

The Synagogue Journal

1856-2006

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Shabbat Noach

Issue 43

Cultural Programs

In this issue ...

The journal celebrates the congregation's support of the arts. This week's Torah reading ends with the story of the building of the Tower of Babel, the first feat of joint human enterprise and technology. The Rabbinic commentators later decided that G-d thwarts this endeavor not because of its ingenuity or ambition, but because the tower's creators went about their project immorally. This story eventually came to be not a criticism of human innovation, but the beginnings of real culture, wherein the highest qualities of people are joined for human social welfare and human betterment. The Tower of Babel story is about how people work together and enjoy the fruits of their labors.

During the 19th century the congregation held concerts and dramatic presentations at the Boerum Place Synagogue and other assembly halls or theaters. Articles and ads from the *Brooklyn Eagle* told of programs that featured voice, piano or violin solos and recitations by an "elocutionist." The evenings were largely social events aimed towards bringing singles together, but also served as fundraisers for the synagogue or other charities. On occasion, the program would include a selection of secular music sung by Baith Israel's chazzan.

In the 20th century the congregation's appreciation for music grew from its association with three composers. Issues 6, 37, 39 and 40 of the Journal examine the music of the brothers Israel and Samuel Goldfarb. This issue recognizes Aaron Copland's connections with Kane Street Synagogue: program notes from "Copland's Sanctuary," a November 14, 2004 concert that featured Music from Copland House and Florilegium; Michael Boriskin's observations on Copland's early influences; Benjamin Levisohn's piece in *The Forward*, "Finding an Excuse to Celebrate Copland," captured the celebration. The concert was featured on www.newmusicbox.org/webcasts/copland/index.nmbx during December 2004/January 2005.

Kane Street Synagogue will be in the spotlight again in an upcoming PBS documentary at noon on November 19, 2006. The third program in Michael Tilson Thomas' *Keeping Score* series "visits the places and explores the ideas that shaped Aaron Copland's life and music." The one-hour documentary by InCA Production producers David Kennard and Joan Saffa will show clips of our sanctuary where Aaron became a bar mitzvah. The piece includes thirteen-year-old Roger Kleinman and his tutor David Arroyo who were practicing for Roger's bar mitzvah later that week.

Last year Andy Levinson and The Arts at Kane Street Synagogue Committee organized four Sunday afternoon concerts: "Family Klezfest," featured Golem, Metropolitan Klezmer and David Kraukauer; George Frederic Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*, performed by members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic and Chorus under the direction of Aaron Smith; "Afternoon on the Left Bank," with music from Copland House was directed by Michael Boriskin with mezzo soprano Janice Meyerson; and "Twentieth Century Music by Jewish Composers of the Americas," featured Continuum with Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs and included the U.S. premier of Samuel Adler's "Song of Songs Fragments."

Afternoon concerts in the sanctuary are truly inspiring. The space has magnificent acoustics. The strong afternoon light streams through the stained glass windows. May the Kane Street community continue to draw together great musicians and appreciative audiences.

Special thanks to: Rabbi Weintraub; Michael Boriskin; Sara Rubinow Simon; The Forward; <http://forward.com>; the Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™, Brooklyn Public Library; www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/eagle,

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The Brooklyn Eagle on the synagogue's Cultural Events

"Grand Sacred" - January 26, 1880

The Eagle ran this advertisement for a Sunday evening concert in aid of the Beth Israel Congregation on January 24th as well.

"Beth Israel Entertainment" – June 1, 1902

The Literary League was the synagogue's Arts and Culture Committee during the nineteenth century.

"B. I. Literary League" – December 12, 1902

This program included presentations by synagogue leaders, the Reverends Lissman and Rosenberg.

"Finding an Excuse to Celebrate Copland"

This article by Benjamin Levisohn on program includes remarks by Michael Boriskin and Cantor JoAnn Rice who directed the concert.

Credit: *The Forward*. December 10, 2004

Notes from Michael Boriskin

The Artistic and Executive Director of Copland House draws connections between Aaron Copland's bar mitzvah speech and his lifetime achievements.

The Copland Family and BIAE

Details gathered from synagogue ledgers, Joseph Goldfarb and the Copland/Perlis biography, "Copland 1900 Through 1942," published in 1984

"Dear Mrs. Rubinow"

Aaron Copland wrote this note to Rabbi Goldfarb's daughter in 1961 on the occasion of the Rabbi's birthday.

Courtesy: Sara Rubinow Simon

GRAND SACRED
VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL CONCERT
IN AID OF THE
BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION,
AT THE
BROOKLYN PARK THEATRE.
Generously given for the occasion by Colonel Sinn,
ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1880.
The programme will include the following eminent artists:
Cornet, Mr. J. LEVY.
Violoncello, Mr. CHARLES WERNER.
Elocutionist, Miss MINNIE CUMMINGS.
Violinist, Master GEORGE LEHMAN,
(His first appearance).
Pianist, Miss MARKSTEIN.
Soprano, Miss EVELINA HARTZ.
Contralto, Miss LENA LUOKSTONE.
Tenor, Mr. CHRISTIAN FRITZSCH.
Baritone, Herr REMMERTZ.
Accompanist, Mr. CARYL FLORIO.
ADMISSION, FIFTY CENTS.
To commence at 8 o'clock P.M. Seats may be reserved at
Box Office after January 28.

BETH ISRAEL ENTERTAINMENT **Its Members Have a Literary and Musi-** **cal Programme at Pierrepont** **Assembly Rooms.**

The members of the Beth Israel Literary League enjoyed a literary and musical entertainment and dance at the Pierrepont Assembly Rooms, on May 28. The entertainment began with an address by the Rev. E. Lissman, lecturer at Temple Beth Israel, who congratulated the society upon the character and scope of its work, and the benefit that accrued to the temple from its efforts. The next number was a violin solo by the Rev. A. Rosenberg, cantor at Temple Beth Israel. Miss A. Salzman then gave an imitation of George Cohan in "The Governor's Son." Nathaniel Tuck sang a tenor solo, and David Ronsheim gave two humorous recitations. The entertainment committee included:

Julius Markendorf, chairman; the Misses S. Boyer, A. Salzman, M. Marks, R. Mesner, R. Rosenstein; Messrs. Willie Jacobs, D. Ronsheim, Julius Meyer, A. Brown, Joe Turstenberg, and Counselor Jacob Manne.

Among those present were:

Mrs. B. Brown, E. Lyons, E. Tuck, B. Kalisher, the Misses L. Kalisher, H. Ronsheim, C. Ronsheim, B. Jackson, T. Schwartz, T. M. Markendorf, S. Marks, Clara Kronheim, C. Alexander, L. Morris, May Hymes, Dora Flatow, E. Jackson, Helen Strauss, A. M. Michaels, Bertha Adler, R. Michaels; Mr. and Mrs. A. Danglo, T. Weissberg, M. Warsauer, Joseph Somborg, C. Baerman, Mrs. A. Rosenberg, Mr. and Mrs. H. Berliner, Louis Strauss, Walter Jackson, Philip Markendorf, Eddy Haas, Eddy Lyons, Julius Hess and H. Herzog.

Martin H. Latner was chairman of the literary committee and a delegation from the Progress Literary Society of Manhattan included Hugo C. Meyer, Joe Heyman and Milton Hecht.

B. I. LITERARY LEAGUE

A pleasant evening was spent at the open meeting of the Balth Israel Literary League. The literary committee had prepared a very good programme, which included a welcome address by Dr. E. Lissman; recitation, by Miss A. Salzman; soprano solo, by the Rev. Dr. A. Rosenberg; critical essay, by Walter Jackson; violin solo, by L. Springer; recitation, by Miss M. Springer; soprano solo, by Miss S. Austion; piano solo, by Mrs. A. Messner, and closing address, by President David Ronsheim.

FORWARD

FOUNDED IN 1897 • PUBLISHED WEEKLY IN NEW YORK

Arts & Culture

Finding an Excuse To Celebrate Copland

By BENJAMIN LEVISOHN

No excuse is necessary to stage a concert of Aaron Copland's works — over the last 60 years, his name has become synonymous with American classical music — but Brooklyn, N.Y.'s Kane Street Synagogue found one anyway. On November 14, it staged a tribute to the composer to coincide with the 91st anniversary of Copland's bar mitzvah, bringing him back to the synagogue where he was first called to the Torah. From here, inside Brooklyn's oldest synagogue, Copland embarked on a career that would take him from his Jewish roots to the pinnacle of American music.

Although the Cobble Hill neighborhood has changed, Copland still would recognize the synagogue, with its vaulted ceilings and stained-glass windows. Two hundred people filled the sanctuary and took their seats in the pews in which Copland and his family once sat. The Coplands attended synagogue regularly, and Harris Copland, Aaron's father, even helped purchase the building in 1906 before serving as its president from 1907 to 1910. While the synagogue provided a communal and spiritual center for the Copland family, it became a musical focal point for young Aaron.

"Copland would have responded to the liturgical music the way any budding musical genius would — as fertile ground for his imagination," said Michael Boriskin, artistic and executive director of Copland House and the pianist at last month's concert. Copland himself wrote that he always remembered the dance songs played at Jewish celebrations and the religious chanting of his youth.

Many of Copland's earliest works experimented with Jewish themes. These include "My Heart Is in the East," from 1918, based on a medieval Hebrew poem; "A Lament," from 1919, which used a traditional melody to "Adon Olam," and "Four Motets," from 1921. These works bear the influence of pre-World War II German composer Ernest Bloch, to the extent that Howard Pollack, author of "Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man," believes that Copland even might have been emulating Bloch. This is true of Copland's music, but more importantly, Copland used Bloch as a model of what a Jewish composer should be.

When Copland was 20, he went to France for what was supposed to be one year of study but turned into three. Copland listened to everything he could and met composers across the continent. He discovered Jewish composers who gave less reference to Judaism in their work than Bloch did — composers such as Darius Milhaud, whom he cited as "proof that a composer can remain profoundly national and at the same time profoundly Jewish." His influences expanded, coming to include the non-Jewish composer Stravinsky, American popular music and jazz. Two of the pieces performed by Music From Copland House at the

concert, "Nocturne" and "Ukulele Serenade," reflect these changes. (With their upbeat and jazzy sound, they were the audience's favorites.)

Copland's music reveals a fundamental shift over time, away from obvious Jewish references to a more cosmopolitan sound. Yet even as Copland was discovering his mature voice, he returned to his roots in 1929 to write a composition that would be Jewish in both subject matter and musical source: "Vitebsk." Copland wrote that he wanted "to reflect the harshness and drama of Jewish life in White Russia," and in it he struggled to re-create the distant world of his grandparents.

"Vitebsk" borrows from a Hasidic *nigun* called "*Mipnei Mah*," but the melody is almost unrecognizable. For those in the audience expecting to hear the familiar sound of Copland's famous pieces, the dark, chaotic and dissonant "Vitebsk" came as something of a surprise — after it finished, one woman simply whispered, "I didn't like that" — but for many, it was a revelation. They heard a different side of Copland, as if he were struggling with the darkness and claustrophobia of the past before he could engage the openness and optimism of the future.

After "Vitebsk," never again would Copland borrow a Hebrew folk melody or a Judaic theme for one of his works. Even "In the Beginning," which uses the first 38 verses of Genesis as its libretto, is not obviously Jewish. In 1947, he was asked by A. Tillman Merritt to compose a choral work with Hebrew lyrics for Harvard's symposium on music criticism, but he used the text from the King James Bible instead.

Yet Cantor JoAnn Rice, the director of the Florilegium Chamber Choir, which performed the work at the concert, noted the similarities between the repetition of the verse "And the evening and the morning were the... day" in Copland's piece and the same text in Hebrew in the Torah service. Sitting in the Kane Street Synagogue, it was impossible to listen to these verses and not recall "*Vayehi Erev, Vayehi Boker*." These Jewish influences would crop up in other Copland works, as well. In his book, Pollack cites other examples, such as Copland's Piano Concerto, which "suggests the calls of the shofar," and his "Dance Panels," which recalls the melody to "*Lecha Dodi*."

The concert closed with Copland's Sextet from 1933. Written four years after "Vitebsk," the piece is miles away in its sound. Copland had found his voice and succeeded in composing what is now recognized as great "American music." Yet his career also epitomized the American Jewish experience. From his Jewish Brooklyn childhood, Copland ascended the heights of the classical music world by creating his music in his own image. As the audience exited the Kane Street Synagogue, one listener summed it up: "Everything was so varied, but it all sounded like Copland."

Benjamin Levisohn is a freelance writer and stock trader in New York.



Notes from Michael Boriskin

Michael Boriskin, the Artistic and Executive Director of Copland House, sent this Email on December 16, 2004 to the Journal Editor.

Ninety-one years ago, a young boy stood on the bima at Congregation Baith Israel to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah. The youngster had taken his Hebrew lessons from Rabbi Israel Goldfarb, under whose caring guidance he also wrote an address to the congregation. His speech dealt with the essential unworthiness of a young boy, and the need to prove himself before the eyes of G-d, his parents, and humankind. The boy certainly learned this lesson well! In his lifetime, he went on to receive three of the highest honors given by the U.S. government: the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded by President Johnson in 1964; the National Medal of Arts, awarded by President Reagan in 1986; and the Congressional Gold Medal, awarded that same year. He also won a Pulitzer Prize, an Oscar, a Grammy, the first Kennedy Center Honors, over two dozen honorary decorations from foreign countries, and over 30 honorary doctorates from leading universities here and abroad. He became one of the most celebrated, beloved, and profoundly influential musical figures in all of American history, and, not incidentally, changed the course of music in 20th century America. That boy was Aaron Copland, and though there's no record of his ever chopping down a cherry tree, he came to be regarded as a kind of George Washington of American music.

Music from Copland House, the resident chamber ensemble based at the creative center for American music established at Copland's restored, landmark New York home, was thrilled to have performed at the Kane Street synagogue on what would have been Copland's 104th birthday, and only steps from where he became a Bar Mitzvah. The program ranged widely over Copland's life, from early, jazz-inspired pieces for violin and piano written in the 1920s to his last major work, a refined duo for flute and piano composed around 1970. Along the way, the audience heard "Vitebsk," a dark, abstract evocation of Jewish life in a Russian ghetto, and Copland's Sextet, an abstract, Modernist masterpiece from the 1930s. The Florilegium chamber choir also appeared on the program, performing Copland's impressive setting of the first lines of the Book of Genesis, "In the Beginning" from the 1940s



The Copland Family and BIAE

Journal Editor Carol Levin gleans information on Aaron Copland's family from synagogue ledgers, Joseph Goldfarb and the biography, "Copland 1900 Through 1942" by Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, published in 1984.

Harris M. Copland

Harris Copland became chairman of Congregation Baith Israel's Sunday school in 1905. At that time the school met in the basement schoolrooms of the Boerum Street Synagogue. All five Copland children (Ralph, Leon, Laurine, Josephine and Aaron) attended the school. At four-years-old, Aaron was the youngest ever student to attend the Sunday school. Management of the school was a challenge as building conditions worsened, resources dropped and the congregation dwindled. When the building became unsafe, Harris arranged for classes to be held at the Brooklyn Antheneum. Harris was one of the trustees responsible for acquiring the church property on Harrison Street that became the Harrison Street Synagogue. The synagogue was renamed in 1928 as Kane Street Synagogue.

Harris served as the congregation's president from 1907 to 1910, a critical period when Baith Israel and Anshei Emes consolidated. Harris Copland and the young Reverend Israel Goldfarb had the demanding positions of managing two very diverse groups of people with Reform and Orthodox leanings.

To celebrate the BIAE merger in 1908, H. M. Copland led the newly consolidated congregation in a festive procession through South Brooklyn from Degraw to Harrison Streets. Perhaps the sounds of the marching band, horse-drawn carriages carrying the Scrolls of Law and solemn dedication service placing the Torahs in the Holy Ark made an indelible impression on eight-year-old Aaron.

In 1936 the Congregation honored Harris at a dinner dance held at the St. George Hotel and made him a life trustee.

Aaron's Bar Mitzvah -

"Regulation moved and carried for a committee of three with power to expend a sum not exceeding of \$25 for a testimonial for the son of Mr. H.M. Copland in honor of his bar mitzvah." Pg. 250 Trustee Minutes, 11/17/1913

"Letter from Mr. H. M. Copland with the enclosed check for \$50 for donation in honor of his son's Bar Mizva. Secretary was requested to acknowledge receipt there of." Pg. 251, Trustee's minutes, 12/1/1913

"letter from Master Aaron Copland for gift sent in honor of Bar Mitzva." Trustees minutes, 12/30/1913

A few weeks before Aaron's bar mizvah Rabbi Goldfarb drafted a speech for Aaron to deliver at the synagogue and party. The speech begins with, "It is hardly possible for me, a young and inexperienced child, to give adequate expression to the feelings and sentiments which fill my heart and crowd my mind on this significant day of my Bar-Mitzvah. Yet with your kind and sympathetic indulgence, and with the aid of God, I shall endeavor to voice my sentiments as I enter into the great brotherhood of Israel." The speech ends with, "As the years will roll on, carrying me along on the wings of time and removing me far, far away from the impressions of childhood and youth, I shall always remember this gathering and this hour, this encouragement and this honor." (The Copland Collection of the Library of Congress)

From his 1984 autobiography:

"The part of my Bar Mitzvah I recall most vividly was the banquet - it actually took place in the store! Relations came from near and far. The merchandise was moved away and an area cleared where we could set up tables."

Cousin Arnold Mittenthal recalled that "Aaron played at his Bar Mitzvah on a piano that had keys missing." Pg. 12

Religious Training

Aaron attended the 4-afternoons-per-week Talmud Torah. The curriculum offered students instruction in Hebrew reading, writing and speaking, the Prayer book, the Bible, Jewish Music, Jewish History and Religion. Students sat in rows on benches behind long tables. At the end of each year in May or June, there were public examinations. The students were called into the office class by class and sat on folding chairs facing Rabbi Goldfarb's desk. Along the south wall, invited guests and parents sat at another line of folding chairs to observe as the rabbi and teachers asked certain questions and heard how well the children responded. The examination of each class lasted about ten minutes and afterwards, candy was distributed. Enrollment in 1912 averaged sixty-four paying pupils, thirteen free and eighteen who continued through the summer.

The Sunday school program emphasized weekly assemblies, a variety of clubs, entertainments and festival celebrations including Confirmation on Shavuot. During Aaron's school years, the school had separate classes for boys and girls. In 1913 three hundred fifty-seven scholars attended the Sunday school.

Rabbi Goldfarb's influence on Aaron

"My father must have had a good relationship with Aaron Copland, who was bar mitzvah here. Copland thanked my father in his biography for supporting him when he was young. The story is that Aaron's father Harris Copland was very resistant to the idea of his son going into the field of music. Aaron went to my father who spoke to Harris with the suggestion to let the boy do it for a while, and see what happens." (From a May 2, 2002 conversation with Joseph Goldfarb)

Near the end of senior year at Boys High, Aaron met with Rabbi Goldfarb asking for help in getting his father's permission to study music. At the time, Harris was vehemently opposed to the idea of his youngest son becoming a composer. He wanted him to take up law. The Rabbi encouraged the concerned father to give the boy a set amount of time in which to follow his dream. If after two or three years it didn't work out, then Aaron could pursue some other course of study then. The rabbi with his knowledge of music was particularly well suited to plead Aaron's case. Harris took his good advice, and in short time was glad he did.

Aaron remembers the Rabbi in his 1984 biography, "By curious coincidence our rabbi, Israel Goldfarb, was himself a composer of liturgical music and the possessor of a fine baritone voice. Rabbi Goldfarb was a sensitive human being and an effective leader of his congregation."

Aaron recalled certain members of the congregation at Yom Kippur services, "elder graybeards of the Congregation stretched themselves out prone in the aisles of the synagogue and prayed for forgiveness of man's evil ways."

"In a lighter vein, it was the small dance bands at Jewish weddings and parties that fascinated me."

Aaron Copland's cordial letter of 1961 to Rabbi Goldfarb's daughter declined an invitation to a celebration for the Rabbi and promised to send a telegram.

Leon Copland

Leon's name is listed on the WW1 bronze plaque of veterans. His bar mitzvah would have occurred in 1903 at the Boerum Street Shul.

Ralph Copland

Ralph probably became a bar mitzvah in 1907 at the Boerum Street Shul. He later taught Sunday school at the Harrison Street Synagogue. For a short period served Ralph serviced as school Superintendent. On 8/9/1914 Rabbi Goldfarb officiated at Ralph's marriage to Dorothy J. Levy. The couple lived at 14 St. Marks. (1907-18 cashbook)

Molly Kronman's Letter to Aaron

Molly Kronman, a Sunday school teacher of Aaron's, wrote to him in the 1970s inviting him to her art exhibition that included a painting of the Sanctuary. He responded with a cordial note wishing her success, but said that he had absolutely no recollection of her. Molly's father, Jacob Kronman, was BIAE's president from 1917-19.

Copland Burial Places

Harris and Sarah Copland, Aaron's parents are buried at the BIAE section of Beth El Cemetery in Cypress Hills, Queens. Alfred, Anna, Ralph, Helen, Dorothy and Milton Copland are interred at Mount Carmel Cemetery.

"Dear Mrs. Rubinow"

Courtesy of Sara Rubinow Simon, granddaughter of Rabbi Goldfarb and daughter of Thelma Goldfarb Rubinow.

AARON COPLAND

ROCK HILL R. F. D. 1 PEESKILL, N. Y.

March 8, 1961

Dear Mrs. Rubinow,

Thank you for your kind birthday greetings.

I was glad to have your letter and to hear that your father is in good health and soon to celebrate an important birthday of his own. I wish I were able to be with you on the occasion of May 3rd. Unfortunately, I am scheduled to leave for the May Festival in Ann Arbor that evening. Would you be good enough to send me the address where the event will take place so that I may send a congratulatory telegram.

With all best wishes....

Yours sincerely,

Aaron Copland