

THE INFLUENCE OF THE JEWS UPON CIVILIZATION

by

Jacob Gartenhaus

Copyright @ 1943

CHAPTER FIVE

JEWISH FINE ARTS

We can give only a brief outline of the Jew's contribution to the fields of music, stage and cinema. In no fields perhaps have they contributed more worthily and generously than in these arts. Through the pages of the Old Testament alone, the musical heritage of the Jew can be traced far into antiquity, for the Jews enjoyed a mature musical culture many centuries before the birth of Christ. From this approach, at least, there is little remarkable in the fact that today among the outstanding musicians and composers are many Jews.

Who is not familiar with the name of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, composer, conductor and pianist? With his *Songs Without Words*, "Walpurgisnacht" music, his oratorios, *Elijah* and *St. Paul*, and his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which contains the beautiful and ever-popular *Wedding March*? His minor works are also popular with lovers of good music everywhere. Who has not heard of Gracomo Meyerbeer, born in Berlin in 1791; creator, as Liszt called him, of Cyclopaeian melodies? Meyerbeer made his debut as a pianist at the age of seven years. Some of his better known operas which have brought him international fame are *Jephtha's Beloved*, *Les Huguenots* and *L'Africaine*. Tausig Carl, one of the great pianists of his day, enriched piano literature with transcriptions of music by Bach, Schubert and Schumann. Ignatz Moscheles, pianist, born in Bohemia in 1794, soon forced the world to take note of him. At the age of twenty-four he was the teacher of Mendelssohn. In 1826 he settled in England where he later succeeded Sir Henry Bishop as conductor of the London Philharmonic Society. His *Concertos in G Minor* were in high vogue, as they are among musicians of today.

Joseph Joachim, interpreter par excellence, was one of the most famous names in the history of the violin. *Hungarian Concerto* and *Hebrew Melodies* for viola and piano testify to his great talent. Jacques Offenback, the father of *Opera Comique*, was a German Jew, though he was educated in France and lived there the greater part of his life. Having first set to work upon parodies of La Fontaine's fables, he shortly thereafter met with success as the composer of music for De Musset's *La Chandelier*. He was the author of a hundred or more compositions, the most famous of which is the lyrically beautiful and popular *Tales of Hoffman* which was performed posthumously and, consequently, whose success the author did not enjoy. In our own country in 1928, Ernest Bloch, Director of San Francisco Conservatory of Music, was awarded a prize by *Musical America* for the best symphonic composition by an American, called *Symphony America*.

The Damrosches, Leopold, Frank and Walter, who are of Jewish origin, have made an invaluable contribution to the musical world. As conductors of symphonies, they are seldom surpassed and not frequently are they equaled. A large number of other conductors of symphony orchestras and of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra are Jews.

Among the great violinists are: Elman, Zimbalist, Heifetz and Menuhin.

The late George Gershwin was considered by many critics to be the greatest composer of this generation. His music is creative rather than interpretative. He has been compared with Wagner and Debussy, in that he did not bind himself to traditional music, but rather explored new fields of tonal blending and harmony. Other contemporary composers are Rubin Goldmark, Irving Berlin, Gus Edwards, Charles Kissel Harris, George William Meyer and Arthur Schwartz.

The Jews in the United States have contributed not only to the catalogues of classical music but also to the semi-classical and popular as well. The operettas of Rudolph Friml and Jerome Kern have been attended by the great and the small, by the learned and the unlearned. There are many people who do not care for the noise of swing music but who have not developed an appreciation for the classics. Consequently, these people, who feel no less the need for music, have found their release in Friml and Kern. With the possible exception of the operettas of Victor Herbert and the waltzes of Strauss, no composers have enjoyed a wider audience nor a more appreciated one than have these two.

Music has been called the universal language. It has not been shackled by the persistence of the frontier. Nevertheless, it is only natural that music should reflect something of the composer's nationality. The music which has had its birth in the German mind has been conceded by almost every unprejudiced critic to be the greatest. Second, perhaps, is the music of the Russians.

One cannot speak of Russian music without think immediately of the brothers Rubinstein, born of Jewish parentage. Anton, in St. Petersburg, and Nicholas, in Moscow, dominated the musical thought of "all the Russias" for almost half a century. Until Anton established his conservatory in St. Petersburg in 1862, it might be said of Russian music that it lacked maturity. Certainly, there was no unified Russian music. Nicholas, encouraged by his brother's success, established a conservatory in Moscow in 1864, and then the two were in a position to mold the musical mind of Russia as they, unquestionably worthy masters, would have it. In a sense, the Rubinsteins were to Russian music what the Rothschilds were to European banking. Of the two Rubinsteins, Anton, the elder, was the greater. His compositions include one hundred nineteen works in almost every known form. His *Ocean Symphony* is known the world over; his *Persian Songs* are still popular. But it is as one of the greatest of all pianists that he is remembered. For a period of several years he toured Europe in concert, and the critics said of him that he surpassed even the beloved Liszt.

Greater, however, than their compositions, greater than their ability to play the piano, was their supreme gift to the world of music: Tchaikovsky. For it was Anton who "discovered" him, and Nicholas who presented his case to the wealthy, music-loving Madame von Meck, whose generosity permitted Tchaikovsky to devote his talents exclusively to composing.

We realize how inadequate this treatment is when we consider the long list of world-renowned musicians. There is not a country which does not count among its great in the musical world those of the wandering race. To give the reader a fuller comprehension of the Jews' influence here, we cite the following others, in addition to those mentioned:

Composers: Bruch, Halevy, Bizet, Saint-Saens, Ravel, Mahler, Schonberg, Milhaud, Saminsky, Achron, Tansman, Korngold, Karl Goldmark, Rubin Goldmark, Aaron Copeland, Sir Frederick H. Cowen.

Composers: Sir Landon Ronald, Klemperer, Kousevitsky, Monteux, Sololoff, Bruno Walter, Bodansky, Stransky, Fried, Altschuler, Hertz, Rothwell, Colonne, Polacco, Schindler, Volpe, Shavitch, Cooper, Fitelberg, Smallens, Taube.

Violinists: Wieniawski, Ernst, Auer, Szigeti, Huberman, Joachim, Kochanski, Seidel, Flesch, Press, Luboschutz, Gardner, Erna Rubinstein, Rosen, Brown, Mannes, Tas, Morini.

Cellists: Davidoff, Popper, Press, van Lier, Gerardi, Piatigorsky, Feuermann, Penha, Garbousova, Belousoff, Hambourg, Wellerson.

Pianists: Rosenthal, De Pachmann, Godowsky, Gabrilowitsch, Bauer, Horowitz, Brailowsky, Tausig, Lhevinne, Liebling, Munz, Schnitzer, Ornstein, Moisewitsch, Schnabel, Landovska, Myra Hess, Mero, Friedman, Gradova, Wengerova, Tina Lerner.

Singers: Raissa, Braslau, Frances Alda, Kipnis, Alma Gluck, Lashanska, Bloch, Dalmores, Lilli Lehman, Kalisch, Wolfe, Dalosy, Renaud, Matzenauer, Guilford, Gabor.

To those who might be interested in continuing this study further, we refer to a recent publication, *Famous Musicians of a Wandering Race*, by Gdal Saleski, containing four hundred twenty-five biographies.

The Jews have taken an equally great part in producing actors of genius. To guarantee them a place in the sun, dramatically speaking, one has only to mention the name of the great French-Jewish tragedienne, Sarah Bernhardt. She was considered the foremost actress of her day throughout the world, and in the history of dramatics her name is second to none. Rachel, whose full name is Elisa-Rachel Felix, first began her career as a child in the streets of Paris. She was the leading woman in classic drama. Many plays were written for her. There are many others who enjoyed no less reputation.

Max Reinhardt, the German Jew, is known throughout the theatrical world as an impresario and director of superior quality. He is known particularly for his productions of Shakespeare, Wilde, Shaw and Maeterlink. Elizabeth Bergner, an exile from Germany, is considered one of the greatest actresses on the stage and cinema.

On the American stage we have Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Al Jolson, George Jessel, Sophie Tucker, Eugene and Willie Howard, Paul Muni, Joseph Schildkraut, Alla Nazimova, Fannie Brice, Webber and Fields, Jack Benny, the four Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin.

Perhaps no form of entertainment has given a wider diversion to as many people as the cinema. The success of the cinema industry is due largely to the initiative of Jewish producers, inventors, technicians and actors.

One only has to think of such companies as Warner Brothers, Columbia, Joseph M. and Nicolas Schenck, Louis B. Mayer, Adolph Zucker, Marcus and Arthur Lowe, Sam Goldwyn, Ben Schulberg, William Fox, Carl Laemmle and the late Irving Thalberg.

Jews have not made the marked progress in painting which they have in other arts, perhaps because in the early centuries the Roman Catholic Church controlled, through its ecclesiastical rules and traditions, much in the field of art, and paintings were done by assignment. Naturally the Jews were barred from such assignments.

Cecil Roth in *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization* says: “The Jewish inspiration of much of European art cannot be denied. Three-quarters at least of European paintings before 1500, and a very high proportion after that date, deal with Biblical, i.e., Hebrew characters and scenes. It is difficult to conceive Italian art of the Renaissance without such familiar episodes as the Creation, the lives of the patriarchs, the triumph of Judith and soon, (though the fact was not realized or conveyed in pictorial art until the last century) the central subject of all – Jesus and the Madonna – which was essentially Hebraic. . . Rembrandt, for example, turned again and again to the Bible for inspiration though he was more attracted by its dramatic than its spiritual values . . . For many years of his life, Rembrandt lived among Jews, painted Jews, and worked frequently under Jewish auspices.”

So we see that in spite of conditions and practices of the early days which were a barrier to Jews themselves as painters, the Hebraic, or Biblical, influence impress upon the field of art.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
