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Introduction

The title of this book contains not one, but two, oxymorons. The contradiction between 'Jewish' and 'music' was Richard Wagner's anti-Semitic invention;¹ the contradiction between 'assimilating' and 'Jewish', already present in Judaism itself, was reaffirmed in the Zionist response to European anti-Semitism.² Ernest Bloch (1880–1959), Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), and Leonard Bernstein (1918–90) did not resolve these contradictions, but in their creative responses to the paradox of assimilating Jewish music, they redefined them. In Bloch's *Sacred Service* (1933), Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), and Bernstein's third symphony, *Kaddish* (1963), assimilating Jewish music becomes audible.

The word *assimilating* is grammatically ambiguous. Its precise meaning is always dependent on context, but its range of meanings is easily described. An Israeli scholar writes:

The words *assimilation* and *assimilated* can be understood either transitively ('the majority is assimilating a minority') or intransitively ('a minority is assimilating into the majority'), and they may be used with a static or dynamic intention, so that the same word may refer to something that happened in a more or less remote past or that is happening now.³

¹ See Richard Wagner, 'Judaism in Music' (1850), in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London, 1894; repr. St Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1972), iii. 75–122. Regarding the originary aspect of Wagner's anti-Semitic thought see Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 209–10.

² On the relationship between anti-Semitism and Zionism, see Jacob Katz, *Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1986), 141–52.

³ Sergio DellaPergolla, 'Quantitative Aspects of Jewish Assimilation', in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, ed. Bela Vago (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981), 186. Compare Phyllis Cohen Albert, who writes: 'The English verb, "to assimilate", can be used both transitively and intransitively, and the two uses correspond roughly to the French active and passive forms, *assimiler* and *s'assimiler*. Depending upon which form is used, it is possible to talk either of Jews assimilating surrounding cultures, or of their *being* assimilated or absorbed into the surrounding culture' ('Israelite and Jew: How Did Nineteenth-Century French Jews Understand Assimilation?', in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 98).

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In this book, my focus is on the relatively recent past, the middle decades of the twentieth century, and both the transitive and intransitive uses of *assimilating* are intended. In the transitive sense, assimilating Jewish music is something that audiences do when they listen, as well as something that critics and musicologists do when they write about it. In the intransitive, the assimilating is done by the music itself. Thus, Jewish music assimilates into the Western tradition of art music when it appears in the form of concert genres such as the oratorio, cantata, and symphony. This book concerns both the composition of *assimilating* Jewish music, with *Sacred Service*, *A Survivor from Warsaw*, and *Kaddish* as its central case studies, and the assimilation of Jewish concert music by audiences and critics.

The phrase 'Jewish music' also requires clarification, but resists definition. Ethnomusicological research, which is flourishing, rejects the notion of a monolithic or 'essential' Jewish music. In current discourse, one finds 'Jewish Music' circumscribed by scare quotes and preceded by the qualifier 'so-called', designated by the plural 'musics', and characterized as 'virtually without boundaries in time or space'. In The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1980), it was still possible to describe the boundaries of 'Jewish music' in a way that largely excluded concert music: 'This article is concerned with the traditional music of the Jews, reflected in oral tradition as well as written documents. It does not deal with individual composers of Jewish descent working outside the Jewish tradition, nor with the music of modern Israel.'5 But in the recent second edition of *The New Grove* (2001), that exclusionary sentence has been reversed; a much-expanded and substantially rewritten entry now begins: 'This article concerns the traditional liturgical and nonliturgical music of the various Jewish communities worldwide, the contribution of Jewish performers and composers within their surrounding non-Jewish societies, and the musical culture of ancient

⁴ All of these can be found in a special issue of *The World of Music* (37/I (1995)) devoted to 'Jewish Musical Culture—Past and Present'. See Uri Sharvit, 'Jewish Musical Culture—Past and Present', ibid. 3; Mark Slobin, 'Ten Paradoxes and Four Dilemmas of Studying Jewish Music', ibid. 22; and Kay Kaufman Shelemay, 'Mythologies and Realities in the Study of Jewish Music', ibid. 24.

⁵ Eric Werner, Edith Gerson-Kiwi, Shlomo Hofman, and Israel J. Katz, 'Jewish Music', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), ix. 614. Werner wrote the section on liturgical music, including the passage quoted here.

Israel/Palestine' (emphasis added). 6 It is the middle term in this series of three—the contribution of Jewish composers within their surrounding non-Jewish societies—that is the subject of this book.

In the nineteenth century, composers of Jewish descent confronted the paradoxes of assimilating Jewish music by working both within and outside Jewish liturgical traditions. Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) and Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864) were among the most successful composers of European music for European audiences and, not coincidentally, the immediate targets of Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism. ⁷ For, as S. N. Eisenstadt has shown, modern anti-Semitism was born precisely when and where European national cultures appeared to be most open to Jewish participation. 8 Concurrently, Salomon Sulzer (1804-90) in Vienna, Samuel Naumbourg (1815-80) in Paris, and Louis Lewandowski (1821-94) in Berlin confronted the paradox from the opposite direction, as trained cantors composing for the synagogue in an assimilated, European idiom.9

David Schiff, in The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, is concerned not with Jewish music in general, but with the hyphenated category of 'Jewish-American music'. He includes in his article a brief discussion of concert music by 'Jewish composers active in the USA', a category that includes Bloch, Schoenberg, and Bernstein, and 'based on the Jewish liturgy', a category that includes Sacred Service, Survivor, and Kaddish. Such music has 'aroused much controversy', Schiff observes, 'perhaps because the very notion of art music is alien

⁶ Edwin Seroussi et al., 'Jewish Music', in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 2001), xiii. 24.

⁷ See Alexander Knapp's discussion of Jewish art music and popular music in the Christian world, from Emancipation to the Second World War, in New Grove, 2nd edn, s.v. 'Jewish Music', xiii. 92-6.

⁸ See especially the section headed 'Emancipation and Antisemitism' in S. N. Eisenstadt, Jewish Civilization: The Jewish Historical Experience in a Comparative Perspective (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 93-5.

⁹ On Sulzer, Naumbourg, and Lewandowski, see Abraham Z. Idelsohn's Jewish Music in its Historical Development (1929; repr. New York: Schocken Books, 1967), especially 246-66 and 269-84; Eric Werner, A Voice Still Heard: The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), especially 199-205, 209-19, and 225-9; and Peter Gradenwitz, The Music of Israel: From the Biblical Era to Modern Times, 2nd edn (Portland, Oreg.: Amadeus Press, 1996), 267-73. See also Eliyahu Schliefer's discussion of liturgical composition in the post-Emancipation period in The New Grove Dictionary, 2nd edn, s.v. 'Jewish Music', xiii. 57-9.

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to a communal tradition in which music and prayer are linked'. ¹⁰ A number of these controversies will be explored in the course of this book.

As modern concert works, Sacred Service, Survivor, and Kaddish stand at various degrees of distance from the Jewish oral tradition of sung prayer, but they are not entirely severed from it. In each of them, Jewish liturgy plays a major formative role, affecting the composer's choice of genre, as well as more specific compositional decisions. Whether it is the sabbath morning service as a whole in Sacred Service, the prayer Shema Yisroel (Hear, O Israel) in Survivor, or the traditional prayer of affirmation, mourning, and remembrance (Extolled and hallowed be the Great Name . . .) in Kaddish, Jewish liturgy provides the basis for all three compositions. Yet these compositions are not liturgical, but art music. Each of them is in a standard concert genre: Sacred Service, in its full concert version, is an oratorio; A Survivor from Warsaw, a cantata; and Kaddish, a symphony. Each, as Schiff suggests, is to some degree alienated from traditional Jewish worship. Even Bloch's Sacred Service, though it sets texts taken directly from the Reform Jewish prayer book, must be modified in significant ways for synagogue use.

Given the many composers who came to the United States as émigrés and refugees in the twentieth century, Schiff's construction, 'Jewish composers active in the United States', provides a necessary gloss to the term 'Jewish-American'. Although Bloch and Schoenberg are European-born, Sacred Service and A Survivor from Warsaw are both products of their composers' activities in the United States. Sacred Service is a setting of texts that Bloch found in the American Union Prayerbook. Schoenberg's 'Survivor' tells his story in English, indeed in an idiom that is recognizable as his second language. Leonard Bernstein, though only a single generation removed from the Jewish ghettos of north-western Ukraine, was American born. Clearly, the American cultural and political context has played an essential role in shaping the kind of Jewish music under discussion here, even and perhaps especially affecting work by composers with deep European roots. In America, Eisenstadt writes,

Mark Slobin, David Schiff, and Israel J. Katz, 'Jewish-American Music', in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (London: Macmillan; New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1986), ii. 571. Schiff wrote the section on concert music.

'a Iew could be, or at least aspire to be, accepted as part of the American collectivity without giving up some type of Jewish collective identity and activities'.11

I have chosen the title 'Assimilating Jewish Music' not without concern for the negative connotations of assimilation in Jewish thought. At its radical extreme in the nineteenth century, total assimilation was 'a utopian dream that envisioned Jewry's complete absorption by its environment, thus solving the "Jewish Problem" for all times'. 12 At this extreme, assimilation merges with the Holocaust, setting the stage for the destruction of European Jewry. 13 But at the same time, assimilation is inseparably linked with a great flourishing of Jewish creativity, indeed with the beginnings of modernity itself. In Modernity and Ambivalence, Zygmunt Bauman writes:

Without any prior intention, by default rather than by design, assimilatory pressures brought forth a social context of a unique and unprecedented creative potential. With an outcome virtually opposite to that which was intended, the pressures generated by the modern project heavily contributed to the birth and flourishing of modern culture—perhaps that project's most spectacular and precious, though largely unanticipated, side-product.¹⁴

Situated like monuments along the assimilatory 'frontier' of Jewish culture, to invoke Bauman's term, the works discussed in this book are part of assimilation's legacy. 15

Between the early 1930s, when Bloch composed the Sacred Service, and the early 1960s, when Bernstein composed Kaddish, the frontier itself was first sealed off, and then redefined and remapped by the Holocaust. Assimilating Jewish Music follows the line of this frontier from its demarcation amid the pressures of nineteenthcentury European nationalism, to its dissolution in American postmodernism. The shifting line of the frontier defines the horizon of expectations for these three works and helps account for their

¹¹ Eisenstadt, Jewish Civilization, 120.

¹² Katz, Jewish Emancipation, 8.

¹³ For a concise discussion of the historiographical issues involved in asserting this connection, see Michael R. Marrus, 'European Jewry and the Politics of Assimilation: Assessment and Reassessment', in Vago, Jewish Assimilation, 5-23.

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and Ambivalence (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

^{15 &#}x27;Assimilation's Ultimate Frontiers' is a section heading in Bauman's Modernity and Ambivalence, 149.

very different aesthetics. The aesthetics of Bloch's Sacred Service, discussed in Chapter 1, are those of European musical nationalism, especially as represented by Wagner. Though Bloch dreamed of new forms and new means of expression, his Sacred Service is a monument of post-Romantic choral music, untouched by the Holocaust in its composition and resistant to modernism in its aesthetics. Schoenberg's Survivor, discussed in Chapter 2, reasserts the aesthetics of classical modernism. It functions as a twofold manifesto: first, for the survival of the Jewish people; and second, for the survival of its own aesthetics as both Jewish and modern. Finally, Bernstein's Kaddish, discussed in Chapter 3, embraces the absence of a unified modernist aesthetic. As the product of a post-Holocaust sensibility and an eclectic, postmodernist aesthetic, it concerns itself with the problem of individual Jewish identity.

The modernist and postmodernist aesthetics I have in mind here are defined, primarily, in terms laid out by Jean-François Lyotard: 'modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forth only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure.' This formula epitomizes the central problem of Schoenberg's Survivor, discerned, famously, by Theodor Adorno: the contradiction between its formal perfection and the inherent unpresentability of the Holocaust. In contrast, Lyotard writes, the postmodern is that which 'puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable'. Whether or not he set out to produce a new aesthetic, Leonard Bernstein's deliberate disruption of the Kaddish Symphony's 'good form' by mixing and juxtaposing compositional techniques and conventions-tonal and atonal, classical and popular, sacred and secular—is postmodern in the formalistic sense described by Lyotard. 16 Aesthetically, then, Sacred Service, Survivor,

¹⁶ 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', trans. Régis Durand, repr. in *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81. Bauman discusses modernity and

and *Kaddish* represent broadly the pre-modernist, modernist, and postmodernist states of assimilating Jewish music. Historically, they situate themselves around the crisis of the Holocaust, and from the perspective of the present, their reception too is largely determined by their relationship to it.

The historical fact of the Holocaust has intensified and informed the critical controversy that surrounds Jewish concert music, with many writers believing that the survival of Jewry itself is at stake in this debate. Writing in 1935, shortly after the rise of Hitler and near the end of his own career, A. Z. Idelsohn, the pioneer of Jewish ethnomusicology, viewed the assimilating tendencies of Jewish art music as an attack on Judaism itself:

As results of my collection and studies the following convictions became crystallized: . . . Composers of Jewish origin have in their creations nothing of the Jewish spirit; they are renegades or assimilants, and detest all Jewish cultural values. The few composers who remained within the fold have mostly corrupted the Jewish tradition with their attempts to modernize it, and have added very little toward genuine Jewish song. ¹⁷

Here Idelsohn subdivides composers of Jewish art music into two broad categories. In one category are those who assimilated completely (like Meyerbeer or Mendelssohn); they 'created or performed European music for the European people'.¹⁸ This group is completely outside the fold. In the other category are composers of Jewish nationalistic music, mostly Russian-born, such as Joel Engel (1868–1927). This group remained 'within the fold', but nevertheless corrupted Jewish song by westernizing it. Engel, for example,

postmodernity, with special reference to Jewish identity, in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, especially chs. 3 and 4. See also Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Kramer, although he studies a much broader historical spectrum of music than I do, also begins his discussion of postmodernity with Lyotard. He defines 'modernism' broadly as 'the conceptual order inaugurated by the European Enlightenment', which 'called on impartial reason to know the world and guide its progress, independent of religious and social authority and unintimidated by them' (p. 6). 'Postmodernism' is defined as 'a conceptual order in which grand, synthesizing schemes of explanation have lost their place and in which the traditional bases of rational understanding—unity, coherence, generality, totality, structure—have lost their authority if not their pertinence' (p. 5).

¹⁷ A. Z. Idelsohn, 'My Life (A Sketch)', *Jewish Music Journal*, 2/2 (May–June 1935), 10. Idelsohn's brief chapter on 'The Jew in General Music' in his *Jewish Music* (pp. 471–7) is more tolerant, but still unenthusiastic.

¹⁸ Idelsohn, Jewish Music, 473.

published several collections of Jewish folk songs in solo and choral arrangements, but 'being unacquainted with their Oriental atmosphere, gave to their accompaniment an inappropriate harmony', according to Idelsohn.¹⁹

Idelsohn's concern with the threat of corruption underscores an aspect of assimilating Jewish music that we have already mentioned: the need to come to terms in a deliberate way with the music and rhetoric of Richard Wagner. As will become clear in the course of this book, Jewish composers after Wagner were sensitive to his attack on Jewish musicians as a corrupting influence within European culture. As Sander Gilman has emphasized, the impact of Wagner's 'Judaism in Music' was widespread and deep in European culture, shaping 'all of the later perceptions of the Jew'. ²⁰ But while Wagner's essay acquired a universality or discursive authority apart from its author, for Jewish composers, in particular, the figure of Wagner needed to be addressed on an interpersonal level. So by arguing that Western music corrupted Jewish music, rather than the reverse, Idelsohn was arguing not only against assimilation, but also against Wagner.

In America, after the war, a different perspective emerged. For Hannah Arendt, writing in *Commentary* in 1947, the very figures whom Idelsohn had condemned as renegades and assimilants become models of Jewish creativity:

[W]e shall have to make room for all those who either came, and come, into conflict with Jewish orthodoxy or turned their backs on Judaism. . . . These figures will be of special significance for the whole endeavor; they may even become the supreme test of its success or failure. Not only because creative talent has been especially frequent among them in recent times, but also because they, in their individual efforts towards secularization, offer the first models for that new amalgamation of older traditions with new impulses and awareness without which a specifically Jewish cultural atmosphere is hardly conceivable. 21

¹⁹ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 463. A classic study of the origins and development of Jewish musical nationalism is Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music: Events and Figures, Eastern Europe and America* (1954; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1983). An important reassessment of the origins of Jewish musical nationalism and of Ernest Bloch's relationship to it is Klára Móricz, 'The Confines of Judaism and the Illusiveness of Universality in Ernest Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh* (Sacred Service)', *Repercussions*, 5 (Spring–Fall 1996), 184–241.

²⁰ Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred, 209.

²¹ Hannah Arendt, 'Creating a Cultural Atmosphere (November 1947)', in Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. and with an introduction by Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 94.

Arendt sees the whole process of Jewish culture-building as beginning anew in post-Second World War America and Palestine and calls for a recovery of 'that great religious and metaphysical post-Biblical tradition which we will have to win back from the theologians and scholars', 22 as well as for a rescue of the secular Yiddish culture of eastern Europe. She portrays a dynamic assimilating process that does not result in a loss of Jewish identity.

Arendt's fantasy of rescuing Jewish culture from the ashes of the Holocaust represents a small part of a complex process of denying, acting-out, and working through the Holocaust that has been carefully elucidated by Dominick LaCapra. According to LaCapra, 'The Shoah has often been in the position of the repressed in the post-World War II West', and 'those trying to lift this repression have faced incredible difficulties and temptations both in terms of the resistance of others and in terms of their own problems in putting things into acceptable language'. 23 More and more, the Holocaust is seen as impinging on all modern Jewish creativity. Ultimately, all three of the compositions discussed in this book participate in the cultural work that LaCapra calls 'representing the Holocaust'.

Throughout this book, the dynamic process of assimilating Jewish music can be observed in various manifestations: in the written reflections and letters of Bloch, Schoenberg, and Bernstein; in the critical, popular, and scholarly reception of their Jewish works; and in formal and stylistic aspects of the works themselves. These three manifestations of assimilation seem to point toward three different critical methods. Consideration of the composers' reflections suggests a study in biographical or psychological criticism. Attention to reception suggests reception history or theory. And considerations of form and style suggest a formalist analysis. Fortunately the relationship between these three methods does not have to be one of opposition. As conceived by Hans Robert Jauss, the project of reception

²² Ibid. 93.

²³ Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 188. The problem of putting things into acceptable language extends to the use of the term Holocaust itself. Shoah, a word which refers to the desolating or laying waste of a city in the Hebrew Bible, is the standard term in modern Hebrew for the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis. It is finding increasing acceptance in Englishlanguage discourse, while the term Holocaust is being questioned as anachronistic (it became current only in the 1960s) and inappropriately sacralizing. While recognizing and sharing these reservations, I continue to employ Holocaust as the more familiar and (for me) idiomatic term.

theory involves mediating between, as well as moving beyond, what Jauss perceives as a limiting conflict between historical and formalist approaches to the study of literature. Jauss refers to the audience's expectations, which are based on earlier and contemporary literature as well as on life experience, as a 'horizon of expectations'.²⁴ As a work endures over time, successive audiences bring new horizons of expectation to it, and at the same time the horizon of expectation itself is modified by the succession of new works and new interpretations.

For the works discussed here, the horizon of expectations was not modified incrementally, but shattered by the Holocaust. In the war against the Jews, European Jewry was destroyed, and Europe itself ceased to exist as the centre of Jewish culture. Thus despite their historical proximity, Sacred Service, Survivor, and Kaddish belong to different cultural worlds. Sacred Service was composed and premiered under the still widely shared expectation that European Jewry would survive Hitler; A Survivor from Warsaw bears witness to the destruction of European Jewry; and Kaddish reflects on the Holocaust from the distinctly American perspective of a new generation.

Now, at the end of the twentieth century, that generation's children and grandchildren face a new paradox. According to Eisenstadt, 'the simple correlation assumed as natural, especially in the nineteenth century in Western Europe, between shedding traditional ways of life and giving up elements of Jewish identity, no longer [holds]'. ²⁶ The either/or choices of earlier generations have evolved into a kind of both/and heterogeneity. Of contemporary Jewish life in America, Eisenstadt writes, 'those very processes, which facilitated the continuous development of Jewish activities and organizations, . . . may encourage a relatively fast and smooth assimilation simply because

²⁴ Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' [1967], in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti with an introduction by Paul de Man, Theory and History of Literature, 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 24.

²⁵ The War Against the Jews: 1933–1945 is the title of Lucy S. Dawidowicz's history of the Final Solution and the Holocaust (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975). The phrase 'the war against the Jews' distinguishes between the Nazi campaign against the Jews and the fate of the Jews themselves (the 'Holocaust') and also between the campaign against the Jews and the Second World War.

²⁶ Eisenstadt, Jewish Civilization, 259.

such absorption can take place without demands for changing religion or denying the sense of Jewishness'.²⁷ It is from this present horizon of expectations, with its multiple possibilities and diverse modes of Jewish identity, that this book looks back on the period spanned by *Sacred Service*, *Survivor*, and *Kaddish* as one in which the problem of assimilation was acutely felt as the unfinished business of European Jewry, and during which a distinctively American Jewish culture (albeit with European roots) was being created.

'Once the drama of assimilation is over (or, rather, *where* it is over)', Bauman observes, 'so is the story of a uniquely creative and original Jewish cultural role.' This book tells three chapters of that story.

²⁷ Ibid. 138. ²⁸ Bauman, Modernity and Ambivalence, 159.