

January 01, 2010

## Book review: The organ and its music in German-Jewish culture

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### Recommended Citation

Jacobson, Joshua R., "Book review: The organ and its music in German-Jewish culture" (2010). *Music Faculty Publications*. Paper 20.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20000735>

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Alpert's consideration of what it means to be a Jew in contemporary America defines Jewishness as both a cultural connection and being part of a religious community. However, it is Alpert's assertion that justice is the central value in the Torah, a value that must be pursued in all arenas of contemporary life, which forms the thesis of this book.

She is able to demonstrate how religious values are as much a part of contemporary progressive Jewish life as she debunks the myth that religion is the province of conservatism, and she successfully challenges the co-opting of religion by the conservative right for political gain. Alpert presents a concise overview of the approach of social justice in contemporary Judaism and how one lives progressive Judaism in everyday life.

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**The Organ and Its Music in German-Jewish Culture**, by Tina Frühauf.  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 284 pp. \$74.00

Tina Frühauf has given us a book that is as much about Jewish identity as it is about music. She presents the organ as a marker of Jewish identity: at first as a marker of assimilation in the context of nineteenth-century reformation, and later as a marker of dissimulation, as Jewish musicians sought to find a unique voice.

The introduction of the organ into Jewish worship in Germany in 1810 stirred up a fierce controversy. In the opinion of most traditional Jews, the organ was *treyf*, totally unfit for Jewish worship. Since the fifteenth century the organ had been associated with Christian worship, and *halakha* forbade *hukkat ha-goy*—imitation of gentile practices. Furthermore, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the rabbinic authorities had declared that the entire nation was in a state of mourning, and music, especially instrumental music, was inappropriate. And playing any musical instrument on Shabbat or a holiday was considered forbidden work (or might lead to the forbidden work of repairing an instrument). But the reformers countered that beautifying the worship service was one of the exceptions to the *halakhic* ban. They also pointed to the precedent of the *magrephah*, (according to some interpretations) a hydraulic organ used in the Temple in ancient Israel many centuries before the organ was used in Christian worship.

But the elephant in the room was the early reformers' plan to remove any aspects of Judaism that were dissonant with the lifestyle of their German Lutheran neighbors. They eliminated traditional *nusah* (prayer chant) and can-

tillation, and completely did away with the role of the *hazzan* (cantor). The rabbi, like his counterpart in the church, led the services, and the music consisted of chorales sung by the choir and congregation, supported by the organ. For the emancipated Jews of Central Europe the organ came to symbolize the enlightenment and their assimilation into a refined culture and a society into which they so desperately longed to be admitted.

Decades later, moderate reformers sought a middle ground in which the *hazzan* regained his position on the *bimah* alongside the organ and the choir. Now the organ was used to accompany the cantorial recitative, to perform preludes and postludes, music for meditation, as well as to accompany congregational singing. Salomon Sulzer, the great cantor of nineteenth-century Vienna, reversed his initial opposition to the organ and opined that the mighty instrument could be used to “lead, control, to cover dissonances” in congregational hymns. His younger colleague in Berlin, Louis Lewandowski, composed organ accompaniments to traditional recitatives that boxed their free rhythms into a rigid meter of four beats to the bar, and their exotic Eastern modality into German classical functional harmony. Again the organ was being used as an instrument in the battle to purge Jewish culture of its “otherness.”

It was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that organ music displayed signs of dissimulation. Whereas nineteenth-century synagogue organists were church musicians who moonlighted on Saturdays, now we find a cohort of trained Jewish organists. Whereas previously enlightened Jews were eager to discard their otherness, now the banner of nationalism was ascendant. In the wake of growing antisemitism and inspired by Zionist ideologies, many Jews embraced rather than hid their ethnic identity. Inspired by composers such as Bartok and Rimsky-Korsakov, Jewish musicians sought to find their own unique voice, one that would blend East and West in a more equitable balance.

The prosperous Jews of early twentieth-century Germany built huge ornate synagogues, equipped with some of the most elaborate organs in the country. When it came to power in 1933 the Nazi party segregated Germany's Jews into an apartheid situation. Banned from attending or performing in public concerts, forbidden to play music by “real” German composers, many Jews turned inward and discovered or rediscovered their Jewish cultural heritage. The synagogue became the venue for concerts of music by Jewish composers, the organ was increasingly heard as a concert instrument, and the repertoire evinced sensitive treatment of traditional material, now freed from the shackles of tonal harmony and four-square meter. Of course, this renaissance would come to a violent end with the destruction of Germany's synagogues on Kristallnacht and the emigration or elimination of Germany's Jews.

Frühauf has provided us with the first monograph on this subject, tracing its trajectory from 1810 to 1939 with the careful attention of a scholar and with the trained eye of a professional organist. The book includes ample illustrations of synagogue organs and detailed tables charting their construction. Frühauf also provides detailed analysis of numerous compositions. But these analyses would have been much more useful had she included the music itself; most of these scores are long out of print. One could quibble with a few errors, such as the mistranslation of *kabbalat shabbat* (p. 141) or the reference to the Lodz ghetto as a “concentration camp” (p. viii). There are a few omissions. In her analysis of the controversies surrounding the admissibility of instrumental music in late Renaissance Italy, she omitted the well-known responsum of Rabbi Leon Modena. In her description of traditional Ashkenazic synagogue praxis (p. 93), she was apparently unaware of a long tradition of active congregational singing in unison, in heterophony and in plurivocality. And there is the odd statement that in the United States today “[w]ith few exceptions, liberal Jewish communities believe in the function and purpose of the organ during liturgy . . .” (p. 199). Would that it were so. Most American synagogues that embrace instrumental music have shifted to the more demotic instrumentation of guitars and drums, and from refined compositions to a simplistic and uninspiring session of sing-along. Perhaps the 200-year tradition of synagogue organ music will soon come to an end. But Tina Frühauf’s excellent volume will remind us of its origins, its controversies, and its glories.

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**Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein**, by Hilary Putnam. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008. 121 pp. \$19.90.

The analytic philosopher Hilary Putnam, Cogan University Professor, Emeritus, at Harvard University, has in his retirement produced a slim and unpretentious volume of four studies devoted to modern Jewish thought. As described in an autobiographical introduction, Putnam developed a personal interest in his Jewishness late in life. He notes a course on Jewish thought that he developed in 1997, though he does not mention that he also published an article on negative theology and a study in the philosophy of religion in that same year (“On Negative Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14.4 [October