

Brief Communication

Editor's Note:

With the report that follows, the *Journal* is continuing the practice of encouraging the submission for publication of "brief communications" on technical process, innovative projects, interesting sidelights on practice in any of the specialized fields of Jewish communal service. 1,000—2,000 word "communications" are invited.

The Use of Music in Jewish Programming

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In professional circles, music is primarily thought of as a performing art. Obviously, the highest form of enjoying music in our cultural and social environment is to witness or participate in a live musical performance. In our time, technology has made it possible to experience almost that same enjoyment in our homes through sound and video recordings, radio or T.V.

Music, however, does play a different role for many peoples of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The worksong, the lovesong, the lullaby, the religious chant, the table-song for the holidays, the rhythmic music for dances for countless occasions, all this is music, too. Music fulfills many functions; it becomes part of a culture, part of a lifestyle. This is true for all peoples on this globe. Among the nations on every continent, this "life-style" music has evolved from ancient "primitive" stages to other "high" stages of musical expression. Some of it has survived, sometime reborn in newer and varied forms, and some of it has been lost.

In trying to bring more "Jewish content" into the programming for our Community centers, Senior Citizens' groups, Jewish schools and camps, we are really aiding the survival of Judaism. (This, incidentally, is true in Israel as well as for the Jewish communities outside of Israel.) To introduce or increase "Jewish content" in our musical programming does not mean only to perform more new or old Jewish compositions, or simply to sing more new or old Israeli songs to "raise the

spirit" on isolated occasions. We must regenerate what I referred to above as "life-style" music. We can do this only by re-creating an atmosphere in which the musical expression of our people in every-day life can bloom again.

The Jewish lullaby, performed by an artist in a "one-night" stand, ceases to be a lullaby. When sung to a sleepy child, it once again performs its original function. The Jewish love song, performed beautifully in concert or on a recording is merely an artistic rendition. It regains a deeper meaning, however, when sung before, during or after the *Chupah* ceremony or in any other situation when inspired by love. The many Chassidic or other table songs may be inspiring at any time, but they provide much more inspiration when sung by a family seated around the dinner table. The foregoing does not mean that we should do away with the performing of Jewish music. A beautiful liturgical song, sung in a concert setting, or on record, radio or T.V. may very well be just as inspiring as a performance by a cantor or a choir during worship in the synagogue. But "concert settings" are one-time experiences for the listener. We should make it possible for our children, college students, parents or grandparents to become more than just "aural spectators." We should give Jewish music a "take-home" value, so that it may become "life-style" music, a part of every-day life and thus may survive as part of a vibrant Jewish musical culture.

How can this be done? To take a few steps

at a time, let's begin with workshops. It would be invaluable to involve not only music specialists, but also social workers, teachers, group-leaders of Jewish community centers, counselors of camps and teaching staff of Jewish schools in workshops to acquaint them with the rich heritage of Jewish music, especially the "life-style" music referred to above.

It is possible to find and recruit personnel who can ably lead such workshops through existing organizations: The National Jewish Music Council of the JWB (whose director, Irene Heskes, organizes such workshops in several places); the Boards or Bureaus of Jewish Education in the various metropolitan areas; the Cantorial organizations (of any ideology), who have many knowledgeable members throughout the country.

What about existing material for such workshops and beyond the workshops? Within the last few years a number of Jewish music publications have appeared which are very useful for the kind of programming discussed here.* To be sure, there is need for more, but there is enough for a start. These publications are available in print or on records or tapes. They contain much of the kind of Jewish "life-style" music which can be taught, if need be, without a professional music specialist, although the assistance of a specialist is, of course, preferable.

These materials can be used in workshops and lead to programs involving large numbers of people, young and old, in Centers, schools, camps and homes. Such programs may always be crowned by special events with guest artists. The importance of such programming, however, is continuity, so that the music taught, practiced and explained may become a vital

part of the participants' lives.

There is also a growing need for more of this kind of easily identifiable "life-style" music with Jewish content for piano students and small instrumental groups. We should encourage Jewish arrangers to prepare such material and instrumentalists to use it. It is time Jewish instrumental music ceases to be the monopoly of bands playing Bar Mitzvah and wedding dates; it is time for it to become part of every-day music in Jewish homes. The time is past, when the only Jewish instrumental music known was *Hava Nagila*. There is more and better music which expresses the feelings, traditions and hopes of the Jewish people. This music should become part of our identity. It is only then and through such programs proposed here, that Jewish music will not merely be a one-time, once-a-year "special event" or festival, but will become an expression of Jewish identity the year-round. The whole struggle for survival as a people is linked to the struggle for identity. Music is an important emotional expression of a people. It is part of a people's path from ancient Judea through a history of wandering, yearning, joy and suffering, to hope and redemption. Let us sing it out!

* Tara Publications of Cedarhurst, New York has an updated catalogue which lists almost everything available in Jewish music by many publishers and on many record labels. The Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, together with Tara Publications published two extensive anthologies of Israeli and Jewish songs, spanning 1948 to 1976; these are the first such collections printed since the establishment of the State of Israel. In addition, a valuable vehicle for workshops and for home use is a set of six cassettes and booklets of *Holiday Melodies*.