

In the Footsteps of the “Great Jewish Composer”¹

EDWIN SEROUSSI

Don Harrán, *Salamone Rossi: Jewish Musician in Late Renaissance Mantua*.
Oxford University Press, 1999, 310 pp.

In a brief news item published in 1861 in *Ben Chananja*, a periodical devoted to Jewish theology edited and published by Leopold Löw, rabbi of Szegedin (Hungary), Wolf Jellinek mentions a printed booklet containing music from the late Renaissance with a Hebrew text in Hebrew characters, which is to be found at the Imperial Library of Vienna.² The booklet included one vocal part (*alto*) from a collection of choral works entitled *HaShirim asher liShlomo* (referred to hereafter as *HaShirim*), written by the Jewish composer Salamone Rossi, who was active in Mantua from the end of the sixteenth century to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Jellinek, at that time a preacher at the Leopoldstaster Tempel in Vienna, never would have guessed that his modest report on Rossi would mark the beginning of an intensive scrutiny of the work of this Italian Jewish composer that would span, and even intensify, throughout the twentieth century.

The fascinating book on Rossi by Prof. Don Harrán of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is the culmination of the process started by Jellinek a century and a

¹ . This essay, written in 2001, appeared originally in Hebrew in the journal *Pe'amim* 93 (2003): 172-82. The author is grateful to the publisher of *Pe'amim*, the Ben Zvi Institute in Jerusalem, for its permission to translate this essay. To Feliza Bascara, who translated this text, I express my gratitude. This English version is an expanded and updated version of the Hebrew original and, in this context, I would therefore also like to express my appreciation to my student Francesco Spagnolo, who provided me with additional information and fruitful commentaries after reading the Hebrew original.

² . See Wolf Jellinek, “Zur Geschichte des Synagogues Gesänge,” *Ben Chananja* 27 (1861): 236-37. The identification of this author with the renowned scholar and rabbi of Vienna, Dr. Adolph Jellinek (1820-93), seems plausible.

half ago. Because of the book's great importance, I found it appropriate to expand the usual scope of a critical essay.³ Therefore, I will precede my discussion on the book with some comments that should help the reader to comprehend Harrán's scholarly achievement and his place in the history of research on Rossi. This essay will conclude with a short discussion of some reflections that arise from reading this book.

Prelude

Following Jellinek, nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals and researchers of Jewish culture in modern universities started to perceive Rossi as a figure worthy of careful study.⁴ Shortly after the publication of Jellinek's article, cantor and composer Samuel Naumbourg (1815-80), a central figure in the Jewish musical life of Paris, began to take an interest in Rossi's Hebrew musical works. Naumbourg learned about Rossi's Hebrew works through Wolf's *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, which cites a piece entitled *Basso HaShirim asher Shlomo* by "Rabbi Shlomo."⁵ Naumbourg eventually managed to acquire the *basso* and *tenor* parts,

³ . This task is even more relevant now, after Prof. Harrán completed in 2003 the publication of Rossi's *Opera Omnia*, which was published by the American Musicological Society in its series *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 100. Rossi's works in Harrán's modern and definitive edition consist of thirteen volumes. *HaShirim* comprise the last volume (printed in two fascicles) of this edition.

⁴ . Israel Adler and Judith Cohen contributed pioneering studies on the transformations of *HaShirim* from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. See Israel Adler, *La pratique musicale savante dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris-La Haye, 1966), esp. Vol. 1, pp. 57-60; Judith Cohen, "Shlomoh di Rossi – Goralah shel yetzirah – HaShirim Asher LiShlomoh" ("Shlomoh di Rossi – The Fate of a Word — HaShirim Asher LiShlomoh"), *Tazlil* 9 (1976): 8-14. Cohen's article is a critical essay on the modern edition of *HaShirim*: Salamone Rossi, *Hashirim Asher Lish'lomo*, edited by Fritz Rikko, 3 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1967-73).

⁵ . See J.C. Wolf, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*..., 1-4 (Hamburg 1715-33), Vol. 4, p. 974. Fürst apparently copied from Wolf's bibliography. See J. Fürst, *Bibliotheca Judaica*, 1-3 (Leipzig 1863), Vol. 3, p. 175.

and was overjoyed to read Moise Schwab's announcement, published in the journal *Revue Israélite*, which reported that the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris had acquired the *sesto* part (the sixth voice of the choir) from Rossi's *HaShirim*. Equipped with three vocal parts of this early Hebrew musical work, Naumbourg sought help in 1874 to locate the remaining parts.⁶ He turned to Baron Edmond de Rothschild, among others, to help him locate and acquire the missing parts, which were very rare and scattered throughout several libraries in Western Europe. The Baron accomplished his mission and brought about the publication of the ancient Hebrew scores in a modern edition. In 1877, Rossi's *HaShirim asher liShlomo*, edited by Naumbourg, was finally published.⁷ It is worth noting that Naumbourg employed considerable license as an editor, such that he even changed the original text of one of the compositions.⁸

Naumbourg's publication of Rossi's Hebrew works stirred much interest in the concept of "Jewish art music" among Jewish intellectuals in Central and Western Europe. Naumbourg also contributed to the development of the idea of a "Jewish musical history" in Jewish discourse at the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, Jewish scholars wholeheartedly endorsed the romantic concept of music history as a succession of "great composers" or "geniuses." The only

⁶ . Further details on the progress of Naumbourg's search appear in a short article on Rossi included in the introduction to the anthology of his works for synagogue: Samuel Naumbourg, *Recueil de chants religieux et populaires* (Paris, ca. 1874), p. XLVI. An inexplicable bibliographical riddle is how Naumbourg failed to notice the existence of an entire set, in mint condition, of *HaShirim* located at the Bibliothèque National of Paris, just a short distance away from where he was sitting! On this, see Adler, *La pratique musicale*, Vol. 1, p. 59 and n. 235.

⁷ . *Cantiques de Salomon Rossi, Psaumes, Chants et Hymnes*, transcrits en notation moderne et publiés par S. Naumbourg (Paris, 1877; reprint: *Out of Print Classics of Synagogue Music*, Transcontinental Editions, no. 17 [New York, 1954]). Naumbourg's book contains a selection of Rossi's secular works, edited by the renowned French composer Vincent d'Indy.

⁸ . In her article quoted above in note 4, Judith Cohen discusses in detail the many errors found in this early edition as well as in other editions of Rossi's work.

problem they had was the scarcity of composers worthy of inclusion in the emerging Jewish pantheon of musical luminaries. It is against the backdrop of these intellectual trends that the keen interest in the figure of Rossi must be analyzed.

Alongside Naumbourg's publication of Rossi's works, Eduard Birnbaum (1855-1920), the pioneer of Jewish musicology, wrote one of his most significant essays dedicated to Jewish court musicians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mantua.⁹ In this monograph, Birnbaum dedicates a substantial segment to Rossi's laying the foundations for the modern scholarly research on this celebrated Italian Jewish composer. Most significantly, Birnbaum writes:

Actually, Shlomoh Rossi is the most important musician of his kind to be produced by the Jewish people. Only the second Shlomoh of our days, Salomon Sulzer, the unforgettable master responsible to a great extent for the renewal of synagogue singing, and whose achievements as a musician, both instrumentally and in song, are so brilliant, can be compared to him. This has been well phrased by Leopold Löw [1811-75, Hungary's first Reform Rabbi] when conferring upon Sulzer the title "Morenu" – but he saw fit to set Sulzer above Rossi even!... We of the House of Israel may say of the last of the Jewish musicians of Mantua that ever since the day of

⁹ . See Eduard Birnbaum, *Jüdische Musiker am Hofe von Mantua von 1542–1628* (Vienna, 1893). Translated, revised and expanded English edition by Judith Cohen, as *Jewish Musicians at the Court of the Mantuan Dukes (1542-1628)*, Documentation and Studies Series, 1 (Tel Aviv, 1978).

the destruction of the Temple no other has been more worthy that Salamone Rossi to head the Levites' choir of harps.¹⁰

This is one of the clearest statements of the romantic concept of the “great composer” at the very inception of Jewish musicology. About a quarter of a century after Birnbaum, A. Z. Idelsohn, in his canonical book, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development*, credits Rossi with bringing harmony and polyphony, two distinctive markers of European art music, into the synagogue. Idelsohn even goes so far as to suggest that Rossi had direct influence on the process of modernization in the synagogue music of Central and Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹¹ Although Idelsohn's claims require more critical scrutiny, the fact that the *alto* part from *HaShirim*, which Jellinek described in 1861, was the property of the renowned Viennese cantor Salomon Sulzer (who donated it to the Imperial Library and was closely associated with Jellinek), indicates that there was some awareness of Rossi's precedent among the innovators of European synagogue music in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Following Naumbourg's publication of 1877, Rossi's *HaShirim* began to be performed in “modern” synagogues outside Italy, from the late nineteenth century on becoming an integral component of the Jewish liturgical music repertoire in Western Europe and the United States. For instance, the collection of synagogue

¹⁰ . Birnbaum, *Jewish Musicians*, 19-20.

¹¹ . See Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York, 1929), p. 203.

choral works for four voices, *Qol rinnah*, published in London and New York in 1910, contained Rossi's *Adon 'olam*.¹² This piece appears alongside works by prominent composers of synagogue music from the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, Israel Mombach, as well as Samuel Naumbourg. This suggests that, already by the early twentieth century, musicologists and Jewish musicians regarded Rossi as part of the narrative called "Jewish music history," and even as one of its pivotal figures.

In the twentieth century, especially from the 1970s onward, Rossi's Hebrew works were the focus of studies by musicologists, mostly if not all Jewish, who specialized in Jewish music. Composers, editors of Jewish musical anthologies, and conductors of Jewish choirs joined the movement that the distinguished Israeli musicologist Hanoah Avenary (whose contribution to the dissemination of Rossi's music will be discussed further on) called the "the contemporary Renaissance of Rossi."¹³

Proof that Rossi and his works had a special standing among Jewish musicians in Europe, the United States and Israel, is in the continuous stream of reprinted editions and arrangements of *HaShirim* that appeared throughout the twentieth century. Take, for example, the reprint of Naumbourg's edition of *HaShirim* in the USA in 1954; the arrangements by the Jewish composer from Paris, Leon Algazi;¹⁴ Eric Werner's *3 Hebrew Compositions for Mixed Choir* of 1956;¹⁵ and the *Sacred Service, transcribed for the American Synagogue*, edited by Isadore

¹² . This in fact is Rossi's *Kaddish*, which Naumbourg arranged for *Adon Olam*. See Lewis M. Isaacs & Mathilde S. Schechter, קול רינה, *Hebrew Hymnal for School and Home* (New York & London, 1910/5670).

¹³ . See Salamone Rossi, *Canzonettas for 3 voices (1589)*, edited by Hanoah Avenary (Tel Aviv, 1975), Introduction.

¹⁴ . Leon Algazi & Vladimir Dyrk (eds.), *5 choeurs de Salamone Rossi* (Paris, 1933).

¹⁵ . Eric Werner (ed.), *3 Hebrew Compositions for Mixed Choir* (New York, 1956).

Freed in 1954, one of the leading composers of the American Reform movement, a work based on settings of selected pieces from *HaShirim* (with the Hebrew text underlay transcribed in the Eastern European Ashkenazic pronunciation!) combined with original works for the organ.¹⁶ The highpoint of the interest in Rossi's work in America was undoubtedly the new revised edition of *HaShirim* by Fritz Rikko.¹⁷

The American Reform and Conservative movements' attraction to Rossi deserves special attention. It reveals their identification with a Jewish artist who was conceived as a model of the possible synthesis of Jewish culture in the Diaspora with the surrounding non-Jewish culture through "harmonious" musical composition. Freed's introduction to his *Sacred Service* expresses this particular conception:

Rossi also devoted himself to the synagogue being the first musically well-educated figure. It is remarkable that in the bigoted atmosphere of the sixteenth century, a composer who always signed himself Salomone Rossi Ebreo (the Hebrew) could have risen to this important place while yet remaining faithful to the religious beliefs of his forefathers.

¹⁶ . See Salomone Rossi, *Sacred Service*. Transcribed for the American Synagogue by Isadore Freed (New York, 1954). Musicologist Eduard Birnbaum preceded Freed with his "modern" arrangement of Rossi's Hebrew works. Eduard Birnbaum (arr.), *Wenn Gott, der Herr, das Haus nicht bauet, im Tonsatz von Salamone Rossi Hebreo* (Königsberg [ca. 1894]).

¹⁷ . See above, note 4. Before this publication appeared, the errors in the Naumbourg edition were still perpetuated. The third volume of Rikko's edition contains an article by Joel Newman on Rossi's musical style (pp. 41-57). This volume also includes a list of modern publications of Rossi's works.

The translation of the term “Ebreo” by “Hebrew” and not “Jew” (as the term implies) reveals a little of Rossi’s glorification, and emphasizes the composer’s religious “difference” in a Christian Italian society. It is interesting to note that his being “Hebrew” is also emphasized in the Israeli edition of his works (see further on).

Rossi’s reception in the historiography of Jewish music from the nineteenth century on reveals the continuous process of the Mantuan Jewish composer’s increasing popularity and status. Don Harrán’s book reaches a new height in this fascinating intellectual process.

The Book

For the past twenty-five years, Prof. Harrán diligently collected all of Rossi’s works and carefully prepared them for scholarly publication (see above, note 3). In addition to this immense task, he wrote the monograph of Rossi’s life and works that is discussed herein. This book is the crowning effort of the intensive research on Rossi by Jewish musicians and musicologists over a span of 150 years.

No researcher could have been more suited to compose a monograph on Rossi than Don Harrán. As one of the leading researchers on music of the Renaissance period, he has mastered the fine details of the musical works from this fascinating period in the history of Western music and its study. Working in Jerusalem, in close proximity to the most distinguished modern center of Jewish studies, Harrán

enjoys direct access to the richest materials on Jewish history and culture in Italy. This twofold proficiency allowed him to crystallize a comprehensive historical-cultural viewpoint, vitally important in order to properly assess Rossi's life and works.

In preparation for his book, Harrán invested huge efforts into locating every possible piece of information, to the minutest detail, on Rossi and his social and cultural surroundings. Among the sources he used were the Mantuan city archives, especially the archives of the Gonzaga family, who governed the city and employed Rossi; the Jewish community archives in Mantua (reaching beyond this archive's classic and in-depth survey by Shlomo Simonsohn); the complete works of Rossi, three hundred and thirteen in number, and the texts of these works: the dedications at the beginning of the Italian works and the different texts included in the opening of *HaShirim*, which includes the famous *responsum* of Rabbi Leone da Modena.

Rossi's entire output includes secular vocal works in Italian (canzonettas, madrigals and *madrigaletti*), instrumental music (symphonies, canzonas, sonatas and various dances), and sacred songs in Hebrew. Harrán's book is organized according to these musical genres.

The book opens with Rossi's biography, which immediately makes us aware of Harrán's meticulous work in constructing the story of the composer's life based on the copious and fragmental evidence. Harrán next discusses the details of the publications of the composer's works; much information regarding the composer is included in works published during his lifetime. Publishing music in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century must have been no easy task,

for a composer would have had to deal with many economic hardships and technical difficulties. Who were behind all these publications? And what were their motives? Harrán suggests that Rossi may have received support twice over for the publication of his works: once from his Christian patrons, mostly from the Gonzaga family, and then from his Jewish benefactor, banker Moses Sullam. This obligated the composer to his supporters, as can be seen in the very obsequious dedications at the beginning of his published works. The relationship between Rossi and his patrons reveals the composer's unsteady standing and his obligation to bow down to figures who were secondary in Mantua's social hierarchy: "what is touching, even saddening is that Rossi seems to be grasping in every direction to achieve protection and security" (p. 50). "In any case," Harrán adds, "the true story of Rossi's relations with his 'patrons' lies hidden behind a veil" (p. 51).

Two central chapters, the third and the fourth, are dedicated to Rossi's vocal and instrumental music. Both chapters are constructed according to a similar formula—from the general to the particular, that is, from the general characteristics of each genre to the characteristics of particular criteria, such as: form and genre, models, rhythm, word-note relations (in vocal works), terminology (for example, the titles of works), etc. Harrán convincingly bases and develops the idea, first conceived by the German musicologist Hugo Riemann at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Rossi was more innovative in his instrumental music. His main contribution in this field was the design of the *trio-sonata* (works for two equal melodic instruments accompanied by figured bass), which is a genre from the Baroque period.

Another important chapter, which is useful to any musician who wishes to perform Rossi's works today, is the fifth chapter, entitled "From Composition to Performance." In this chapter, Harrán suggests solutions to the fundamental problems that concern performers of Renaissance music today. These problems arise from the way music was printed during Rossi's time. For example, which instruments were intended by the composer to be used? (The composer did not always indicate the names of the instruments.) There are also problems concerning the interpretation of the notation. For example, when should one add accidentals that are not found in the original notation? Furthermore, how is one to tune the instruments? What tempo and dynamics should be used for different sections? Another important issue is how to suit the texts to the music of the vocal works. This chapter is undoubtedly a useful guide for any serious performer wishing to revive Rossi's works.

In the sixth chapter, Harrán deals with Rossi's musical works for theater. It seems that Rossi was more involved in theater than is apparent from his published works. Harrán suggests the very likely possibility of Rossi's involvement with the Jewish theater group that was active in Mantua at the time. This assumption is based on convincing arguments related to the literary sources of some of the vocal works, as well as to stylistic and structural characteristics of several of the instrumental works. Harrán also assumes that some of the works published by Rossi were performed in plays put on by the Jewish theater group of Mantua and in other staged performances at the Gonzaga home.

Rossi's Hebrew works in the collection *HaShirim asher LiShlomo*, which comprises a fifth of all of the composer's known works, are discussed at length in

the seventh chapter. Here, Harrán summarizes his earlier studies from the different perspectives of this unique work. The chapter opens with a detailed discussion of the historical and cultural context in which Rossi's Hebrew work was conceived. Harrán focuses on the texts at the beginning of *HaShirim*: Rabbi Leone da Modena's two introductions (*haskamot*) and his *responsum* from 1605 regarding the use of polyphonic song in the synagogue of Ferrara. This significant and detailed *responsum*, which reveals information about the debate on this issue in the synagogues of northern Italy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, is printed at the beginning of *HaShirim* as though the composer or his spiritual patron (da Modena) had anticipated that there would be opposition to the innovation in Rossi's works.

The author then discusses the classification of *HaShirim* texts and the supposed contexts in which they were performed. Harrán rightly emphasizes that Rossi's works were not meant to replace or even to lessen the practice of traditional monophonic prayer by the cantor and congregation. On the contrary, Rossi's works were meant to create short "artistic spaces" within the continuity of the traditional performance of liturgical texts sung by the cantor and the congregation. The intention was to contribute additional value to certain parts of the service that were traditionally "musical stations," such as texts that were usually sung according to a specific known melody. Between these texts, there are the *Barehu*, the *Qaddish* that precedes it, the *Qeddushah*, various Psalms (twenty out of the thirty-three pieces in *HaShirim* are from the Book of Psalms), *piyyutim* (liturgical poetry) according to the Italian custom, and one wedding song that concludes the collection.

Further on, Harrán discusses the musical style of *HaShirim* in detail, according to a formula similar to that used in the discussion on other musical genres addressed in the book. The discussion raises the unique issue of the placement of the Hebrew text beneath the notes. Rossi published the texts in Hebrew letters and, as a rule, placed the words in their entirety at the end of each musical line. The exact placement of the syllables in the musical sentences was left open to the singers' interpretations, and presented a serious problem to any choir conductor who performed *HaShirim*. It seems that Harrán's new edition, based on his careful scientific research, will provide solutions for most of these uncertainties.

Harrán concludes his analysis of *HaShirim* with the following words: “[In the last piece of *HaShirim*, the wedding ode *LeMi Ehfotz*,] Rossi seems to be writing an epitaph to his own conception of Hebrew music as a blend of Italianism and Hebraism, not to speak of his own life story as a reconciliation of the separate cultures in which he moved” (p. 241). And, in the Conclusion, he adds in the same spirit: “Like consciously Jewish musicians in later times, Rossi confronted the problems of preserving his Jewish identity in a non-Jewish environment and of communicating, as a Jew, with Jews and Christians in such a manner as to be understood and esteemed by both” (p. 242).

These words reveal the writer's high regard for the subject of his research: his admiration for Rossi's almost unique achievement in combining the Jewish heritage (which is also the author's heritage) and the non-Jewish Italian musical culture (to which the author has dedicated the best of his efforts).

Postlude

Regardless of the many scholarly attributes of the book described above and without seeking to diminish its importance, Harrán's book does nevertheless raise a few questions regarding certain issues that the author could have addressed, but preferred not to. These questions touch upon two issues: the first is a discussion of whether it is possible to judge and evaluate the relationship between the Jewish culture and the non-Jewish culture of the past through the sensibilities of the present; and the second concerns the reception process of an art work from the past in the present, and its influence on research.

The first question, which is of particular interest to historians studying the history of Italian Jewry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is whether or not there was a Jewish Renaissance in Italy that paralleled the non-Jewish Renaissance. Does Harrán adopt the approach that Hava Tirosh-Rothschild called "harmonistic interpretation," whose representative was Cecil Roth (who, by the way, frequently used the field of music in general and the Rossi case in particular in his arguments).¹⁸ This approach claims the existence of a new and unique period of cultural blossoming and openness to the spirit of secularism and individualism among Italian Jewry. Or does the author perhaps adopt the approach of the school of Joseph Baruch Sermonetta and Robert Bonfil that almost

¹⁸ . Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Culture in Renaissance Italy — A Methodological Survey," *Italia* 9 (1990): 63-96. All of the observations in this paragraph concerning the different perceptions of the Jewish Renaissance in Italy are taken from this article.

completely rejects the term “Jewish Renaissance”? Or is the author possibly inclined to adopt David Ruderman’s stance that does not reject the term “Jewish Renaissance,” yet claims that only a small elite sector of Italian Jewry underwent this process? And how does the author regard Moshe Idel’s stimulating standpoint that music among Renaissance Italian Jewry reflected their propensity for mystical, theurgical, and magical activities? A discussion of these questions might have enriched the book and made it the ultimate study on the music of Renaissance Italian Jewry for many years to come.

The second question, that is, the influence of Rossi’s reception process on modern research and the modern interpretation of this subject, calls for a discussion, however short. Piecing together the figure of Rossi as the archetypical “great Jewish composer” is an interesting topic. As we have seen, many (mostly Jewish) musicians and musicologists have dedicated themselves to Rossi, and Harrán is no different from his predecessors in this sense, except for the excellent quality of his study. Harrán classifies Rossi’s story “as the stories of all other culturally vibrant composers, thoroughly unique in the annals of music history” (p. 242). The “great Jewish composer” is a talented musician according to all the criteria of the general surrounding culture, who maintains close ties with his community and does not give up his Jewish identity in order to be accepted by the non-Jewish society. Harrán’s study undoubtedly contributes to maintaining Rossi’s reputation as the first “great Jewish composer,” by placing him beside prominent Jewish composers of the twentieth century who are considered “Rossi’s

spiritual descendants, among them Ernest Bloch, Darius Milhaud, and Leonard Bernstein” (p. 2).¹⁹

On this point it might have been possible to ask just how much Rossi was a “good Jew” and how it is at all possible to measure the “quality” of the Jewish identity of each individual. Did Rossi observe all or some of the *mitzvot* (religious deeds)? Was he familiar with the Jewish canon? According to Harrán’s assessment, it is possible that Rossi was the author of the Introduction to *HaShirim* and, therefore, must have had some familiarity with *halakhic* literature; yet, this remains only an assumption. It is also possible to assume that Rabbi Leone da Modena may have been the actual author of the Introduction. Apart from the few intellectuals who supported him, how did the Jewish community of Mantua regard Rossi? And is Rossi’s place in non-Jewish musicological discourse as central as it is in Jewish and Israeli discourse? For example, Rossi’s name is not even mentioned in Grout and Palisca’s *A History of Western Music*, the most

¹⁹ . This trope also returns in many recent CDs and Internet sites. See for example the CD *Blessings of Beauty: A Classic Collection of Judaic Gems by Kurt Weill, Morton Gould, Salamone Rossi, Billy Joel, David Amram, and more...*, The Orchard, #883 (2000), whose promo reads as follows: “A unique exploration of beautiful and passionate music inspired by the Jewish soul. Includes works by Kurt Weill, Salamone Rossi, Morton Gould, Billy Joel, David Amram, and more. These Judaic gems are adapted from song and arranged for flute, flute choir, and piano.” In a curriculum for Jewish teachers, Rossi is aligned in one breath with no less than the leading contemporary American composers of synagogue music who are mostly associated with the Reform movement: “Over the years there have been many notable composers of Jewish music. Salamone Rossi was one of the earliest accomplished composers, setting many Hebrew liturgical texts to music. An important German-Jewish nineteenth-century composer of Jewish music was Louis Lewandowski, whose settings are still widely used in many American synagogues. Jewish music for all occasions continues to be composed and performed by contemporary American Jewish composers such as Debbie Friedman and Craig Taubman.” <<http://www.sbgmusic.com/html/teacher/reference/cultures/jewish.html>>

common textbook on music history in the universities of the Western world.²⁰

In one of my lectures, I nicknamed the intensive deliberation on Rossi and his Hebrew works carried out by Jewish and non-Jewish researchers and performers in the late twentieth century “Rossi-mania.” A symptom of this trend can be found in the production of CDs of Rossi’s Hebrew works (in their original choral format or in diverse types of arrangements); at least ten CDs of this kind were produced between 1995 and 2001 in the USA and Europe.²¹ The Internet has also

²⁰ . Donald K. Grout and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 4th edn. (New York & London, 1988). For the sake of accuracy, we must point out that Rossi is mentioned in books on Western music history that focus particularly on the Baroque, such as Manfred Bukofzer, *Music from the Baroque Era from Monteverdi to Bach* (London, 1948). Rossi as a major composer appears abundantly in notes to recent CDs (see note 20 below). For example, in *Salamone Rossi Hebreo*, Zamir, #910 (1998): “The scene: the court of Mantua during the fullest flowering of the Renaissance enlightenment. The world has changed and the Dark Ages had passed... for a while. During this all too brief respite from segregation and persecution, the Jews of Mantua experienced a new freedom and, in response, a blossoming of art and music flowed from the ghetto. Perhaps the greatest representative of the Jewish participation in the Italian Renaissance is the composer and violinist, Salamone Rossi. Exceptional on many counts (the first Jewish polyphonic music to be published, one of the first composers to write instrumental sonatas, etc.), Rossi eagerly embraced the revolution taking place in the music of his gentile contemporaries, namely Monteverdi and Gastoldi.” On the occasion of the ecumenical conference dedicated to Rossi held in New York City in 2002, the follow review appeared: “If someone told you that one of the most important, influential and best-selling composers in Europe around 1600 was an observant Jew living in a ghetto, you’d probably think it was a joke. We are just now beginning to learn how far from a joke this Jew’s story is... It was 300 years before any other Jewish composer attempted something similar — it took that long for any Jewish musicians to venture out into the larger Christian society or to bring new music into Jewish society. Only with the liberalizations of the 19th century were Jews to be found once again at the center of the music world. But even then, most of those, like Felix Mendelssohn, Gustav Mahler, etc., found it necessary to convert to Christianity before they or their work could be accepted” (Raphael Mostel, “Meet Europe’s Hottest Composer, c. 1600: A Devout Ghetto Dweller Named Rossi,” *Forward*, 29 November 2002). Rossi also made it to the Art Section of *The New York Times* (8 November 2002, section E, Page 10, Column 1): Barry Singer, “A Renaissance Composer, Actively Jewish When That Wasn’t Easy.”

²¹ . For example, *Salamone Rossi: The Songs of Salomon, Pro Gloria*, Musicae Recordings #113 (1997), ASIN: B0000011YK; *Rossi, Hashirim Asher Lishlomo*, Pro Cantione Antiqua, Carlton Classics #6600452 (1998), ASIN: B000003YQ7; *The Songs of Salomon: Jewish Sacred Music from 17th century Italy*, New York Baroque, Eric Milnes Director, Vol. 1, Dorian #93210 (2000), ASIN: B00004UDEW, Vol. 2, Dorian #93220 (2001); *Salamone Rossi Hebreo*, Zamir, #910 (1998), ASIN: B00005R63F; *Taste of Eternity*, Matthew Lazar, Western Wind, #1890 (1998), ASIN: B00000F1BM; *Rossi: The Two Souls of Solomon*, Accent Records #96119 (1999), ASIN: B00000444H; *Chants-Mystiques; Hidden Treasures of A Living Tradition*, Matthew Lazar, Pgd Special Markets, #20340 (1995), ASIN: B0000047JO; *Salomone Rossi: The Songs of Solomon*, Conductor Pavel Kuhn, Panton (Cze) #811271(1996), ASIN: B000004AKK; *Salamone Rossi: The Songs of Solomon*, Yorkshire Baroque Soloists Pro Gloria Musicae Recordings #113 (1997), ASIN: B0000011YK; *Lady Take a Lover: Music and Poetry from the Ghettos of Renaissance Italy*, End Pin, (2002), ASIN: B000065EP1.

contributed to the nurturing of Rossi's figure as a sort of early Jewish cultural hero. An amusing example of the exploitation of Rossi's towering image can be found in the title of a review of CDs by contemporary Italian klezmer bands (who are in fact partially influenced by hard rock): "Salamone Rossi's Children: Three Italian Klezmer Bands"

<http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/davidow/2000_0312_italy.html>. Rossi has become a kind of "patron saint" for any modern Jewish music coming out of Italy!

In addition, it seems to me that Rossi is one of the very few non-Israeli composers whose works have been published by the Israel Music Institute (IMI), the "national" publishing house for Israeli music. IMI published two books of Rossi's works in Italian, edited by the late Prof. Hanoch Avenary, and this fact is not mentioned in Harrán's book.²² It is unfortunate that in a book whose every detail is scrupulously based on the most esoteric bibliographic details, the Israeli publications of Rossi's works are missing.²³ This raises very interesting questions: What about Rossi in terms of Israeli culture and contemporary Israeli music in general? Did the heads of the Israeli publishing house consider Rossi to be the kind of model worthy of imitation for a successful synthesis of Israeli culture with folk culture? Is Rossi also conceived in Israel as a good starting point for "Jewish music history" and, hence, as part of the construction of a national Jewish narrative in the field of music?

²² . See Salamone Rossi, *Madrigals for 5 voices (1602)*, edited by Hanoch Avenary (Tel Aviv, 1989) and the *Canzonettas for 3 voices (1589)*, quoted in note 12 above.

²³ . In contrast, Avenary's editions are mentioned in the new edition of Rossi's works edited by Harrán.

In conclusion, however much Rossi and his Hebrew works are important and respected, this does not justify the lack of proportion in the attention paid to them and other issues in the research of music in Jewish culture and society of the past and the present. Because of the somewhat obsessive treatment of Rossi as a “great Jewish composer,” the research of Jewish music tends to ignore many other Jewish composers who were no less productive and successful in bridging Jewish culture and the surrounding non-Jewish culture through their works. For example, during Rossi’s time, at a relatively short geographical distance from where he lived in Mantua, the Ottoman Empire was home to an active school of Jewish *payytanim* and composers. This group was to excel in its contribution in shaping Ottoman art music, on which most of today’s Middle Eastern classical music is based. Rossi’s contemporary was Avtaliyon ben Mordechai, a disciple of Rabbi Israel Najara (ca. 1555-1625), who was a leading composer of his time and recognized by the non-Jewish society. During the era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, when European Jews had almost no access to art music circles, the Jewish composer and musician Itzhak Fresco Romano (an observant Jew who died in 1815), known in Turkish literature as Tamburi Izak, directed the musical activities of Sultan Selim III’s court. Izak’s secular works are still performed today by the most important ensembles in Turkey and are heard on radio and television.

Until recently, the names of Avtaliyon and Tamburi Izak were completely excluded from the narrative of “Jewish music history.” This is due to the Eurocentric approach that emphasizes the very few Jewish works that were accepted into the pantheon of composers of Western music history, while the

musical traditions of the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East were classified under the rubric of “folklore.” Indeed, many other European Jewish composers suffered a similar fate. This is evident, for example, in the absence of the names of Italian Jewish composers from texts on Jewish music, composers who promoted the use of choral music in Italian synagogues from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The absence of these composers from Jewish music historiography is the result of subjective evaluation; their works were considered to be of low quality because they sounded too “operatic.”

This essay is intended to serve as a basis for future discussion on central issues concerning the historiography of music in Jewish society and culture. A discussion of this sort on the music of Italian Jewry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is now possible due to Don Harrán’s impressive and exemplary work on Rossi.