

***Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880-1948: A Social History.*** Byjehoash Hirshberg. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 298, bibliography, index, musical examples, \$101.50, ISBN 0 19 816242 1.)

Judith R. Cohen

Volume 19, Number 2, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087704ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087704ar>

[See table of contents](#)

**Publisher(s)**

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

**ISSN**

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

**Cite this review**

Cohen, J. R. (1997). Review of [*Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880-1948: A Social History.* Byjehoash Hirshberg. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 298, bibliography, index, musical examples, \$101.50, ISBN 0 19 816242 1.)]. *Ethnologies*, 19(2), 182–185. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087704ar>

are knowing, and are “already somewhere, not just on their way to an adult destination and, further, in a very interesting place indeed” (p. 123).

### References Cited

- Abrahams, Roger. 1969. *Jump-Rope Rhymes: A Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Abrahams, Roger. 1980. *Counting-Out Rhymes: A Dictionary*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Newell, William Wells. 1883. *Games and Songs of American Children*. Rpt. New York: Dover, 1963.
- Opie, Iona, and Peter Opie. 1959. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Opie, Iona and Peter Opie. 1969. *Children's Games in Street and Playground*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian. 1959. *The Games of New Zealand Children*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson, and Felicia R. McMahon, (eds). 1995. *Children's Folklore: A Source Book*. New York: Garland.

CAROLE H. CARPENTER  
York University  
North York, Ontario

---

***Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880-1948: A Social History.*** By Jehoash Hirshberg. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 298, bibliography, index, musical examples, \$101.50, ISBN 0 19 816242 1.)

This is a fascinating account of the development of music, and, perhaps even more, of musical institutions, in the area that became the State of Israel in 1948. The focus is on Western art music, and to a somewhat lesser extent on the development of the folk song and the continuation of the traditional musics of the different communities.<sup>1</sup> In each case, the book's strength lies in

1. Or one could also conceivably adopt Bohlman's view that “the most pervasive ethnic music in the Central European Jewish community was western art music” (1989:100).

its treatment of the individuals involved and the institutions they formed, and running through the entire work is the thread of the quest for a national identity, “the challenge of determining the properties of a still non-existent national style based on the barely-mapped field of the music of the eastern communities which...they were untrained to study” (p. 184). This seems to be enough of a challenge, but the ever-present problems of economic difficulties, terrorism, epidemics, integrating traumatized immigrants from both the Middle East and war-torn Europe, pioneering in physically difficult conditions, and forming a new nation are all inextricably woven into the struggle to establish a national musical life.

Some of the early history is particularly fascinating, for example, detailed accounts of transporting pianos by horse and donkey from the Jaffa port to Jerusalem in the 1850s, and, during the same decade, the German Consul’s hash-and-Beethoven evenings in Jerusalem (p. 6). The first community orchestra was started in 1895, the first music conservatory in 1910 — and by 1937 37% of school children were enrolled in music schools. From then on, Hirshberg chronicles a roller-coaster ride of successes and setbacks, inextricably linked to economics on the one hand and on the other to both worldwide and local politics. Among the local concerns specific to early twentieth-century Palestine were the conflict between establishing music institutions and the pioneer agrarian ideology; the balancing of ideals of performance with a philosophy of public music education; and the negotiation of identity — all compounded by the rise of Nazism and its direct effects on the emerging nation. There are stories of petty interactions, outweighed by stories of true heroism, a maze of activity and ideology competently assembled and analyzed.

Other issues include the establishment of the national orchestra and radio service, the development of music schools and the work and lives of individual composers and musicians. One chapter of particular interest to the folklorist is Chapter Nine, “Inventing a Tradition of Folksongs”, which is precisely what had to be done, by combining a Biblical past and a futuristic vision.<sup>2</sup> One unusual detail regarding the dissemination of the new folk songs both locally and throughout the Diaspora was the use of postcards, each postcard with the words and music to a song; in one year, an entire printing of 4690 sets of twelve postcards was sold out!

Chapter Eleven discusses the traditional music of various “ethnic” groups, for example Yemenite and Iraqi music, largely through musical biographies tied to history and politics; and tackles questions of “authentic” versus arranged performances of traditional music, and the lack of ethnomusicological and anthropological training.<sup>3</sup> The author provides some interesting new angles on

2. These, in fact, are the Hebrew-language songs I learned as a child in a Jewish summer camp in Québec’s Laurentian Mountains, a quirky combination of modified Middle Eastern modes and Western European structures, which I loved singing at the time without having any idea of their brief history.
3. For example, the song from Weinberg’s opera “The Pioneers” (186) was attributed by Weinberg to Yemenites in the Arab village of Silwan near Jerusalem, by others, according

the Yemenite singer Bracha Zefira, whose role in Israeli music has been discussed before (Flam 1986, Shiloah 1986); for example, we learn about her suggestion (which was ultimately rejected) that the violonists accompanying her use Middle Eastern techniques (p. 200). The beginnings of ethnomusicology are sketched briefly (p. 202-203). The following chapter discusses the central role of music on the kibbutz, its use there as a “solution to social ills” (p. 206), faithfully attended gramophone concerts and a concert by Jascha Heifetz “gulped down like fresh dates” (p. 217). Again, inventing new traditions is a theme, the discussion of which includes the designation of applause in some cases as sacrilegious, hypocritical, unspiritual and bourgeois (p. 213). The final chapters — not the least interesting ones, despite their brief mention here — concern the search for a specifically Jewish music and musical semiotics of East and West.

Several brief musical examples are provided throughout the book, specifically related to issues discussed, and generous quotations from such sources as letters and newspaper reviews add valuable ambience; however, there are no photographs, which would have been a very useful documentary addition. There are barely any technical problems, no significant typographical errors and just a couple of semi-redundant footnotes (68n15/84n.39; 88n.54/90n.67). There could have been more musical examples, especially, at least from my point of view, of the new folk songs and the various musical traditions (for the latter, see Shiloah 1992 and Bohlman 1986). But the main problem has nothing to do with the author or the copy editor — it is the inflated price of over \$100 (Canadian), for a standard-length volume.

Altogether, this is a well-written, well-researched volume of interest not only to those working with Jewish and Middle Eastern music, but also to anyone concerned with how an emerging nation develops and establishes its identity, and how that identity is bound up with music at all levels.

## References Cited

- Bohlman, Philip V., (ed.). 1986. *Music in the Ethnic Communities of Israel*. Special issue of *Asian Music*, 17, 2.
- Bohlman, Philip V. 1989. *The Land Where Two Streams Flow: Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel*. Urbana: University of Chicago Press.
- Flam, Gila. 1986. Bracha Zefira: a Case Study of Acculturation in Israeli Song. *Asian Music*, 17, 2: 108-125.

---

to Weinberg, to Georgian Jews. I learned it in Montreal in the 1970s as an Israeli folk dance entitled “Debka Druse”, and subsequently heard it on Lebanese folk dance recordings.

---

Shiloah, Amnon. 1986. The Traditional Artist in the Limelight of the Modern City. *World of Music*, 28, 1: 87-98.

Shiloah, Amnon. 1992. *Jewish Musical Traditions*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

JUDITH R. COHEN  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario

---

***The Epic of Qayaq: The Longest Story Ever Told by My People***. By Lela Oman. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996. Pp. 144, illustrations, \$22.50 US, ISBN 0-295-97531-8 pbk.)

***The Bedbugs' Night Dance and Other Hopi Sexual Tales of Sexual Encounter***. Edited by Ekkehart Malotki. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. Pp. 416, illustrations, \$16.95 US, ISBN 0-8032-8239-7 pbk.)

Two very different books contribute to recent interest in oral tradition and storytelling. Each is steeped in an oral tradition which complements its literary form. *The Bedbugs' Night Dance and Other Hopi Sexual Tales* and *The Epic of Qayaq: The Longest Story Ever Told By My People* perpetuate long histories of Hopi and Inupiat storytelling; they may be read as written translations of oral performances. The two books differ stylistically, however, in the approach each takes to the translation of oral stories into written literary forms and genres. *The Epic of Qayaq* is written by a bilingual author who contextualizes the stories in written English idiom. *The Bedbugs' Night Dance*, in contrast, is published simultaneously in Hopi and English. It retains many speech patterns and expressions from Hopi and refuses to be categorized as Native literature "written in English." Neither book attempts to emulate oral speech repetitions and cadences in its written form; the authors have chosen instead to incorporate elements from oral tradition into their texts at the level of the narratives themselves. In terms of traditional genre distinctions, *The Bedbugs' Night Dance* resembles a collection of thematically linked short stories written out of a Hopi cultural context; *The Epic of Qayaq* is formally constructed as an epic.

Lela Oman translated the stories which comprise *The Epic of Qayaq* directly into English after years of participating in Inupiat storytelling performances. It is a beautifully illustrated text; the works of Inupiat visual artists complement Oman's literary images. Recited orally, the adventures of Qayaq take weeks to tell. The book recounts his experiences as Qayaq wanders through northern