



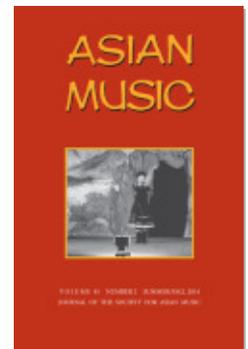
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Cute Boy, Charming Girl: Children's Songs of the Modern Hebrew Nation (1882-1948) (review)

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Recording Reviews

Cute Boy, Charming Girl: Children's Songs of the Modern Hebrew Nation (1882–1948). Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel no. 22. Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013. One CD-ROM (46 minutes). Booklet (176 pages; 121 in Hebrew and 55 in English) of commentaries by Edwin Seroussi, Talila Eliram, and others. \$20.00.

Over the past few years, the Hebrew University's Jewish Music Research Center, directed by Edwin Seroussi, has released a number of excellent albums through its Anthology of Musical Traditions in Israel label. The latest contribution to this series investigates an important gap in the scholarly history of pre-state Israeli music: repertoire written specifically for children. Given the aspirational position of Hebrew-language song in Jewish society during this period, the role of music composed with didactic ideals in mind deserves careful examination.

This repertoire serves as an unusually clear-cut case of the rise and fall of an “invented tradition.”¹ Following the emergence of Zionism, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the birth and rapid development of a secular, modern Hebrew-language corpus of songs. By exploring children's songs composed between 1882 and 1948, this album presents the first part of the trajectory of this invented tradition. Yet as the editors note, many of these songs have been forgotten, a process they trace to the increasing influence of electronic mass media. Another factor in this attenuation is surely the ideological differences between the world of the songwriters and the modern State of Israel, which has gradually abandoned the Ashkenazi flavor of the early days of the Zionist enterprise in favor of today's multicultural society.

The CD itself consists of 56 children's songs, with tracks ranging from 14 seconds to almost three minutes in length. It is packaged attractively inside a 5 × 5.5 inch hardcover book, with a cover adapted from an illustration by the iconic Israeli painter Nachum Gutman. The book includes a preface by Edwin Seroussi and an introduction and thorough commentaries by Talila Eliram, the principal researcher behind the project, in collaboration with Ruth Freed and Yaakov Mazor. The performers on this album are volunteers from a variety of backgrounds, born between 1907 and 1944. While the recordings themselves are documentary in nature, as evinced by the generally

untrained voices and occasional varying recording quality, the end result exceeds its purpose: for me, listening to the CD felt like an encounter with beloved older relatives.

The album features songs by a large number of composers, including some of the central figures in musical education in pre-state Israel, such as Abraham Zvi Idelsohn and the prolific songwriter Levin Kipnis, both of whom published editions of songs aimed at preschoolers. The CD also includes works by lesser-known music teachers, as well as Hebrew-language songs composed and published at the turn of the century outside Palestine, notably by Noah Pines in Odessa (1903) and Yithzak Alterman in Warsaw (1913). Although the overwhelming majority of the texts and melodies are original, some are adapted from German sources, and others relate to Hassidic *niggunim*.

The songs themselves are categorized into seven groups: “Songs for the Yearly Holiday Cycle,” “Songs about the Sea and Ports,” “Songs about Animals,” “Songs about Nature,” “Activity Songs: Learning, Games and Dances,” “Family Songs,” and “Varia.” Each topic is described and contextualized in the liner notes, and the songs are ordered accordingly. Thus, under “Activity Songs,” we learn about the Zionist educators’ interest in German pedagogical strategies, such as those pioneered by Friedrich Fröbel. This in turn directly influenced the creation of play songs with choreographed movements and can also be seen in the late nineteenth-century modernization of the *heder*, the traditional Jewish one-room schoolhouse. These explanations shed light on the actions called forth by the song texts (such as coming to the table, packing one’s schoolbag, dancing, and so forth).

Beyond the meticulous annotations, the sevenfold categorization is a highly successful curatorial strategy, enabling listeners to draw their own conclusions about the association of certain subjects with types of musical materials. For example, I was intrigued by the fact that four of the seven “Songs about Nature” feature Hebrew texts or translations set to song melodies by Schubert and Humperdinck. The close relationship between Hebrew and German versions of certain songs crops up again and again; indeed, one of the performers recalls that she sang the Humperdinck in Hebrew at her kindergarten, while her father sang it to her in German at home.

The only reservation I have about this project is that the Hebrew and English versions are not identical: the song texts appear in Hebrew only, accompanied with detailed annotations for each song. The English-language scholarly texts encompass the introduction and the contextualization of each of the seven categories as well as the track listings. While they are rich and expertly translated, it would be difficult for a non-Hebrew speaker to further explore this repertoire without access to the song texts. Given that the liner notes consist of more than 170 pages as it stands, this was perhaps a

pragmatic choice. Still, one envisions that in the future perhaps some of these texts could be translated and added to an accompanying website.

The importance of the work of Eliram, Seroussi, and others involved in this project is intensified by the fact that much of this repertoire is rapidly disappearing. Indeed, the majority of the performers on the album were born before 1930, and a significant number before 1920. The decision to present field recordings rather than professional singers is commendable, resulting in a powerful album that approximates the experience of learning the songs through aural transmission. As Eliram notes in her introduction, the songs on this CD were rarely commercially recorded and thus largely forgotten. This promising project shows that songs that were mostly left out of the canon can greatly illuminate unexpected aspects of everyday life in pre-state Israel. The album will appeal to scholars of Jewish music and culture, researchers interested in the historical development of theories of early childhood education, and musicians looking for firsthand sources of multicultural inspiration.

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Notes

¹ See Bohlman (1994, 43) and Hirshberg (2009, 100) for discussions of this aspect of early Hebrew-language song.

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Music of the Golden Sands: G'ayrat O'temuratov, Azat Seyilxanov: Songs and Melodies from Karakalpak Bards. Collected by Frédéric Léotar. Ethnic Series. Leiden: Pan Records PAN 2117, 2012. One CD-ROM (55 minutes, 25 seconds). Liner notes 4 pp. (Full liner notes available from Pan Records, info@panrecords.nl.) \$15.00.

This CD comes from Frédéric Léotar's fieldwork in Karakalpakstan, the large western region of Uzbekistan, on the bardic musical tradition, which is