



Alexander L. Ringer
(Courtesy of Margie Wallace)

Musica Judaica 2003
In Memoriam: Alexander L. Ringer
(1921-2002)

On May 8, 2002, the American musicologist Alexander L. Ringer, who died in Lansing, Michigan, on May 3, 2002, was buried in the countryside cemetery of the Israeli Kibbutz Afikim, where his daughter and family live. Thus, in the presence of members of his family, close friends, and colleagues in Israel, the eventful life of an effervescent intellectual and scholar came to an end. He was a man of three continents, a faithful son of the great cultural and musical heritage of Europe, America, and of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and in Israel.

Of Dutch origin, Ringer was born in Berlin on February 3, 1921 and educated in Berlin and Amsterdam. From 1943 to 1944, while interned in the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, he taught music education, and after World War II, he emigrated to the United States, where he received, in 1949, a Master of Arts degree from the New School for Social Research (New York), and in 1955 a Ph.D. from Columbia University. Prior to joining the music faculty at the University of Illinois, where he was appointed Professor in 1963, and where he remained until his retirement, he taught at Columbia University, Hebrew Union College's School of Sacred Music, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Oklahoma. In addition to his various teaching positions, which included visiting appointments at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Heidelberg Universität und Hochschule für Jüdische Studien, he was a founder and honorary member of the International Kodály Society, a member of the editorial board of *Musica Judaica*, and general editor of the collected writings of Arnold Schoenberg.

My initial encounter with Alex Ringer goes back thirty-eight years, when, as a Fulbright visiting professor at the Hebrew University, he was called upon to lay the groundwork for establishing of the first Department of Musicology in Israel. Ringer utilized all of his diplomatic talents to convince his interlocutors that musicology should be as vital an academic discipline in Israel as it is at

European and American Universities. Moreover, due to his strong belief in music education, he extolled its importance, not only as an academic discipline, but also for its indispensable role in training music teachers and for broadening their humanistic outlook. In line with this comprehensive approach, he proposed a detailed curriculum for the future department, taking particular care to pursue the process and to preside over its ratification by the senate and university authorities.

During the period preceding its official opening, in 1965, Ringer was sent by the university to Europe on a fund raising mission for the fledgling department. It was on this particular occasion that I met him for the first time in Paris. Interestingly, our meeting took place in the neighborhood of the opera house. The centrality of this *haut lieu* in the history of French music played an important role in Ringer's doctoral and later researches. Here he worked on his doctoral thesis concerning the French *Chasse* (Medieval and Renaissance hunting songs composed for the leisure class). Among his diverse research interests, one which became a major preoccupation was his quest for elements of "Jewishness" in the music of famous Western Jewish musicians. His article, "A Family of Jewish Musicians in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Paris", published in *Musica Judaica*, VIII/1 (1985-86) was one of many which eloquently displayed his erudition. Tracing the background of the reign of Louis XV and the inhospitable attitude toward the Jews in Paris, Ringer proceeded to describe the reasons—primarily economic—which led the monarch to admit a limited number of successful Jewish merchants and finally, he claimed that not only merchants, but also some intellectuals and representatives of liberal professions were permitted to reside in Paris so that they could practice their occupations. He remarked that, despite the encouragement of "limited Jewish emancipation, a new kind of strictly intellectual anti-Semitism," exemplified by Voltaire's article "Juifs", was emerging at that time. The talented Lévy family of musicians, however, "enjoyed considerable status in Parisian music and musical life at mid-century." It is remarkable how, on the basis of scattered information drawn mainly from the journal *Mercure de France* between 1733 and 1776, Ringer managed to depict Madame Lévi's (spelled consistently with an "i") success as a great singer, as well as an instrumentalist who "thrilled a distinguished audience with her outstanding performance on the *par-dessus-de-viole*" (viola). The same held true for "her brother, Joseph Lévy, a much sought after music teacher who soon made a name for himself as

the composer and publisher of the first sonatas for solo harp to appear in France." Ringer's article is interspersed with information about Parisian musical life, including composers, styles of composition, music critics, instruments, and their techniques.

After dealing with the "Jewishness" of the Lévy artists, he concluded:

When all is said and done, the available evidence, scanty though it may be, does affirm the presence of Jewish or at least Jewish-descended professional musicians of high caliber in mid-eighteenth-century Paris, musicians whose influence on local music and musical life was anything but negligible.

Returning to our first encounter in Paris, it is interesting to note, that, in the framework of the same mission, Alex had another first encounter in London with Alan Lessem, his future doctoral student at the University of Illinois who was then seeking an academic career in Israel. That encounter was described in an article published in 1993 under the title "*Recordare*—Never to forget" (*Canadian University Music Review*, XIII). This perennial and symbolic expression occurs among the divine imperatives found several times in the Bible and in post-Biblical literature. The event which occasioned Ringer's article was a memorial lecture marking the premature death of his pupil and friend. The ambiguous use of "*Recordare*" became clear during the major part of the lecture, whose content and general conclusion provided the needed clarification which has to do, again, with the theme of the quest for Jewishness. The predominant style in this memorial lecture, particularly in its first part, is marked by a feeling of tenderness and thoughtfulness. Ringer expressed his sorrow for the loss of Lessem, "a quite extraordinary human being, in whom I sensed a kindred soul from the moment we first met," as well as "gratitude for the unique privilege of having known such a generous heart and such a persistently creative mind." It was because of their common affinity with and interest in the music of Schoenberg and Kurt Weill, that he decided to devote the bulk of the lecture "to a subject which, I know he would have welcomed: the Jewish experience of Kurt Weill, the cantor's son, as reflected in his creative achievement."

Kurt Weill, as a Jewish musician, enjoyed special attention in Ringer's writings, but in this lecture he focused mainly on his "Jewish" opera, *The Eternal Road*, with which the composer began his

American period. "Unlike most of his Jewish colleagues, Weill landed in the United States in 1935 in response to a specific artistic task, the completion of and preparation for the performance of *The Eternal Road*, a curtailed, and in part drastically altered English version of the historical pageant *Der Weg der Verheissung*, written by Franz Werfel." The first performance of this Jewish opera or musico-dramatic depiction of millennia of Jewish history, took place in New York in 1937, and became a tremendous success. In describing Weill's life and works, Ringer provided details concerning the cultural milieu of his native German town (Dessau), his father, a cantor who composed a volume of Hebrew liturgical works, his musical studies in Berlin, and its celebrated cosmopolitanism, which "affected all of his thoughts and actions, musically, dramatically, and indeed politically." Weill's creative activity in Berlin included the *Dreigroschenoper* ('*Three Penny Opera*'), which made him world famous. Forced to flee from the Gestapo, he emigrated to the United States, where "he managed to establish a solid reputation as a sophisticated, yet remarkably popular, composer of Broadway musicals."

In the process of his work on *The Eternal Road*, he called upon his father to provide him with "really old, genuine original Jewish music, not new, modern." He later wrote to his father: "I do not intend to use these things directly, but merely to use them as material for a preliminary study." Although the project required reliance on original Jewish motives, he decided to employ such material sparingly, *i.e.*, in connection with the liturgy. "The Jewish liturgy," he contended, "is very poor in real melodies."

Omitting many of Ringer's important comments, I would like to touch upon Ringer's beautiful depiction of the opera's conclusion, which also concluded his article and which brings us back to the aforementioned concept of "*Recordare*" and its significance.

At the conclusion of the Biblical mystery play *The Eternal Road*, the multitiered stage bursts into radiance upon the procession of Biblical figures from Abraham to Isaiah and Jeremiah, and behind them, the entire timeless congregation of Israel, led by the rabbi with an uplifted Torah scroll... Ascending the heavenly stairs this 'eternal procession of Israel,' he intones Psalm 126: When the Lord brings back the redeemed to Zion, then shall we be like unto dreamers... Weill, whose parents had been lucky... to settle in the land of Zion, sang that perennial song of hope with all his heart and all his soul long after he had come to accept America as his

personal Zion... The last words that resulted without much fanfare yet, when all is said and done, turn out to proclaim in countless different ways our perennial obligation not to forget: *Recordare*, to remember always—in contrition as well as in joy.

I know of two more such exalting and homiletic finales in Ringer's writings. One is found in his enlightening survey on Israeli music: "Musical Composition in Modern Israel" (1965). This study, carried out during his long stay in Israel as a visiting professor, reflects his great intellectual curiosity, his wish to explore new areas, and his ability to pinpoint the essence of the studied theme. In this article, which deals with ten active Israeli composers, he analyzed and classified their works in light of the variegated stylistic trends to which they adhered. In his attempt to find an eventual common approach, Ringer referred to the distinction between religion and religiosity often recurring in his writings. This is because of "the conviction shared by the majority of their countrymen that Judaism represents in essence more of a civilization than a religion, since it has always dealt with the totality of social existence, not excluding aspects associated elsewhere with secular culture". He added that "nothing is more symptomatic of the very special cultural climate of modern Israel than this unique interpenetration of religious, socio-political and artistic values." Another particular aspect underscored by him was the encounter of those composers with Arab music, and the impact exerted on some of them by its modal systems, with its particular motivic and structural procedures based on the *maqam* principle. Incidentally, Ringer himself became quite interested in the Arab musical tradition, to which he devoted some of his future publications.

He concluded this study with the following grandiose finale:

With history on her side—if only in view of the growing importance of composers, from Debussy to Boulez, inspired by Eastern musical esthetics—Israel with the enormous reservoir of talent is bound to find a secure place within the very mainstream of the world's music, away from the periphery on to which she has often been forced in the past either by circumstances beyond anyone's control or by some well-intentioned but artistically misplaced ideology. Provided she is granted the lasting peace for which all her citizens pray, that time will be reached *bimhera be-yamenu* ('soon in our day').

Another example of a grandiose finale is found in the conclusion of his paper, "Jewish Music—Old Problems, New Dilemmas," read at the closing session of the World Congress on Jewish Music held in Jerusalem in 1978 and published in its *Proceedings* in 1982. In this paper, Ringer dealt with the troublesome quest for Jewish music, raising the thorny problem of who may be considered musically a Jew. What, if any, are the ramifications of Jewishness in music? The ensuing discussion of this problem highlighted his recurring attempt to deal with it, particularly in connection with almost all the Western composers of Jewish origin and the distinguishing traits in their compositions. The composer who attracted Ringer the most was Schoenberg. Between 1973 and 1990, he devoted no less than eighteen studies to this great master, culminating in two books: *Arnold Schoenberg: the Composer as Jew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), as well as his last book in German, published posthumously as *Arnold Schönberg: Das Leben im Werk* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2002).

Schoenberg, Weill, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Darius Milhaud, Ernest Bloch, Leon Kirchner, George Rochberg, and many others were, of course, protagonists in his general quest for particular components of given stylistic entities, whether Western or non-Western. They typify, though not exclusively, the music of individuals and groups identified as Jews by virtue of their birth, upbringing, and/or commitment.

Among the various theories which Ringer discussed, one was the important study of melodic variants of Bartók and Kodály, which often revealed "astonishing historical connections between widely separated cultures." In light of this theory, Ringer contended that "the quest for 'Jewish' stylistic traits might be expected to benefit immeasurably from comparative melodic analysis." A case in point, according to him, might be, for instance, an eventual comparison between "the slow movement of Schumann's D Minor symphony and the opening march of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, with their significantly divergent continuations of near-identical beginnings," or the "aggressive rhetorical gestures that pervaded Schoenberg's expressionistic idiom..." Another theory referred to in this presentation stated that any culture is eclectic by nature. In view of this idea, Ringer contended that Jewish culture is even more eclectic than others "by historical necessity." That is why one has to determine those specific cultural factors which have interacted with others. In doing so, Ringer added: "From the syncretistic perspective, the aesthetic gap that separated a Kurt Weill

from his older contemporary Schoenberg might well be cited in support of, rather than against, the decisive import of their respective Jewish roots."

Another theory to which Ringer adhered was stated by Heinrich Berl, who, in speaking of the Jewish contribution to Western music, argued that "musicians of Jewish descent [reflecting their "Mediterranean" roots], tend to stress melodic-rhythmic qualities in their work to the detriment of the Central and West European preoccupation with harmony." Ringer found this notion applicable even to Schoenberg, who as the "ultimate scourge of functional harmony, not only admired Mahler's melodic-rhythmic mastery, but proudly acceded to the direct succession of [Mahler], who had rejuvenated European music by restoring its ancient Mediterranean birthright, while rehabilitating the musico-physical energies of dance, as embodied in the march in particular."

Ringer claimed that monophonic chant, as traditionally practiced in Mediterranean synagogues, no longer suits the "meta-harmonic practices of virtually all modern Jewish composers." Among his pertinent examples were Schoenberg's discussion (from his *Harmonielehre*) "of a type of absolute melody predicated on the dissolution of traditional harmonic thinking," and "Milhaud's polytonal practices, derived from the diatonic rather than the chromatic tradition [representing] a peculiarly Franco-Jewish approach... by a composer who was also among the first to successfully explore substantive aspects of Afro-American jazz." Ringer concluded that

it is precisely in terms such as these that the quest for meaningful 'Jewish' elements in a given music will have to proceed if it is to go beyond more or less obvious affinities with liturgical or folk tunes, not to speak of mere textual references or the cultural protestations of composing chauvinists. For, in art "the ultimate test is rarely *what* but *how*, not the nature of the material but its treatment, its unique 'intonation.' And, 'intonation' in that sense reflects not merely the individual psyche, but the total historical experience of the community, physical and spiritual, to which the artist belongs, whether he identifies with it consciously or not.

After dealing briefly with Israeli music in the light of his preceding arguments, Ringer concluded boldly and optimistically as follows:

So strongly and clearly is its many-splendoured voice heard throughout the world today that none will judge us presumptuous if at the conclusion of this, the first World Congress on Jewish Music, held in the Holy City, we paraphrase [Isaiah's] liturgical adage to proclaim humbly and gratefully yet proudly our faith that forever "from Zion shall go forth our song; Jewish music from Jerusalem."

Ringer's contributions dealing with musical education were similarly influenced by his personal character, as seen in his publications of the 1960s: "Music in the Commonwealth of Learning," "Teacher Training," and, "Musicology and the Future of Music Education." Yet, it seems that the figure who had mostly influenced his thinking and attitude in this respect was the Hungarian composer and initiator of a special method of teaching music: Zoltán Kodály. In 1965, after writing a short article entitled "The Lives of Kodály," he dedicated at least five more studies to the Hungarian musician and his educational theory, not to speak of his sustaining effort and energy to disseminate his method and to implement it in a number of institutions in the United States and Israel. Kodály's method was, to a large extent, inspired by Hungarian folksongs; it was to this particular aspect or linkage that Ringer dedicated his study "Folk song in Education—Problems and Promises," published in the *Bulletin of the International Kodály Society*, XVII, 1 (Spring, 1992).

The topic, as Ringer stated, should be treated in its broader ramifications, touching upon a number of serious questions of a sociological and political nature no less than strictly musical nature, beginning with problems of definition, for which he referred to the teachings of Bartók and Kodály. He proceeded to discuss various issues and theories related to the philosophy of education, the educational value of song, the importance of the human voice, music as a whole and in particular vocal music in ideal education, without forgetting to criticize the narrow prevailing approaches. Ringer regarded Kodály and his special method of utilizing music as an indispensable ingredient of *Bildung*, and the socio-cultural formation of the human being in all his creative potential. He then defended the Kodály method and its validity outside of Hungary, mentioning its successful application in the United States and in Israel. He also spoke about the lack of requisite abilities of teachers to recognize and utilize its

aesthetic wealth and inherent potential as a musico-educational tool providing initial access to the entire world of music.

Ringer was also an active member of the International Musicological Society, the American Musicological Society, the Society of Ethnomusicology, and the International Folk Music Council, whose *Year book* he edited from 1969 to 1970.

Finally, he was a versatile musicologist and a respected intellectual of wide learning, with an imposing command of European languages. He was blessed with a great curiosity of mind, and an ability to write eloquently about the various aspects of the many subjects he treated. His 167 publications (books, articles, and reviews) cover a wide range of topics. In addition to his studies of the life, works and styles of some sixty famous eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American composers, Ringer published a number of syncretical studies on historical, cultural, and aesthetic trends and styles, and sociological issues affecting music. To illustrate the scope of his works, we conclude this homage with a modest list of selected topics: *The Early Romantic Era: Between Revolutions, 1789 and 1848* (1991), *Musik als Geschichte: gesammelte Aufsätze* (1993), "Clementi and the *Eroica*" (1961); "On the Question of 'Exoticism' in 19th-Century Music" (1965); "Mozart and the Josephian Era: Some Socio-Economic Notes on Musical Change" (1969); "Beethoven and the London Pianoforte School" (1970); "Die Parthei des vernünftigen Fortschritts: Max Bruch und Friedrich Gernsheim" (1972); "The Political Uses of Opera in Revolutionary France" (1973), "Musical Taste and the Industrial Syndrome" (1974), "Musicology Today: a Question of Commitment" (1974), "Opera as Public Ceremony: The French Revolutionary Connection" (1982); "Of Music, Myth and the Corporate State" (1983), *Socio-Economic Aspects of Italian Opera at the Time of Donizetti*" (1984), "Proxy Wars and Horns of Plenty: On Music and the Hunt at the Time of Francis I" (1984), "Religious Music in the West" (1987), "Amerikanische Musik im Zeitalter des Jazz" (1990), "One World or None? Untimely Reflections on a Timely Musicological Question" (1991).

Additional topics of Jewish interest can be found in his articles: "Handel and the Jews" (1961); "Salomon Sulzer, Joseph Mainzer and the Romantic *a cappella* Movement" (1969); "Schoenbergiana in Jerusalem" (1973), "Arnold Schoenberg and the Politics of Jewish Survival" (1979); "Friedrich Gernsheim (1839-1916) and the Lost Generation" (1980-81), "Faith and Symbol: on Arnold Schoenberg's Last Musical Utterance" (1982); "Innere Rück-

kehr: jüdischer Musiker nach der Gleichhaltung" (1992) and "Solomon Sulzer: Zwischen Emanzipation und Exotik (1997).

May his memory be blessed.

Amnon Shiloah

Two Significant Musicological Events: Commemorating Salamone Rossi (ca. 1570- ca. 1628) and Eric Werner (1901-1988)

The first event, held at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Merkin Concert Hall at the Elaine Kaufman Cultural Center, on November 10 and 11, 2002, constituted a project undertaken by the Zamir Choral Foundation, whose founder and director is Matthew Lazar.

The two-day conference was devoted to the study and music of Salamone Rossi, a contemporary of Claudio Monteverdi, who was among the chief musicians employed at the Gonzagan Court in Mantua, Italy. He served as an instrumentalist and conductor of an all-Jewish orchestra that entertained the Duke. Rossi was a pioneer of the Baroque trio sonata, as well as a singer and composer of vocal music. In addition to writing madrigals, his *Hashirim Asher LiShlomo* ("The Songs According to Solomon") (1622/23), contained thirty-three settings based on Hebrew liturgical and paraliturgical texts. He, along with the Venetian Rabbi, Leon Modena, sought to restore liturgical music to the exalted status it had enjoyed in the days of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

The conference began with an open sing of four of Rossi's Hebrew compositions: "Barekhu," "Shir hamma'alot, ashrei kol yirei Adonai" (Psalm 128), "Haleluyah Haleli Nafshi et Adonai" (Psalm 146), and "Adon Olam."

Historian David Ruderman (University of Pennsylvania) opened the academic session with his paper, "Italian Jewish Society in the Era of Salamone Rossi." Providing a vivid portrayal of the Jewish ghetto in Italy, he rejected its image as an isolated society cut-off from the mainstream of Italian life. Instead he offered a more nuanced interpretation, focusing on its scientists, philosophers, and rabbis who sought worldly knowledge. Many of them, prominent in Venetian society, were university educated. Jews engaged themselves in all aspects of Italian secular society, which did not force them to abandon their Jewish identity. This was