

Forgotten musicians?

Paul Ben Haim – a wanderer between the worlds

1. Research Question

In context of the project “Shared and/or contradictory heritage?” I want to work on the topic of “forgotten musicians”, more specific, I will focus on a biography of an artist and an artistic work in which the shared cultural heritage is reflected as a German-Jewish one: that of the composer Paul Ben Haim (1897 in Munich – 1984 in Tel Aviv), who can be considered a wanderer between worlds and cultures; and about the shared memory and heritage connected to this topic.

I want to do research in two steps: first about the person Paul Ben Haim and his life: How did he live in both Germany and Israel? Secondly, about his artistic work and its context: What kind of music was his? What influenced his music, how was he himself received in both countries, Germany and Israel? How did the immigration and his life in exile influence his work and are these influences visible in his compositions? What are the main differences between the music he composed in Germany and the music he composed in Israel?

However, I don't only want to look on the influences on Paul Ben Haim, but I want to find out how Ben Haim himself influenced classical music and compositions in both Germany and Israel. I want to do research on the impact Ben Haim had on classical music in both countries and on his position and significance in the canon of classical music and compositions.

- How is the reception of his work in both Germany and Israel, how has it been in the past, maybe in times when Ben Haim was still alive, and how is it today? Is he still performed these days or are his works mostly forgotten?
- Are there differences in the (public) perception in Germany and Israel? How is his significance in Germany and Israel?
- And particularly important, is he and his work considered as cultural heritage and as a part of the shared German-Israeli cultural heritage?

2. Methodology

I want to observe and research the musical field in both countries – and Ben Haim's reception. I want to find out if and where he is played, at what occasions, where he is played more often and where he is more popular, and which of his pieces are performed more often and are the most popular ones. Therefore, I want to look at newspapers, local papers and musical magazines and concert recordings on YouTube. Is there a difference in the reception of Ben Haim in Germany and in Israel? Is his legacy livelier in either country?

Documentary research

- Contemporary newspaper articles about Ben Haim (1933-1984)
- Number of biographies and scientific literature in Germany and Israel
- Concert recordings on YouTube/CD recordings (qualitative and quantitative analysis)

- Articles about the opening of the Ben Haim Research-Centre in Munich and its relevance for a shared artistic heritage

Expert interviews:

I want to try to talk to experts in the field of music theory and musical history. Therefore, I will contact the Ben Haim-Research Center at the University of Music and Theatre in Munich that was newly opened on Monday, 30th March 2020. With this center, the Munich University wants to make a significant contribution to a comprehensive research of the Jewish music culture in southern Germany and to the music of NS-persecuted musicians and composers. The Ben Haim Research Center particularly focuses on the biography and work research of Nazi-persecuted composers and musicians as well as on the Jewish musical life in southern Germany. As this is exactly the topic I am working on, I am sure I will get a lot of valuable information from this contact point.

I can also imagine doing interviews in both Israel and Germany among musicians, non-musicians, and young people to find out if people still know Paul Ben Haim and/or his music or even listen to it and play it and if there's a difference in the reception between musicians and non-musicians and maybe older and younger people.

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