

# THE SOUNDS OF ERETZ YISRAEL IN AMERICA: 1920's-1950's

(Dr. Lorry Black, Rabbi Dr. J.B. Sacks)

סיפורי מוסיקה  
STORIES OF MUSIC



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## **Introduction**

This lesson will explore how American Jews have engaged with Israeli musical forms, from the 1920's through the 1950's. We will examine how Israeli music navigated the ongoing relationship between American Jews and Zionism and Israel.

The Stories of Music team understands that every individual engages with Israel in a different way, and this engagement is something that can change over time. Our goal for this lesson is to raise an awareness of the impact of Israeli music on American Jewish life before Israel became a state and its ongoing impact beyond.

(*NOTE:* This lesson is best done over two sessions. For those completing the lesson over two sessions, we have marked where the instructor might break, giving bullet points that can be reviewed and an outro for that session. If completing in one session, then the instructor will have to decide what material to include or not, yet still transmit the essence of the lesson. This can be comfortably done with some preplanning.

We have also on occasion provided some possible time frames, particularly for exercises (e.g. pair shares) and discussions. For larger units, we have not. Each instructor should feel free to make the choices on what to emphasize and on which sections to linger based upon their own priorities. We at Stories of Music are available as willing partners to discuss through such issues with you.

This lesson was conceived and developed in conjunction with the lesson entitled “The Sounds of Eretz Yisrael in America: The Crucial 1960's,” also designed to be taught over two sessions. The Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions of these lessons overlap, as do the themes. Therefore, we feel that teaching these two lessons together will provide a real opportunity for deeper learning and greater staying power for the students.

We also recognize and appreciate that some instructors may have particular circumstances and reasons for not teaching both lessons together. If doing so, you may wish to recap the main points of the first lesson when beginning the second lesson at a later time.

Finally, for all lessons we have a Resource Guide and a Student Worksheet. Among the items these contain are lyrics. The Student Worksheet contains all the lyrics to musical selections intended to be explored/discussed. The Resource Guide contains more lyrics.)

## **Enduring Understandings**

(What are the big ideas learners will take away from this lesson?)

- Israeli music was a primary means through which American Jews were exposed to Israeli culture and Zionism, and became and remained connected to Eretz Yisrael.

- Israeli music grew in impact on the synagogue and in Jewish education efforts, formal and informal, as American Zionism took hold.
- The “sound” of Israeli music has influenced the composition of Jewish American composers.
- American Jews’ integration and distribution of Israeli music reflects the contemporaneous relationship of American Jews to Israel.

## Essential Questions

(What are the essential questions that frame this unit? What questions point towards the key issues and ideas that will be taught?)

- How has Israeli music made its impact on American Jewish life? (Consider both formal and informal ways.)
- How has Israeli music had an effect on American Jewish composers and songwriters?
- When and how did Israeli musical forms start penetrating American culture generally?

### Outline of the Lesson

#### Part 1: Prelude/Introduction

- Our personal connection to the music of Eretz Yisrael
- “*Artza Alinu*” and “*El Ginat Egoz*”

#### Part 2: Beginnings of Pre-State Music in American Jewish life

- A.W. Binder and “*Na’ale L’artzeinu*”
- Bracha Zefira (and Nahum Nardi); “*Bein N’har P’rat U-vein N’har Chidekel*” and “*Shir HaAvodah (v’Hamlachah)*”

#### Part 3: The American Form of Zionism

#### Part 4: Art Music inspired by Pre-State of Israel Folk Songs

- Julius Chajes and *Hebrew Suite* and “*Song of Galilee*”
- Max Helfman, *Hag HaBikkurim* and *Israel Suite*

#### Part 5: Israeli Composers Commissioned by American Jews

- Marc Lavry and *Sabbath Eve Sacred Service*

#### Part 6: Coda and Outro (Herbert Fromm’s *The Pioneers*)

## The Lesson

### Part 1 — Prelude/Introduction

Welcome to *Stories of Music!*

SLIDE 1

(NOTE: Instructor may wish to have the audio of some music in the background as participants arrive and get ready for the lesson. If so, you might want to choose any of the music that will be explored or heard in this lesson. The first video has “Artza Alinu” and “El Ginat Egoz”--both fairly familiar Israeli melodies. Hence that might make a nice choice to provide a comfortable grounding for the participants. If using entrance music that is not part of the lesson, please choose music of Israel that was composed before 1960, in keeping with this lesson’s theme.)

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### Pair share (Discuss in pairs 3-5 min)

SLIDE 2

Pairing with the person next to you, please share with each other your responses to the following.

- ❓ Recall one (or two) experience(s) in which Israeli music was a part. (You might think broadly of life-cycle events, dance, holiday celebrations, summer camp, visits to Israel, Zionist youth groups, etc.)
- ❓ What did this experience/these experiences mean to you as a person/Jew?

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### Explain

SLIDE 3

As you continue to consider your own experience and perhaps take in others’ experience, let us listen to two examples that represent distinct musical trends in Israel during different time periods. Each one has its own unique connection to Israel, to American Jewish culture, and the synagogue. These songs are still commonly sung and/or danced to today.

“*Artza Alinu*” (“We Emigrated to the Land”) (Music and lyrics by: Shmuel Navon, 1928)-- (Pioneer Song) Sung by folklorist [Ruth Rubin](#), c. 1947. The celebration of pioneer life and the pioneer spirit is common in pre-State Israeli music. This song has been choreographed for several dances over many years since its composition. (In video below, from 0:00-1:15)

“*El Ginat Egoz*” (“To the Nut Tree Grove”) (Music by: Sara Levy Tanai; Lyrics by: Song of Songs 6:11, 7:12-13; and 4:16, 1944)--Performed by [Shoshana Damari](#) in 1960. Israeli music has often used the Tanakh as a source of inspiration. This song is also an example where a song from Eretz Yisrael is more associated with the choreographer than the composer. In this case, most people know that [Levy Tanai](#) choreographed the work; far fewer realize she also composed it. (In video below, from 1:16-2:22)

As you listen to this music, please consider how might Jews in America have heard and/or connected to this music.

For both songs in one place, [play this video](#). 

## Discuss

- Have a couple of people (2-4) react briefly to the music: what resonated with you? Which sounds like music from Israel?, etc.
- Do you connect to this music? Do these songs resonate in any way for you, even if you have not heard them before?

Before we listen to and respond to more music, we want to acknowledge that Israeli music encompasses an extraordinary diversity. It reflects the wider, broader Middle Eastern musical milieu, as well as the many different musical traditions of the varied cultural, ethnic, and religious communities living there.

As we proceed, we will speak of Israeli music as a whole, but we'll try to remember that it really is not simplistically or easily reduced to "one thing," but is a beautiful, tremendous pastiche and conglomeration of many musical forms.

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## Part 2 — Beginnings of Pre-State Music in American Jewish life

SLIDE 4

Music from the land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) started entering American Jewish life in the nineteenth century, but started a deeper penetration in the 1920's, after a specifically American form of Zionism, became dominant. We will speak more about this "American Zionism" later, but because of it, some musical figures traveled to *Eretz Yisrael*, transcribing what they heard and publishing it here. Abraham Wolf (A.W.) Binder was the earliest of these.

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## Introduce Abraham Wolf Binder (1895-1966)

SLIDE 5

- Binder was a central figure in the reformulation and introduction of "traditional Jewish music," featuring Middle East and Eastern European modalities, into the music of the synagogue.
- Core to Binder's musical interest in Eretz Yisrael music was his trip to the (then) Mandatory Palestine (1925-26). This inspired Binder to write *New Palestinian Folk Songs*, a book of song arrangements for piano and voice. (1926, Bloch Publishing Company).
- This book was the first widely available collection of songs from Eretz Yisrael.
- As a professor at the Jewish Institute of Religion (NYC), as music director at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue (New York City), and as a Jewish music leader, he transmitted his love and understanding of Israeli musical forms to generations of Jewish leaders.

### **"Na'aleh L'artzeinu" ("Let us Emigrate to Our Land")**

- "Na'aleh L'artzeinu" was published in virtually every Zionist songbook in America well into the 1960s, beginning with Binder's *New Palestinian Folk Songs*.

- While “Artza Alinu” was an expression of *realized* joy by those who had already moved to *Eretz Yisrael* and started working it, “*Na’aleh L’artzeinu*” is an expression of *optimistic* joy by those anticipating moving to Eretz Yisrael.
- Some scholarship indicates that the melody may have originated as a dance for the celebration of Lag B’omer on Mt. Meron in Israel. Nevertheless, scholarship also suggests that the song has features of Arabic, Slavic, Yemenite, and/or Yiddish motifs. For more on the background of “*Na’aleh L’artzeinu*,” [see this article by David Berger](#).
- The melody is used by at least three other songs: “*Amcha Yisrael Yibaneh*,” an old Pre-State tune; the very popular Eastern European Yiddish song, “*Shnirele Perele*,” and “*Na’ale L’Har Tsiyon*,” a Shavuot song.

**Play** [“\*Na’aleh L’artzeinu\*” from Binder’s \*New Palestinian Folk Songs\*](#) 

### Explain

In Binder we saw how an American Jewish academic and musician notated and arranged folk songs of Israel to make them accessible to the general Jewish population. Soon after, other Jewish composers such as Thelma Goldfarb, Max Helfman, A.Z. (Abraham Zevi) Idelsohn, Harry Coopersmith, and Julius Chajes published their own collections and arrangements of Zionist and Pre-State songs.

Now, we will explore how performers also were able to bring this music to American Jews, beginning in the 1930’s. Bracha Zefira is a good example of this.

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**Introduce** [Bracha Zefira](#) (1910-1990)

**SLIDE 6**

- Zefira was the first singer of Yemenite background to become a superstar, recording three of the first Hebrew language albums on the Columbia label. The albums circulated widely throughout the American and Israeli Jewish communities.
- Orphaned by age 3, she moved from place to place, always absorbing the range of music of many immigrant groups, including those from Bukharia (a region of Uzbekistan), Tashkent (capital and largest city of Uzbekistan), Samarkand (Iran), Salonika (Southeastern Uzbekistan), Persia (Greece), as well as the local Arab community.
- Zefira established a collaboration with pianist/composer [Nachum Nardi](#), which would blossom into a successful musical duo as well as a marriage (ending after eight years). Their performance for the Palestine Broadcasting Service in 1936 was the first radio broadcast in Hebrew. ([See here for a brief history of radio in Eretz Yisrael.](#))
- In 1937 she and Nardi embarked on a tour in the U.S. Among Zefira’s performances, she gave a huge concert for the 25th anniversary of the Yidish Natsionaler Arbeter Farband (Jewish National Workers Alliance), a [landsmanschaft](#) with Labor Zionist leanings. In addition, her recordings for Columbia Records (with Nardi), done at this time, served as a foundation for the new field of Hebrew language recordings.

- Zefira later focused on art music. She shared her acquired knowledge of folk song with the many composers, including Marc Lavry and Paul Ben-Haim, with whom she forged an enduring collaboration.

### **“Bein N’har P’rat u-N’har Chidekel” (“Between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers”)**

- The melody, by [Nahum Nardi](#), is based on an Arabic melody.
- The text is one of the “folk poems” by [Chaim Nachman Bialik](#), an early twentieth-century pioneer of modern Hebrew poetry. Setting music to poetry is common in the music of Eretz Yisrael.
- In the poem, a young woman requests, in vain, the matchmaking skills of a golden hoopoe (*duchifat*, Eurasian Hoopoe), a mythical bird of the Jewish folk tradition.
- [The bird in Jewish lore](#) is associated with King Solomon, guards treasures, and is entrusted with special missions, in this case to find and bring a beloved to the speaker of the poem. The Eurasian hoopoe was [declared the National Bird of Israel in May 2008](#).
- In the poem, the hoopoe is perched in a [palm tree, which in Judaism](#) symbolizes peace, righteousness, sincerity, and abundance.
- The palm tree is located in Mesopotamia, where our ancestors Abraham and Sarah were married, where Rebecca is found as the perfect mate for Isaac, and where Jacob works for his beloved Rachel.
- Before or after playing, the instructor may wish to note the use of traditional Middle Eastern modes juxtaposed with a more classical piano part.

### **Play** [“Bein N’har P’rat u-N’har Chidekel”](#)


(NOTE: For the full Hebrew poem by Bialik, see here. This version contains the first four stanzas.)

#### **Extension idea**

**SLIDE 7**

For another example, here’s a short video of Zefira singing another poem of Chaim Nachman Bialik, with music again by her then husband Nahum Nardi, entitled [“Shir HaAvodah \(V’ham’lachah\)”](#). This dates from April, 1936. (NOTE: This song should not be confused with Nahum Nardi’s other famous song, *“Shir Ha’Avodah”*, based on a Natan Alterman poem (and also known as *“Kachol Yam HaMayim”* or *“The Blue Sea”*).

#### **Discuss**

-  Both Binder and Zefira are excited to bring the folk music of Israel to the public. How are their approaches different? (One might consider what segments of the American Jewish public might be reached by each.)

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### Part 3 — The American Form of Zionism

SLIDE 8

We have just shown how Israeli music entered and started becoming part of American Jewish life in the 1920's and 1930's, through the work of Binder and others who took the time to go to Palestine, listen to the various forms of music there, annotate them, publish them, and teach them. This led to broader interest, paving the way for the touring and recordings of Zefira. Of course, others played a role as well. Yet all of this occurred in conjunction with and due to the development and adoption of American Jewry's unique brand of Zionism. Let's explore that briefly now.

On the eve of WWI (1914), Zionists numbered only about 20,000 of the 1.5 million American Jews. By 1921, that number increased tenfold. This was due to the envisioning and promotion of a distinctly American version of Zionism, propelled forward most especially by Associate Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (served from 1916 - 1939). This Americanized version of Zionism maintained an emphasis on Palestine as a place of freedom and refuge for Jews and highlighted the need for a Jewish state, without commending aliyah.

This new version of Zionism appealed to Jews who were acculturating to their new American landscape. In line with American values and American liberalism, this new American Zionism helped Jewish Americans to become Zionists without reneging on their faith in America.

This distinctly American version of Zionism won out by 1927, and remained the basic American view and form of Zionism. (For more on early [American Zionism](#), see [here](#).)

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#### Pair share

SLIDE 9

- 🔍 How, in your own words, would you describe "American Zionism"?

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### Part 4 — Art Music Inspired by Pre-State Israel Folk Songs

SLIDE 10

#### Explain

Several composers expanded on the work of annotating the melodies of Mandatory Palestine, turning them into large-scale concert works, often for choir and orchestra. Julius Chajes' *Hebrew Suite* (1939) and Max Helfman's *Hag Habikkurim* (1947) are good examples. The works are not liturgical, but, rather, intended for performance. They both utilize pre-existing melodies encountered while visiting Palestine.

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#### Introduce [Julius Chajes](#) (1910-1985)

SLIDE 11

- Famed American synagogue composer Julius Chajes was born in Lemberg (Lvov), Galicia (now Poland) to an upper middle class family, and Chajes began piano lessons at age seven with his mother, a well-recognized concert pianist.



- Beginning in 1934, Chajes lived a deeply influential two years in Palestine where he chaired the piano department of the Beit L'viyim Music Academy in Tel Aviv.
- During his time in Palestine, Chajes became interested in studying Jewish musical sources in antiquity and some of the accumulated folk music of the region. He was also exposed to Arabic and Pre-State Hebrew heritage (folk) music, as well as Pioneer (*Halutzim*) songs. He would go on to annotate, arrange, and often publish the repertoire that he learned.
- In 1938 Chajes came to the US where his reputation very quickly took hold with high profile performances, such as a performance of his setting of *Psalms 142* at the 1939 New York World's Fair.
- Chajes would settle in Detroit in 1940, from which he would continue to be a central figure of the Jewish music world as both music director at Temple Beth El of Detroit and faculty member at Wayne State University.

### Hebrew Suite

- The title, which might suggest only a language, refers to what was then often called “Hebrew culture”, the folkloric, literary, and artistic expressions that sprang from modern Zionist-oriented sensibilities and represented the new, youthful, and optimistic guise of Jewish identity.
- The second movement, *Walls of Zion*, is a reference to the walled ancient part of Jerusalem (*ir ha'atika*, or “the old city”). For more on the Old City of Jerusalem, [see here](#).
- *Hebrew Suite* was originally composed in 1939 as a chamber work for clarinet, piano, and string quartet, and was revised for orchestra in 1965.
- Before or after playing, the instructor may wish to note the programmatic aspects of the music. What storytelling devices can be heard in the music, and how does this music musically depict the “Walls of Zion” (without the use of lyrics)?

### Play Hebrew Suite Mvt. 2 “Walls of Zion”


(NOTE: We offer three selections here by Chajes: Movements 2 and 3 of *Hebrew Suite* and “Song of Galilee,” placed at the beginning of the second session for those teaching in two sessions. For those teaching in one session, the instructor might play only one of these selections by Chajes.)

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### Pair share

### SLIDE 12

So, let's take a moment to take in all the music we have already heard today. They include “*Artza Alinu*,” “*El Ginat Egoz*,” “*Na'aleh L'artzeinu*” as arranged by A.W. Binder, Bracha Zefira's performance of “*Bein N'har P'rat*,” (Bracha Zefira's performance of *Shir HaAvodah v'HaMamlacha*), and, just now, Julius Chajes' “Walls of Zion. Please turn to the person sitting next to you and each take time to share:

-  Which of the pieces of music we have heard today speak to your conception of the music of Eretz Yisrael?

(NOTE: Instructor might first wish to ask class participants what they have gleaned so far about music from Israel. The instructor should keep responses in one place (e.g. white board). If you take and record responses, instructor should add any/all bullet points from the following that were part of the classroom experience.)

In this first part of our Lesson on the impact of the music of Eretz Yisrael on American Jewish life, we have accomplished a lot! We:

- began by hearing how Israeli songs and dances (“*Artza Alinu*,” “*El Ginat Egoz*”) from different eras and distinctly different contexts (settling Eretz Yisrael; Kibbutz celebration of Passover, prayer) all have entered American Jewish life.
- saw how in the 1920’s figures such as A.W. Binder and Julius Chajes went to Israel and annotated and published the music they heard from the people (e.g. “*Na’aleh L’Artzeinu*”).
- saw popular singers, such as Bracha Zefira, made popular here, folk music traditions of any number of Jewish musical traditions within Israel, through their performances and recordings (e.g. “*Al N’har P’rat*”).
- saw that figures such as Julius Chajes not only annotated and published what they heard in Eretz Yisrael, but also subsequently composed art music that was based upon these songs.
- We have seen how the development of a specifically American form of Zionism (particularly post-WWI) helped with the reception of the music of Eretz Yisrael in American Jewish life.
- We have seen how the music of Eretz Yisrael became part of educational efforts, formal (e.g. training of cantors) and informal (e.g. Zionist youth groups, Jewish summer camps).
- We have seen how the “sound” of the music of Eretz Yisrael influenced Jewish American composers.

And all the efforts and all the music we have discussed today represent what was done before 1948, when the State of Israel came into being! You can imagine that a lot of these efforts received a boost and accelerated after the State of Israel was established. We’ll be looking at some of that material in our next session!

We conclude today’s session with another movement from Chajes’ *Hebrew Suite*. This is the brief Movement 3, entitled “Hora.” Before or after listening to “Hora,” the instructor may wish to note that “hora” means “dance”. As such, you may want to consider whether this work is a hora meant to be danced to, or if it depicts a community hora taking place. Enjoy!

Play [Mvt. 3 “Hora”](#) 

—BREAK—

(NOTE: For those teaching in two sessions, this begins section 2. Instructor may wish to use the summary to remind class participants of what we've learned and where we are. We are continuing to explore how Palestinian folk songs inspired art music. For those teaching in one session, the instructor might opt to skip this additional piece of Chajes and move ahead to the work of another composer who created art music based on Palestinian folk songs, Max Helfman.)

### Introduce

We ended our previous session learning about Julius Chajes, his efforts to bring the music of Eretz Yisrael to American Jews via publication of songs he transcribed while in Israel and also by writing art music to some of that material. We listened to a portion of *Hebrew Suite*. The original chamber ensemble version of *Hebrew Suite* contained an additional movement that Chajes removed for the orchestral piece: Galil. It was based on a popular Pre-State folk song, "El Yivne Hagalil" ("God Will Rebuild the Galilee"), which probably dates from [the Second Aliyah period](#) and may be part of a series of songs from that time that were deliberately fashioned by Jewish settlers in imitation of Arabic songs. Chajes published this separately as a choral version. It was one of the most widely performed Hebrew choral pieces in America during the mid-20th century. It is said to have generated more in royalties for Chajes than all his other works combined. Indeed, the arrangement was performed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir at one of its conferences and was used in the sound track of the film *Ben Hur* in 1959. Let's listen to this!

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Play ["Song of Galilee"](#) 

SLIDE 14

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Introduce [Max Helfman](#) (1901-1963)

SLIDE 15

- Helfman is especially remembered today for his seventeen years as Music Director of Brandeis Camp, first in Winterdale, Pennsylvania and then in Santa Susana, California (now Brandeis Bardin Campus of the American Jewish University, Brandeis, California). With a landscape that resembled Israel, he inspired and helped generations of young Jews connect to Judaism through the breadth of Jewish music.
- There he also established an annual Brandeis Arts Institute, that exposed young people to prominent figures in the world of Jewish music, including Bracha Zefira and Julius Chajes.
- Composer, choral conductor, and educator Max Helfman was born in Radzin (Radzyn), Poland, where his father was a local teacher and cantor in whose choir he sang as a child. He grew up immersed in the world of Jewish music and education. Upon arriving in America, he became a sought-after boy-alto in New York Orthodox synagogue choirs.
- Helfman was deeply passionate about Yiddish culture, but was also a proponent of Zionist and modern Hebrew culture.

- Without formal university education, Helfman became a self-taught intellectual, familiar with the canon of both secular Jewish and Western literature and philosophy.
- He would become the mentor to many individuals in their Jewish music education, favoring his time with students over his time spent composing.
- Helfman held many prominent Music Director/Organist posts. From these positions, as well as his numerous collaborations with cantors and other performers, he was incredibly influential.
- His songbooks and sacred works are still a significant part of the Jewish music canon.

(NOTE: We offer one movement of Helfman’s *Hag Habikkurim* and one movement of Helfman’s *Israel Suite*. If time is a consideration, the instructor may decide to choose only one.)

### **Hag Habikkurim (Festival of the First Fruit)**

- Helfman’s choral pageant *Hag Habikkurim* is a suite of original arrangements of modern Hebrew songs that were sung in Pre-State Israel from the early years up to independence. These songs reflected the Zionist ideals of national return and reconstruction, that they had gone there to reclaim, resettle, and rebuild as a Jewish national home.
- A pageant was conceived as an American reflection—and not necessarily an actual replica—of the spring harvest kibbutz festival, *hagigat habikkurim*, which, even long after independence, was reenacted during or on the pilgrimage [Festival of Shavuot](#) as a kind of secular substitute celebration for that religious holiday. (See [here for more on Kibbutz festivals](#); see [here for a brief history of Shavuot celebration in Israel](#).)
- Helfman fashioned this choral pageant in 1947, as a general expression and exposition of the modern Hebrew culture that was then both vibrant in—and emanating from—Palestine and the imminent State of Israel. His primary audience was American Jewry—especially its younger generations—and the pageant participants themselves.
- *Hag Habikkurim* premiered in 1947, with Helfman conducting, and was performed at events throughout the country over many years.
- We’ll be listening to the first movement, “*El Hak’far*,” based on a melody by [Mordechai Zeira](#) and lyrics by Israeli poet [Emanuel HaRussi](#). (Here is another example of a poem set to music, here recast again as an art music piece.)

### **Play [Helfman’s \*Hag Habikkurim\*: 1 “El Hakfar” \(“To the Village”\)](#)**

(Play from the beginning)

Instructors may wish to note the march-like nature of the music, reflecting the words (by Emanuel Harusi (Novogrebelsky) (1903–79)), urging Jews from urban and even cosmopolitan walks of life to forgo their present lives and lifestyles and “return” instead to the land to plow the fields.

## Consider

*Hag Habikkurim's* scope of influence: In addition to summer performances at Brandeis Camp Institute, the piece appeared in concert versions by Jewish choruses; by synagogue schools, sometimes in connection with graduation exercises; by Zionist youth organizations; and by combined youth and children's choirs and dance ensembles at annual all-city Spring Jewish music or arts festivals, which brought together people from dozens of congregations and schools from numerous neighborhoods and suburbs of a single city.

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## Israel Suite

SLIDE 16

- *Israel Suite* is a reflection of Helfman's shift, in the 1940s, to the cultural aesthetics, song, and spirit of modern Israel.
- *Israel Suite* comprises six (from among dozens) of his original arrangements of songs of Hebrew national expression and Zionist idealism, optimism, and determination—songs that were sung by the *halutzim* in Palestine during the decades prior to statehood, which became part of the Israeli song repertoire.
- Helfman's arrangements of those songs were fashioned initially for students at the Brandeis camps, and they were published in a collection issued by the Brandeis Youth Foundation as part of the Brandeis Camp Institute of Music Series.
- On certain occasions Helfman would string together several of the arrangements and present them as a suite, sometimes connected by narration or poetry readings and even accompanied by dance or other choreographed movements—as a type of unified artistic expression.
- For a Carnegie Hall concert on June 13, 1948, only a month after Israel's birth as a sovereign nation—what had been programmed as A Suite of Palestinian Melodies was quickly retitled Israeli's Song for the printed booklet, with the earlier title as a subtitle in parentheses.
- Performances of *Israel Suite*, including the Carnegie Hall performance, featured a two-piano accompaniment. Helfman had intended to orchestrate these song arrangements, but he died before he could realize that objective. The present song suite was orchestrated expressly for the Milken Archive's recording in Vienna in 2000 by Helfman's disciple, [Cantor Charles Davidson](#), a distinguished composer and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary's H. L. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music.
- "Laila Pele" is an ode to the "motherland" of Israel by [Yitzhak Shenhar](#) (Shenberg) (1902–1957), the noted writer, translator, and editor who came to Palestine in 1921 from the Ukraine during the Third Aliyah.
- The melody is by [Shalom Postolski](#) (1893–1949), who came to Israel from Warsaw in 1920 (Third Aliyah) and was among the first settlers of Ein Harod—one of the first kibbutzim in the Valley of Jezreel. He was one of the first composers of the kibbutz movement, and much of his music was written for kibbutz celebrations and festivals, as well as composing settings to Israeli poems.

Play [Helfman's Israel Suite. IV. "Laila Pele" \("Night of Wonder"\)](#) 

**Explain**

After Israel gained independence in 1948, the American Jewish community grew in its orientation toward Israel. Israeli composers became prominent in the Jewish world, and a few were commissioned to compose for Jewish cultural settings. Commissioned by American organizations, their settings of the Shabbat services engage texts using Middle Eastern and western classical musical languages. These opportunities exposed the Jewish community to significant Israeli composers who exemplified the high art music of Israeli culture.

**Introduce Marc Lavry (1903-1967)****SLIDE 18**

- Marc Lavry was among the preeminent composers of mid-century Israel, composing a multitude of works and teaching in the “Mediterranean” style.
- Lavry was born in Riga, Latvia, but the majority of his music education and the beginning of his musical career, took place in Germany.
- In Germany, Lavry began to address Jewish subjects in his music. His orchestral piece, *Hassidic Dance* (op. 22) and his *Suite Juif* (“Jewish Suite”) for string quartet (or string orchestra) both premiered in Berlin (1930 and 1931, respectively).
- In the wake of the Fascist coup in Latvia, Lavry was determined to emigrate permanently. While not yet involved with Zionism, he made an exploratory trip to Palestine, after which he decided to make *aliyah* in 1935.
- He came to straddle the line between art music and popular folk-oriented song. He not only incorporated indigenous folk material and echoes in his concert pieces such as *Al Naharot Bavel* (“By the Rivers of Babylon”) in the “Mediterranean” model, but he also composed original folk-type songs such as “*Shir Ha’Emek*” (“Song of the Valley”).
- Lavry was both music director and conductor of the Palestine Folk Opera (Tel Aviv) from 1941 until 1947. During that time he also served as resident composer of the Ohel Theater (Tel Aviv). From 1950 until 1958 he was music director of Kol Tziyon Lagola (The Voice of Zion to the Diaspora), a short-wave radio network that broadcast to Jewish communities outside Israel.

***Sabbath Eve Sacred Service***

- Marc Lavry’s *Sabbath Eve Sacred Service* was commissioned in 1958 by Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco’s most prestigious Reform synagogue, which had previously commissioned full-length Sabbath services from Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud.
- His approach throughout the service uses the Israeli-Mediterranean melodies most perceptibly, but it is clearly cast into the musical idioms, form, and performance norms of the traditional Askenazi synagogue—of which he was obviously aware.
- The orchestral prelude reflects a purely late-Romantic character, with a few subtle references to biblical cantillation (Ashkenazi motifs for intoning the prophetic readings, or *haftarah*).

Play [Barkhu-Sh'ma Yisrael](#) 

**Extension idea**

To explore Lavry's *Sabbath Eve Sacred Service* further, we present II. *L'kha dodi*. In this animated setting, the melodic material is presented as a dialogue between a two-part women's chorus and the men in unison, and is reminiscent of many Israeli tunes composed in a "folk style" during the Second and Third Aliyah periods and into the 1950s.

Play II. [L'Kha Dodi](#) (Video is also on same slide, lower right) 

**Discuss**

- ❓ While Lavry was German-trained, he sought to reflect the traditions of Israel and the broader Middle East/Mediterranean. To what degree do you feel these selections reflect "Middle Eastern" or "Mediterranean Style" music?

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**Coda/Conclusion — Weaving Our Learning Threads Together**

**SLIDE 19**

We have spent some time showing how the music of Eretz Yisrael has penetrated American Jewish life.

- ❓ Can you share what you have learned?

**Notes**

- Instructor should keep list in a public place (e.g. whiteboard)
- Instructor should supplement the participants' suggestions with the following:

In this lesson on the impact of the music of Eretz Yisrael on American Jewish life from the 1920's through the 1950's, we have accomplished a lot! We:

- began by hearing how Israeli songs and dances ("*Artza Alinu*," "*El Ginat Egoz*") from different eras and distinctly different contexts (settling Eretz Yisrael; Kibbutz celebration of Passover, prayer) all have entered American Jewish life.
- saw how in the 1920's figures such as A.W. Binder and Julius Chajes went to Israel and annotated and published the music they heard from the people (e.g. "*Na'aleh L'Artzeinu*").
- learned how a distinctively American form of Zionism emerged following WWI, which emphasized support of Eretz Yisrael as a refuge and exhibited little to no interest in promoting aliyah. This version of Zionism became dominant beginning in 1927.
- saw popular singers, such as Bracha Zefira, made popular here, folk music traditions of any number of Jewish musical traditions within Israel, through their performances and recordings (e.g. "*Al N'har P'rat*").

- saw that figures such as Julius Chajes not only annotated and published what they heard in Eretz Yisrael, but also subsequently composed art music that was based upon these songs. (We heard a selection from “*Hebrew Suite*.”) This paved the way for such art music composers as Max Helfman (*Hag HaBikkurim* and *Israel Suite*).
- finally, we saw how some major synagogues commissioned Israeli composers, such as Marc Lavry, to make settings for entire Shabbat services. (e.g. “Bar’khu-Sh’ma Yisrael” and “L’cha Dodi”)

We also learned that the songs and music of Eretz Yisrael penetrated American Jewish life in a number of ways:

- through songbooks annotating Pre-State folk songs (e.g. “*Na’aleh L’Artzeinu*” in A.W. Binder’s *New Palestinian Folk Songs*, efforts of Julius Chajes)
- through performance and early recordings (e.g. Bracha Zefira)
- through art music based on Pre-State folk songs (e.g. Chajes’ *Hebrew Suite*, Helfman’s *Hag HaBikkurim* and *Israel Suite*)
- by commissioning of Israeli composers to write a service (such as for Shabbat, e.g. Marc Lavry’s *Sabbath Eve Sacred Service*)
- through dance (e.g. “*Artza Alinu*,” “*El Ginat Egoz*”)
- through institutions and organizations shaping future Jewish leaders

We have also learned much about the music of Eretz Yisrael, including:

- Many Israeli songs use lyrics from the Tanakh (e.g. “*El Ginat Egoz*,”)
- Some songs were sometimes specifically composed for dance (“*El Ginat Egoz*”)
- Sometimes composers and artists set music to words of prayer (e.g., Marc Lavry’s *Sabbath Eve Sacred Service*)
- Sometimes Hebrew poems served as inspiration for music (“*Bein N’har P’rat U-vein Chidekel*,” “*Shir HaAvodah*”)
- Sometimes works mark special occasions (“*Hag HaBikkurim*”)
- Sometimes songs became associated with their performers more than their composers and/or lyricists (e.g. Bracha Zefira’s works)

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## Outro

## SLIDE 20

As we end this lesson, I share with you a selection from a work entitled [\*Pioneers \(Halutzim\)\*](#) by [Herbert Fromm](#) (1905-1995). The work is the result of a commission from Arthur Fiedler, the music director of the Boston Pops Orchestra. The work, from 1971, builds on his 1942 composition called *Palestinian March* and refers musically to the early *halutzim*, the Zionist pioneer-settlers in Palestine in the decades preceding the founding of the state in 1948. Indeed, the initial theme quotes from “*Na’aleh L’Artzeinu*,” that we heard as a Pre-State folk song from Binder’s work. This brings us full circle for today! Enjoy this piece.

(NOTE: The piece runs 5:18. If running short on time, please start at 4:08.)



**Play** [Fromm's Pioneers:](#) 

(*A final note:* We hope that this lesson resonated with your students. Please consider deepening their learning and understanding by teaching the complementary lesson entitled “The Sounds of Eretz Yisrael in America: The Crucial 1960’s.”)

Enjoy! // **שלום!** // *L’hit-ra’ot!* // See you soon!