as a hallmark of local style, characterized by the romantic image of a Dorian mode (a minor mode with no leading tone and with a major sixth), a square 2/4 meter, a symmetrical structure of short phrases and constant syncopation.²⁶ Marc Lavri, who immigrated in 1935, composed the extremely popular song "Emek" in 1936, for instance, and then elaborated it in his symphonic poem of the same name. Boskovitch also turned to the hora in his arrangement of the folk song "El yivneh hagail" and used hora rhythms in the first movement of his Violin Concerto (see Fig. 6) and in the "Amamiyah" movement of the *Semitic Suite* (see Fig. 7). But in his writings of the early 1950s, Boskovitch ridiculed the hora, arguing that

[its popularity] has dissipated. The "asthmatic" rhythm has undergone far-reaching changes as a result of the psychological changes that naturally occurred after the tension of the heroic period and with the return to normalization. It is only natural that the hora is in the process of adaptation to the realities of the Israeli society. If it used to be a mark of identity for a composer to write his hora, one should no longer be encouraged to do so. The composer should rather look for new ways that would free him from the trauma



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

of the hora and allow for ways of rhythmic-collective expression that would suit the dialectic "time," which has changed radically.²⁷

In this article, Boskovitch clearly maintained an attitude that Israeli composers should be "encouraged"—even guided—in their musical style.

In Boskovitch's worldview, Israeli music would find its symbolism in the sound and melos of the Middle East. This view was in contrast to the prevailing attitude of Western-educated critics, who commonly equated Middle Eastern musical elements with primitivism and folk music. Boskovitch, however, applauded the rhythmic flexibility, melodic richness, virtuosity and direct expression of Middle Eastern music, which he contrasted with the "artificiality" of European music. In terms of the emerging Israeli style, Boskovitch recommended the avoidance of vertical harmony—the most Western of the musical elements—in favor of melody and rhythm as elaborated through linear polyphonic techniques. These could range from Middle Eastern heterophony to polyphony in the manner of Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky or Paul Hindemith, depending on the specific musical composition. Finally, Boskovitch subscribed to Sabaneev's model, according to which a scholarly project of systematic collection and accurate transcriptions of Middle Eastern melodies would function as an obligatory initial stage in the formation of national style. The melodies would then be disseminated through group singing, folk concerts, and choral gatherings and festivals—rather than through their arrangement for piano accompaniment, an "alien" dimension that should be avoided.

A continuous line of thought leads from Boskovitch's early Cluj essay through the lecture of 1943 up to the publication of his comprehensive 1953 essay. His was a combination of romantic aesthetics and evolutionary historicism with an extremely antiromantic conception of the role of the composer. Boskovitch used his critic's pen as a powerful tool for spreading his ideology, evoking constant polemics in his frequent reviews. Yet Boskovitch's writings were a double-edged sword. While they were primarily directed to the local intellectual readers in the country who were destined to form a motivated and discriminating audience, they were also a means of verbally grounding his music, which he meant to serve as the collective expression of the Israeli people.

In his self-imposed role as spiritual spokesman of a newly formed society, Boskovitch constantly reviewed and scrutinized each of his own works. The severity of his self-appraisal became evident with the completion of his Violin Concerto in 1942, which won first prize in the prestigious Huberman Contest.²⁸ The concerto

was played by violinist Lorand Fenyves and was acclaimed both by the audience and by critics. Yet Boskovitch decided to withdraw the piece from future performances, having deemed it in need of extensive revision.²⁹

To outside observers such as his students and colleagues, Boskovitch appeared to be a highly emotional and ultrasensitive artist capable of changing his views and directions overnight. Such an impression was misleading. The principal facets of Boskovitch's ideology remained stable throughout his career—particularly those concerning his concept of place and time—and he was always at pains to furnish ideological and theoretical justification for each of his creative endeavors. A salient example was his attitude toward the piano, the most European of musical instruments, which in Palestine (and later Israel) continued to be the principal instrument both for music education and performance. In his 1953 essay, Boskovitch defined the piano as the most domestic of all European phenomena:

all pastorales in the piano literature, from Scarlatti to Debussy, depict sceneries through the window of the living room. Eastern music is more airy: it depicts the outdoors. Even in its cultured urban forms, it would have nothing of the salon-like Watteau. Certain traits of the Semitic desert would always echo in its sounds.³⁰

He therefore recommended the substitution of Arabic instruments such as the *ud* and the *rebab*.

Yet Boskovitch himself had continued to compose for the piano. In 1944, for example, the dancer Yardenah Cohen had commissioned a series of piano arrangements for her dances—which, ironically, were based on biblical themes and were meant to be danced bare-footed in Bedouin attire, accompanied by Arabic music. Cohen had first hired three Iraqi Jews who made their living at the Haifa fish market and who played the *ud*, *darbouka* (Arabic drum) and flute. After a short period of uneasy cooperation, she concluded that she could not form the proper personal communication with them.³¹ She then turned to Boskovitch, who felt the need to formulate a theoretical justification for the use of the piano in Israeli music. He later wrote that,

the Jewish psyche uses the piano as a percussion instrument for rhythmic-motoric expression. The musical independence of the piano may have been an added psychological-social factor, if one bears in mind that the Jewish virtuosi came from Eastern Europe, where the regimes were as a rule anti-Jewish. It would be only natural that with the renewal of Jewish creativity in the homeland the piano would play a central role in the instrumental music of the Israeli composers. The rhythmic potential of the piano also fits the dynamic period of building the homeland.³²

The reasoning may have been tenuous, but it provided Boskovitch with another argument in accord with his dialectics of time and place: while the place called for a visionary Eastern pastorale as performed on Arabic instruments, the dynamic era of nation-building was best expressed by the rhythmic percussive qualities of the piano.

Boskovitch's first encounter with Middle Eastern music had come shortly after his arrival in Palestine. In 1939, the singer Brachah Zefira approached a number of local composers—all of whom were recent immigrants—and asked them to provide

her with arrangements for the ethnic songs of Yemenite, Bukharan, Sephardic and Persian origin that she had been performing. Zefira, a Yemenite Jew, had grown up as an orphan, first with foster families of different ethnic groups and then in a boarding school, during which period she had recorded in her superb musical memory a large multiethnic repertory. She turned out to be a unique performer and stage personality dedicated to the mission of introducing the Middle Eastern musical heritage to Western-educated concert audiences.³³ Most of the composers she approached, notably Paul Ben-Haim,³⁴ willingly composed arrangements. Boskovitch, however, decided to compose only original songs with piano or orchestral accompaniment.³⁵ While there may have been personal reasons for his so doing, his main motivation was most likely ideological. In his view, the making of arrangements was to be a temporary phase in the absorption of Middle Eastern idioms into the new national style, and Zefira herself had already accomplished this. Boskovitch thus preferred to take on the more challenging task of synthesizing Zefira's voice into his own style.

Boskovitch's intensive creative production during the years 1939 to 1946 was marked by his efforts to internalize the most fundamental elements of composition of Arabic music. His archive, for example, contains a manuscript of many pages of transcription of melodic figures of *maqam bayat*,³⁶ (the *maqam* being the scalar and melodic framework for improvisation in Arabic music). Boskovitch believed in retaining those elements of Western music that complied with principles of Arabic music while rejecting purely European devices such as the fugue (which he considered the most intellectual product of the German spirit). A concrete expression of his ideology is the second movement of the Oboe Concerto, which uses the improvisatory technique of the slow section of the *taqsim*, the most important form of Arabic music. The oboe was selected because it is similar in sound to the Mediterranean zurna. As it would do in a traditional *taqsim*, the oboe gradually develops the range of the *maqam* with a strong attraction back to the basic note G, which creates a powerful tension throughout the movement. The oboe slowly climbs to the upper octave and then covers the lower fourth, while the orchestra maintains a recurrent ostinato figure of three notes (see Fig. 8). While Boskovitch emphasized melodic and rhythmic factors, he restricted the role of harmony. There is no modulation throughout the movement, and hence the harmony is static. At the same time, Boskovitch retained the Western conception of a closed form by having a melodic and registral recapitulation toward the end of the movement. This fusion of Western and Eastern elements was generally well regarded. According to one critic,

The performance of this piece . . . should be regarded as a musical event that may lead us to a new way of musical thinking. . . . Boskovitch has an important idea: he wishes to adapt his melodies to our country, to its scenery and climate, to its people and language. . . . He is not writing cheap Jewish music, although his origin is from the Jewish music of Eastern Europe . . . He has moved away from Eastern Jewish music to the music of the East.³⁷

Perhaps the most sincere and consistent realization of Boskovitch's ideology at this time was the *Semitic Suite*, a short and highly communicative work that was the fruit of a great deal of effort (several versions were written and discarded over a

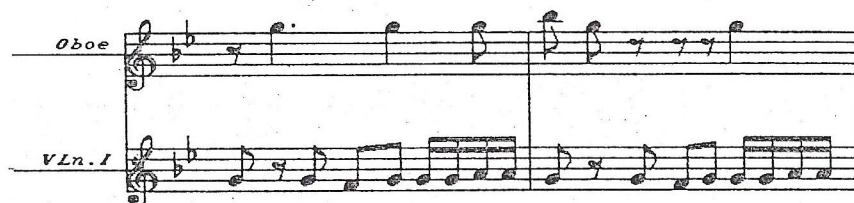


Fig. 8

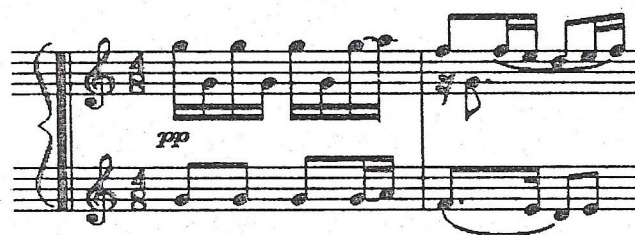


Fig. 9

period of at least three years). The suite's second movement, a series of variations on a theme, was virtually identical to an earlier piece Boskovitch had written for Yardenah Cohen's choreography of a scene from the Song of Songs that depicted Shulamit and the shepherds (see Fig. 9). The direct Arabic model for this movement was noted at a fieldwork interview (1976) with the great Iraqi-Jewish musician Ezra Aharon, who had immigrated to Palestine in 1934. Upon listening to the movement, Ezra Aharon readily picked up his *ud* and improvised on the same melodic figures (see Fig. 10). The other movements, however, he defined as "Israeli, not Arabic" music.

Boskovitch's most radical experiment in the suite, however, is the second toccata, which becomes here a monophonic dance with incidental heterophony, in which all instruments play the same basic melody with individual elaborations (see Fig. 11).³⁸ In his program notes for the suite, Boskovitch defined it as

an expression of the dialectics of time and place in the spiritual collective theme of the history of our people. As a projection of the nonmusical elements, the suite emerges as an allegedly extroverted folk music, but in reality it is based on imaginary folklore because it contains no melodic or rhythmic quotes.³⁹

The first orchestral version of the *Semitic Suite* betrayed attempts at breaking away from the Western sound even more than the original piano version. The score calls for the use of the cimbalon⁴⁰ as an emulation of the Arab *kanun* and for the use of the non-Western microintervals of 1/4 tones in the trumpet parts. This score was later used by conductor George Singer in his performance with the Vienna Philharmonic, which is perhaps the most dramatic recording of the suite so far.⁴¹ But Boskovitch later discarded those somewhat artificial attempts and limited himself to the emulation of Middle Eastern sound by means of European instruments.

Despite the deliberate folk-like and communicative nature of the music, the work evoked extreme reactions. Ravina, who provided the program notes for its first



Fig. 10

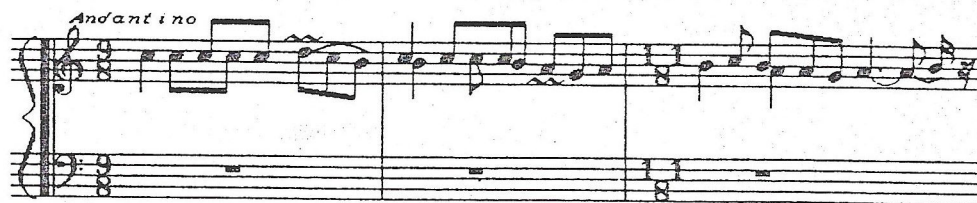


Fig. 11

performance in February 1946, pointed out the difficulty of determining the tonic of the first movement, which is based on a recurring pattern of four pitches in different permutations rather than on a single prevailing center. And Rosolio, the German-educated veteran critic of *Haaretz*, wrote:

Boskovitch distinctly and clearly aims at the creation of a new musical style, which is markedly 'Eastern.' Dispensing with any Western harmonic and melodic factor, he creates tunes that fit the world of Oriental, Arabic music. The harmonic and formal process also follows this music. Boskovitch realized that it would be impossible to proceed in this country with music based on the principles of the West: the scenery, the way of life, the environment, all require a change and another basic conception. But it appears to me that Boskovitch's method jumps too far. The most important problem is how to fuse the two styles. . . . One cannot solve the problem simply by ignoring it. Boskovitch writes in purely Eastern style, and the Western element disappears from his music.⁴²

Rosolio, it should be noted, was an intelligent and open-minded critic at a time when the standards of music criticism in the daily press were generally high. Typically, compositions in a purely Western style were chastised for lack of Jewish or Middle Eastern content. Rosolio, for instance, had previously praised Erich Walter Sternberg for the "prevailing Jewish dialect in his *Joseph and his Brethren*" (1914), which had been achieved without the use of "any folk tune, neither of the Jewish diaspora nor of Eretz Israel,"⁴³ and Ravina had commended Sternberg for applying "an individual approach with no concession to that which is commonly considered as Eastern."⁴⁴ Despite such praise, critics expressed reservations about any extreme turn to Middle Eastern devices. Rosolio and others were simply not ready to admit the most radical elements of the *Semitic Suite*, particularly its rejection of the harmonic parameter.

Another basic feature of Boskovitch's music was its near avoidance of direct quotes of folk material, the only exceptions being his early arrangement of "El yivneh hagail" and a quote of Sara Levi Tanai's song "Kol dodi" in *Suite for the Youth*. Ideology might also explain Boskovitch's limited interest in composing songs in the folk style. In his statistical study of the history of the Israeli folk song, Natan Shahar has distinguished three groups of songs according to the frequency

and significance of their dissemination in printed sources: repertory songs, which received the broadest public recognition; interim songs, which enjoyed only a limited distribution; and "paper" songs, which were printed but rarely performed in the community.⁴⁵ By 1941, the overall number of songs had reached 2,479, of which 684 could be defined as repertory songs. By 1949, the overall number had nearly doubled to 4,073, and the repertory group numbered 948 songs. Shahar has listed thirty-four songs by Boskovitch. Nine of them, however, are very short kindergarten songs organized as a small cycle, such that the actual number of separate items does not exceed twenty-four, two of which originated as art songs. According to Shahar, eight of Boskovitch's songs—a third of his output in this genre—have become repertory songs, almost all of them originating as incidental music for the theater, as with the extremely moving and popular "Dudu." It is noteworthy that, in a period in which the idiom of national folk songs was idolized, Boskovitch rarely mentioned folk and popular idioms as leading the way to the new Israeli style. His ideology called for the formation of a style that would represent the deepest spiritual layers of the Jewish people in their land rather than a naive, folk-like popular style.

As noted, a period of great productivity dating from Boskovitch's arrival in Palestine in 1938 came to a virtual halt in 1945. Boskovitch's renewal of intensive compositional activity in 1959 was at first retrospective in nature. The orchestral *Song of Ascents*, for example, elaborated and repeated melodic and rhythmic elements from his early compositions, whereas the cantata *Daughter of Israel* was dominated by the nostalgia of Bialik's poem and by rich tonal harmony. Then a sudden stylistic transformation occurred, one which may be understood against the background of the musical scene in Israel at that time.

Following the war years, which were largely a period of seclusion for the Jewish community in Palestine, Israeli composers during the 1950s were subjected to the powerful avant garde ideology of the post-Webern composers—particularly that of the Darmstadt group, which developed total serialism and claimed for it a central role in future musical composition. One of the group, Pierre Boulez, went so far as to claim that "anyone who has not felt . . . the necessity of the 12-tone language is superfluous."⁴⁶ Boskovitch's response was discriminating and slow. On the one hand, his basic premise concerning time imposed on him a constant awareness of changes in the musical world; on the other hand, his insistence on the centrality of place prevented him from any wholesale borrowing of outside influences. It was only in 1960 that he determined the aspects common to Middle Eastern music and to European serialism. Serialism allowed him to overcome the pressures for tonal directionality while relieving him of the traditional types of folk-like dance and pastoral that no longer corresponded to the complex social reality of Israel. Boskovitch at this time had expressed the belief that his earlier, "Mediterranean" style had come to a dead end.⁴⁷ Serialism represented a systematic, inexpressive form of music that accorded with his own nonromantic, collective and nonindividualistic principles. His last compositions were an experiment in the serialization of the rhythmic qualities of biblical Hebrew—the intonation of which had comprised an important aspect of his early ideology. Boskovitch's sudden illness and premature death at the age of 57 prevented the realization of his new style, in which he

completed only three compositions, the *Concerto da Camera*, *Lament*, and *Ornaments*.

Boskovitch himself viewed his composing as a constant search for the ideal and collective Israeli national style. On the surface, his musical output might appear to be an erratic meandering from style to style; interpreted on the basis of his ideology, it reveals itself as a consistent response to changing conditions. Boskovitch's fundamental mistake was his belief in the possibility of achieving a unified, synthetic Israeli style as a result of the collective effort of Israeli composers who would follow his model.⁴⁸ What emerged instead in Palestine and later Israel was a musical society that interacted both with Middle Eastern and Western influences in a pluralistic coexistence of styles and techniques.

While Boskovitch's ideology never translated into the basis of a unified style, it did form the solid foundations for a concept of Israeli music that was both more sophisticated than folk-like music and collective enough to relieve Israeli music in the 1940s and 1950s from extreme individualism, on the one hand, and reliance on folkloristic primitivism, on the other. Boskovitch never led a "school" of composers. Yet as a leading teacher of theory and composition and as an influential music critic, Boskovitch maintained a powerful influence on his students and readers. The concept of Mediterranean music that he coined became a commonplace in the Israeli musical scene, as evidenced, for example, in Menahem Avidom's *Mediterranean Sinfonietta* (1952) and Ben-Haim's Piano Concerto (1949) (originally titled the *Mediterranean Concerto*).⁴⁹ Moreover, while he was not alone in his approach, Boskovitch provided the most consistent and established theoretical rationale for advancing the cause of a visionary national style.

Indeed, a listener's survey in the late 1970s provided evidence that an Israeli audience (more specifically, a group of listeners of different ages and countries of origin) retained a clear conception of what constituted "Israeli" music.⁵⁰ Responding to twenty excerpts of Israeli and non-Israeli music of the 1930s–1950s, more than 90 percent identified the second movement of Boskovitch's Oboe Concerto as "Israeli." While a Platonic ideal of Israeli music may not exist, there do appear to be musical patterns that help define any given piece as Israeli. Boskovitch's ideology and style provided even those who opposed him with a point of reference—known to this day as "Mediterranean music"—that still serves to identify at least some of the music produced in Israel.

Notes

1. See Jehoash Hirshberg, "Israel Philharmonic Orchestra," in *Symphony Orchestras of the World*, ed. Robert Graven (New York: 1987), 200–207.

2. Many of the immigrants were refugees from Nazi Germany. For a detailed sociological study of their migration to Palestine, see Philip V. Bohlman, *The Land Where Two Streams Flow: Music in the German-Jewish Community in Israel* (Urbana: 1989).

3. Erich Walter Sternberg, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel," *Musica Hebraica* 1–2 (June 1938), 27. This was the only issue of the periodical, which was the organ of the World Centre

for Jewish Music in Jerusalem. Its activities were terminated with the outbreak of the Second World War. See Bohlman, *Land Where Two Streams Flow*, 116–138.

4. See "Cluj," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: 1971), 617–619.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See *La situation de la minorité juive en Roumanie* (Paris: 1928).

7. For more detailed information about the Boskovitch family, see "Boskovitch," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4, 1260. In Rumanian documents, the family name is spelled Boskovics. The composer himself spelled his last name in various ways in letters and manuscripts (Boskovitch, Boskowitch, Boskovich).

8. *Kelet és Nyugat Között* (Cluj: 1937). The pamphlet, which had a very limited publication, was funded by a sympathizer from the United States. Only two copies have been found so far in Israel.

9. Boskovitch's first major piece, completed in 1936, was the *Cantique d'été*, which revealed the strong influence of Claude Debussy. A scheduled radio broadcast of this work never took place. *Chansons populaires juives* became known in Hebrew as *Sharsheret hazahav* (*The Golden Chain*).

10. From a lecture given in Tel-Aviv in December 1943 to a group of Jewish immigrants from Hungary. See the manuscript of the lecture, Boskovitch Archive, National Library, Jerusalem.

11. Interview with Charles Eshkar, Tel-Aviv, June 1977.

12. The manuscript has been edited for publication by Herzl Shmueli as part of his book, *Alexander U. Boskovitch: His Life and Works* (forthcoming).

13. Wagner's attack was first published under the pseudonym Richard Freigedank in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 33 (1850) and then as a separate booklet in 1869. The article was translated into English by William Ashton Ellis and published in *Richard Wagner: Prose Works* (London: 1895–1899), vol. 3, 79; an easily available edition is found in *Wagner on Music and Drama*, ed. A. Goldmann and Evert Sprinchorn (New York: 1964), 51.

14. Heinrich Berl, *Das Judentum in der Musik* (Stuttgart: 1926).

15. Gdal Saleski, *Famous Musicians of a Wandering Race: Biographical Sketches of Outstanding Figures of Jewish Origin in the Musical World* (New York: 1927). In the second edition of the book (1947), Saleski substituted "Jewish origin" for "wandering race." In the book itself, he used rather broad if not absurd criteria in defining Jewishness—for example, claiming that Maurice Ravel was of "Jewish origin."

16. Alexander Boskovitch, "A Zsidó Zene Problémá" ("The Problem of Jewish Music"), in *Kelet és Nyugat Között*, 31.

17. An English translation of Sabaneev's article, "The Jewish National School in Music," was published by S. W. Pring in *The Musical Quarterly* 15 (1929), 448–468.

18. *Ibid.*, 452.

19. For a detailed discussion of Idelsohn's life and work, see Israel Adler, Bathja Bayer and Eliyahu Schleifer (eds.), *The Abraham Zvi Idelsohn Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem: 1986). The East-West Conference in Cairo (1932) was a landmark in the history of the then new discipline of ethnomusicology. This was the first large-scale meeting of European scholars with selected musicians from the Middle East who gave concerts and were recorded and interviewed. Among those who attended the conference were the ethnomusicologist Robert Lachmann and the great *ud* player and singer Ezra Aharon, both of whom immigrated to Palestine three years later.

20. Alexander Boskovitch, "The Golden Chain," lecture given at the Fourth Congress of the Institute for Liturgical Music, Jerusalem, 1964. A recording of the lecture is found at the National Sound Archives, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

21. Fritz Mordecai Kaufmann, *Die schönsten Lieder des Ostjuden* (Berlin: 1920).

22. David Rosolio, *Haaretz*, 18 March 1938.

23. Moshe (Bronzaft) Gorali, *Davar*, 8 April 1938.

24. Menashe (Rabinowitz) Ravina, *Davar*, 29 December 1938. Ravinah was the main music critic of this newspaper from the time of its founding in 1925 until his death.

25. Alexander Boskovitch, "Ba'ayot hamusikah haleumit beyisrael," *Orlogin* 9, (1953), 28–93. Avraham Shlonsky was the editor of this periodical.
26. Although the Palestinian hora has been linked to the Rumanian *hora lunga*, a clear connection has never been established and may never have existed.
27. Alexander Boskovitch, "Art Music in Israel," in Shmueli (ed.), *Alexander U. Boskovitch*.
28. The competition—held only once—was in honor of the Palestine Orchestra's founder, violinist Bronislaw Huberman, who had suffered severe injuries in a plane crash. Winners in the contest had their works performed by the orchestra. Second prize was awarded to Paul Ben-Haim for his *In Memoriam*.
29. Boskovitch never completed the revision of the concerto, but the second movement was published as a "psalm" for violin and piano (Tel-Aviv: 1987). According to his widow, Boskovitch considered his *Concerto da Camera* as a substitute.
30. Boskovitch, "Ba'ayot hamusikah haleumit," 292.
31. Yardenah Cohen, *Betof uvemaḥol* (Tel-Aviv: 1963), 31.
32. Alexander Boskovitch, "Musikah yisraelit lapesanter," *Bat-kol* (September 1957), 9–12.
33. Zefira had also received musical training in Germany and had performed in concert with her first husband, the pianist and composer Nahum Nardi. She was thus uniquely qualified to act as a mediator between the immigrant composers and the Middle Eastern musical heritage. For more information on Zefira, see Jehoash Hirshberg, "Berakha Zefirah vetahalikh hashinui bamusikah beyisrael," *Pe'amim* 19 (1984), 29–46; and Gila Flam, "Beracha Zephira—A Case in Acculturation in Israeli Song," *Asian Music* 17 (1986), 108–125.
34. Jehoash Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim: His Life and Works* (Jerusalem: 1990), ch. 9.
35. The four songs are "Adonai Ro'i" ("The Lord is My Shepherd"), issued in Zefira's recordings, "Tefilah" (based on A. Hameiri's poem) and a pair of drinking songs, "Shenei hitulim" ("Two Mockeries"), based on poems by Shlomo Alharizi.
36. The *maqam* is somewhat parallel to the Indian raga. Listeners are expected to be knowledgeable about the *maqam*'s melodic character, expressing their admiration of the performance by applause and conventional exclamations at defined spots.
37. G.K., *Hagalgal*, 25 March 1944.
38. In heterophony, each instrument elaborates the basic melody in accordance with its own idiomatic nature, such that ornamentations and deviations in time occur. Heterophony is prevalent in non-European music, especially the Gamelan music of Indonesia.
39. Boskovitch's use of Yardenah Cohen's dance in the suite was not a direct quote but rather an adaptation of a basic *maqam* figure.
40. Boskovitch's model was most likely Zoltán Kodály's *Háry János*, with its extensive cimbalon part.
41. The recording, which is of poor quality, is kept at the Kol Israel library.
42. David Rosolio, *Haaretz*, 1 March 1946.
43. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1939.
44. Menashe (Rabinowitz) Ravina, *Davar*, 23 February 1939.
45. Natan Shahr, *Hashir haerez-yisraeli bashanim 1920–1950: heibetim soziomusikaliyim umusikaliyim* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University, 1990).
46. Pierre Boulez, quoted in Leonard Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (Chicago: 1967), 171.
47. Boskovitch expressed these views to a close friend, the composer, percussionist and conductor Joel Thome, who was himself dedicated to avant-garde composing. Recorded statement of Thome to author, April 1983.
48. Such a belief derived from the erroneous premises of the evolutionary historiography of music, which were propagated by avant-garde groups in Europe and the United States. The fallacy of their arguments was exposed by Meyer in his *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*. Meyer coined the term "statis" to refer to the constant state of nondirectional pluralistic and dynamic

activity during which new tactics and strategies emerge, rather than actual revolutions and innovations.

49. Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, 232.

50. Jehoash Hirshberg, "The 'Israeli' in Israeli Music: The Audience Responds," *Israel Studies in Musicology* 1 (1978), 159–171.