



FROM WITHIN A SYMPATHETIC
SOUNDSCAPE:
RETHINKING/RE-SINGING PAST
AND PRESENT
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I was born in Jerusalem in 1956 to parents who emigrated from Germany in the 1930s. I studied Musicology and Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, where I graduated (Ph.D.) in 1992. Currently I officiate there as a Senior Lecturer graduated (Ph.D.) in 1992, and where I now hold the Arthur Rubenstein Chair in Musicology. I spent a year at Oxford University as a Visiting Scholar (1997). In my work I focus on problems of music and meaning (utilizing semiotic analysis) and the wide critical and theoretical aspects of the cultural analysis of music. Relevant publications: “The Music of Sympathy in the Arts of the Baroque: Or The Use of Difference to Overcome Indifference.” *Poetics Today* (2001); *Tuning the Mind: Connecting Aesthetic Theory to Cognitive Science* and *The Arts in Mind: Pioneering Texts of a Coterie of British Men of Letters* (2003) both books with Ruth Katz (a former Fellow at Wiko); “Sounds of Revelation: Aesthetic-Political Theology in Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron*.” In *Modernist Cultures* (2005). “Between Noise and Harmony: The Oratorical Moment in the Musical Entanglements of Jews and Christians.” *Critical Inquiry* (2006) [an extended version of my Dienstagskolloquium]. – Address: Department of Musicology, Hebrew University, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, 91905, Israel.

In my first written reflections on the Berlin/Wiko experience at mid-year (printed in the Wiko Newsletter *Nachrichten*) I tried to locate my life in the city in relation to various personal, familial and historical Berlin meridians (visits of family members in the city in the past century including several of my own; my response to the place where the Nazi regime

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took over and from which their most satanic plans of destruction originated; my experience of current cultural life in the city; the contemporary Berliners I happened to meet; my research project as related to these elements; and Wiko as a haven enabling such encounters). Past and present constantly intermingled in these experiences, which were often not easy to handle, however enriching they have been. In this short essay coming after the end of the year, what becomes salient is the role of the Wiko community in coloring my personal and scholarly journeys of this year. It is obviously only a sketch rather than the full landscape or soundscape in which my private course took place.

Two operatic experiences – among the many we had entertained in the course of the season – framed my year; one took place almost before the season started, the other after it ended. Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* in the Staatsoper, a work composed mainly in Berlin between 1930 and 1932, was the first. This work is one of the last, crucial moments in the "musical entanglements of Jews and Christians" that I have researched this year, a moment that turned upside down the great Western oratorical tradition. Tom and Janice Mitchell joined Yaron Ezrahi and me in this experience, which launched a rich period of discussions on media and the Holy Scriptures, on sounds, performances, and politics. Georg Philipp Telemann's *The Patient Socrates* written for the Hamburg opera house exactly two hundred years earlier was the last operatic event. It was performed by a group of highly talented, young, energetic artists in one of the rare summery evenings we had this year, at the handsome Schloss Rheinsberg. This comic opera is a product of happy baroque times, apparently unencumbered by political disasters, when composers in the Brandenburg era, as part of a large European community, could happily draw their sources from distant classical models, for the benefit and entertainment of the nobility and the emerging bourgeoisie. Disclosing, in fact, a deep ideological bias, which this opera partially ridicules, it stands for a wonderful specimen of a rather neglected aspect in music history to which I devoted part of my time in the course of this year, together with my colleague and friend Reinhard Strohm from Oxford (a guest of Wiko in May).

These two seemingly unrelated historical and stylistic moments can stand for the thematic and experiential frames that intersected again and again on my cognitive map all through the year. In beautiful, classical Potsdam, the meeting of young Fredrick the Great with old Bach (no less the great) inspired the latter to compose his *Musical Offering*, a work that I regard as powerfully transcending boundaries – political, stylistic, cognitive. Not far from this court, at about the same time, young Moses Mendelssohn was making his way into an enlightened world to which he eventually contributed so much. And here the great

Bach resurrection – his grandson, Felix performed the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 – an important moment in the musical entanglement of Jews and Christians, which I examine from within these conflictual perspectives – an aspiration to universalism that, especially in Germany, gradually turned into an aesthetics rejecting diversity in the name of a particular unity. The inclusive notion of *Mitleid*/compassion – as it emerged in philosophy and art since early modern times and yet relinquished the Jew as a non-musical, uncompassionate Other influenced this cultural encounter. A workshop at the Einstein Forum in December offered me an opportunity for a further elaboration of this crucial concept.

My understanding of these modes of communication was enriched by various intellectual interactions along the year: Chinese writing and artifacts with Lydia Liu, on the one hand, and Western musical notation and musical constructions, on the other, became comparable along hidden cognitive as well as political lines; with Myles Burnyeat, discussions on the Classical origins of the great mimetic tradition that sustains generations of art making threw light on later uses of it in early modern times; whereas with Peter Utz, insights about translations illuminating their literary originals found an echo in issues concerning my own engagement with old sources being interpreted in light of new artistic and performative forms that they brought about. Our “experience” reading group (which included Galit Hasan-Rokem, Jamie Monson, and Maria Todorova) convened later in the year, to deal with, among other things, ways in which different forms of the present are relived, revived, and impinge on “future presents” – a lens I have started to use already in a workshop organized for November by Sorin Antohi (in collaboration with University of California, Santa Cruz and Central European University, Budapest) to discuss “The Materialization of Historical Time”. The “Jewish Schwerpunkt” that serendipitously emerged in the course of the year, with Galit Hasan-Rokem, David Nirenberg, and Eli Zaretsky, with the variety of critical and methodological points of view they offered, was most conducive to my major project. The hazardous journey I was able to launch in my exploration of *terrae* partially incognito for me – among other things, the intricacy of medieval Jewish-Gentile history – was highly encouraged (and protected) by this invisible team. The fascinating, comparative worlds of the religious Muslim woman vs. the religious Jewish one, in my discussions with Ziba Mir-Hosseini, opened new perspectives of political and intellectual understanding and collaboration.

All in all, modes of experience and terms of sympathy (replacing compassion as a more egalitarian form of “being with”), contradictory or seemingly unrelated cultural layers reverberated with each other in the course of the year, opening up new options for intellec-

tual insight, friendship, and dialogue. Of special significance for me were those that transpired with our German fellow Fellows. I found myself trying to synchronize our lives' routes in the past forty years, our respective coping with different, though sometimes astonishingly related legacies (in the sense Maria Todorova suggests in this volume). This dialogue concerns not only moments of death and destruction (which were not skipped), but also forms of life and culture. With Ute Frevert, I exchanged about German familial codes of domestic behavior, which even Orthodox German Jews came to share. Just as I was surprised to hear about the musical *Nachlass* of Wolfgang Seibel's grandmother – a series of 78 records of Joseph Schmidt, the Jewish singer of opera and light music, Wolfgang was stunned to hear about the extant collection of Schmidt's cantorial singing in a Berlin synagogue before the war. Stefan Maul was fascinated with the kind of student life my grandmother could have in his university town, Heidelberg, in the second decade of the 20th century. Rethinking and sometimes re-singing the past was thus part of our shared present.

Here is an anecdote that exemplifies some of the above. In my *Dienstagskolloquium*, I chose to include a caricature entitled: "Family Quarrels or the Jew and the Gentile" (1802), featuring a Christian singing a "healthy" *moderato con espressione* tune, juxtaposed with a Jewish singer whose complicated coloratura degenerates into cacophony and "noise". It was, as in many other cases, the wonderful services of the library that enabled me to find such caricatures and trace their context. And here I stood, showing and singing the respective "musics" of the two rivals. And we all laughed because it was funny, because anti-Semitism at that historical moment was not as bad and dangerous as it eventually became, because I, a Jew, was performing it, allowing self-mockery. Unpredictably, I was later "re-butting" or "avenging" this mockery when I performed a vociferous, ridiculed Brunhilde – so cast by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly in our final "opera" – and dear princess Aloisia (Alois Hahn, whose musical sensibilities, in addition to his famous taste for exquisite wine, were a cause of joy for the Fellows throughout the year) retorted: "O Freundin, nicht diese Töne" – from which I could vocally modulate into what now appeared as a robust, vigorous music: a Hassidic song, accompanying no less than the entrance of our universalist, globalisation girls* ...

These ingredients – of shared experience and personal stake, of candid talk and attentive ear, of variety of legacies – sometimes conflictual, sometimes reconciliatory, amid ongoing

* The group of women Fellows who ventured this year to study together aspects of globalisation.

political upheavals that made us all alert to the risky situation of our world today; to say nothing of the artistic and musical interest shared by so many in the group, the good humor, and the egalitarian spirit that predominated in many of our interactions made this year so special and memorable, beyond publications and other regular, palpable achievements and products of such gift years.



Family Quarrels or the Jew and the Gentile. 1802. Taken from: Alfred Rubens. *A Jewish Iconography*. London, 1981, p. 18.