Who are you? Yes you, the person that just read that question and raised his/her eyebrows! Go ahead and ask yourself: Who am I? How do my friends know that I am Jason, or Emma? Where do I live? Does my birthplace decide who I am? Is it the language? The books I read? The food I eat? The places I shop at? The people I associate with?

Questions like these might be used by an individual trying to examine his/her identity. The Oxford Dictionary defines identity as “the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.”¹ The dictionary entry for identity also shines light on the origin of this ambiguous term—the word identity comes from the post-classical Latin word *identitas* that in turn came from the classical Latin *idem* meaning “same”. Identity as a social phenomenon entered society in the late sixteenth century and it was used to define the “quality of being identical”. In the centuries to follow, the meaning of this word has changed and its use significantly increased; just entering the words “what is identity” in a search engine such as Google yielded 1,060,000,000 results. In recent years the word identity has branched out to include terms such as racialization and

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ethnicization. Ethnicization is a set of dynamic processes that construct people as belonging to a particular ‘ethnic’ group on the basis of assumptions about culture, national origin, or language.

Klára Móricz decided to explore this phenomenon of ethnic identity of composers of Jewish origin in *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music*. The material in this 436-page book is organized in three parts, “Jewish Nationalism à la Russe: The Society for Jewish Folk Music,” “Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: Ernest Bloch and Racial Thought,” and “Utopians/Dystopias: Arnold Schoenberg’s Spiritual Judaism.” The three main ideas running through Móricz’s book are a comparison of the differences between Jews in Russia, Switzerland, France, Austria, Germany, and the United States; the involvement of Jewish composers in Jewish culture and as part of an international society; and how these Jewish composers were affected by the new social and world events that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century. Móricz believes “the study of Jewish identities in professional music, with an emphasis on their complex, often conflicting nature, [is] something much ignored in essentialist studies of identity,” thus providing the scholarly community with an in-depth study of a topic not well explored.

The expression of Jewish identity in Jewish music began, as suggested by Móricz, with the establishment of nationalist movements in Russia. What forced this fight for nationalism? For Jewish cultural societies in Russia, the first decade of the twentieth-century was a time of repressed political frustration. Móricz writes that from the time of Alexander II (1855-1881) the history of Russian Jewry consisted of hope for the improvement of their situation, but such promises were repeatedly unfulfilled.

In order to protect their heritage, the Historical-Ethnographic Commission was founded in 1882 where much interest was given to Jewish folk music. According to Johann Gottfried von Herder, “folk songs were an expression of something both generalizable and universal, and restricted-reflecting the history, landscape, and unique national features of the country from which they came.” For this reason, Russia witnessed the formation of the OYNM (Obshchestvo Yevreyskoy Narodnoy Muziki translated as The Society for Jewish Music). At its inception in 1908, this society focused

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3 Ibid., 125.


5 Ibid., 18.

on the collection, preservation, and cultivation of Jewish cultural artifacts, including Jewish folk music. In *Jewish Identities*, however, Móricz also mentions that politicians influenced the formation of these societies but with the passing of time, composers such as Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) focused less on satisfying political figures. Instead they worked on creating a Jewish Art music. For Leonid Sabaneyev (1881-1968), a Russian Soviet musicologist, this rebellion was the birth of Jewish National Music. One reason for the birth of Jewish National Music, as Móricz suggests, was the conscious expression of the national spirit that replaced an unconscious one wherein the sophisticated art music of the intelligentsia superseded the folk music of the uneducated masses.

Reading these beliefs could potentially lead to confusion. Were these composers ashamed of their folk music and tradition? Or were they influenced by changing religious and political ideas? In *Jewish Identities*, Móricz directs the reader to Albert Weisser’s (1918-1982) view on the birth of Jewish National Music: the rise of social ideas such as *haskalah* (the Jewish enlightenment) and Herzlian Zionism. In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture*, the *haskalah* is listed as the first idea of an ideology that justified modernization, and the mobilization of common knowledge that would support it, suggesting road maps and practical means of implementation in many areas of Jewish life.7 Zionism on the other hand is a religious approach to explaining the rise of Jewish National Music; it affirms Jews can emancipate themselves from exile without awaiting explicit and manifest support from God.8 Should the *haskalah* and Zionism be seen as influenced by Western ideologies or increased awareness of what constitutes Jewish music? This is where trying to understand the historical development of Jewish nationalism turns into a tough task.

According to Móricz, composers were ashamed of using folk melodies because they thought many of these folk melodies were contaminated with elements from the Orient such as the frigish mode, a term used by Móricz to define the type of Phrygian mode distinguished by the half-step between its first and second and the augmented second between its second and third degrees. Another element of this Orientalism was descending chromaticism, a characteristic of music of the Jews, Georgians, Arabs, or Polovtsians-Turkic nomadic people who were called Polovtsi in Russia. This dislike of oriental elements apparently inspired composers to wish to compose “pure” Jewish music, but was this possible?

As if the search for purity was not enough, during this time Russia saw a contemporary interest in the growth of neo-nationalism and a greater discrepancy

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8 Ibid., 672.
between the composers who accepted modernism and those who did not. To the modernist Jewish composer, the music of the Biblical Hebrews became more appealing. From this vantage point, Jewish folk melodies were re-fashioned to include some sacred elements to the point that their national character became unrecognizable. Was this transformation necessary? Composers and scholars had focused so much on moulding folk music to belong to only one nation; this has “prevented them from seeing the contributions [that] itinerant musicians from various foreign countries and ethnic origins [brought to folk melodies].”

9 Jewish Identities gives one theory for this transformation: that it was the rise of anti-Semitic ideas that led Jewish composers to hide their Jewish identity in modernist techniques.

How else did anti-Semitic ideas influence future Jewish composers? Móricz begins the second part of her book with the title “Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: Ernest Bloch and Racial Thought.” The “dangerous myth” referenced here is the concept of race which Móricz movingly argues is “one of the greatest and most tragic errors of [mankind].”

10 The first chapter of this second part is dedicated to the explanation of the word race, which Móricz describes as one of the main influences on Jewish composers. Given that race was an important issue at the beginning of the twentieth century, Móricz does not provide a clear definition of the word. Instead she presents several prevalent contemporary opinions: it was a “scientific truth,” it satisfied “deep mystical impulses,” and it was used to cover up “primitive aggressiveness and snobbery.” Gradual changes in the meaning of this rather vague word began to influence cultural ideas as well. To prove this, Móricz uses a captivating quote from Barzun, an American historian: “‘Culturalist’ racism was prevalent in the arts mainly because racial theories provided the simplest and most common way to cover up critics’ ignorance concerning artistic genius and its transmission.”

11 This quote suggests critics were the only ones who relied on racial theories but in Jewish Identities, Móricz briefly refers to Richard Wagner, a composer who also accepted racial theories. In his essay Das Judentum in der Musik, Wagner wrote about Jews and how they influenced language, nationality and art in German culture. Wagner’s opinion that “all Jewish artists lacked an authentic cultural identity of their own” influenced Ernest Bloch to define his art as racially Jewish.

Bloch’s demonstration of Jewish identity in his music was tightly interwoven with religion. As the reader is told in Jewish Identities, the connection between identity

9 Ling, A History of European Folk Music, 217.

10 Móricz, Jewish Identities, 95.

11 Ibid., 96.

and religion was something composers used as the last hope of reaching purity. Understanding this connection is complicated because Móricz involves Italo Calvino’s short story “The Count of Monte Cristo” in which Calvino writes about Edmond Dante’s fate. Móricz describes how Edmond Dantes remains trapped in the complex maze of his imaginary prison. The reader is left wondering why this story was mentioned here. Móricz argues that the main theme in Calvino’s story is “the interchangeability of the real and the imaginary, and, even more crucially, the dangerous potential of mental processes.”¹³ Is the reader supposed to understand the connection between religion and identity as something imaginary that composers interchanged for reality?

Móricz uses this story to parallel Bloch’s confinement in his intellectually constructed racial self-image with Dantes’s trapped existence. But according to Schiller, Bloch has a clear and solid understanding of what race is. Bloch understood race as both primordial and consciously chosen, ancient (dating from the Bible) and contemporary, a matter of both biology (oriental blood) and inspiration.¹⁴ But in Jewish Identities, Móricz constantly brings to attention the changes in Bloch’s Jewish identity and musical style over time. This is quite understandable since he said: “In Switzerland, they say I am a Swiss renegade-In America: a Swiss expatriate... in Germany, I am a “Frenchman” because I fought for Debussy. In France, I am a “German” because I defended G. Mahler—and now.... The Jews... say I am not a “Jew.”... Where must I go to live and to belong! In the Moon?!?”¹⁵ Bloch gave this statement after the negative reception in the United States of his Sacred Service, a work based on a Jewish liturgical text. I do not agree with Móricz’s contention that Jewish self-hatred or anti-Semitic stereotypes can adequately explain Bloch’s changing musical style. In my opinion, Bloch’s musical style changed because he longed to be accepted. He attempted this by claiming Jewish status and by trying to compose works that could be stylistically recognized as Jewish. The reader is now left wondering if someone else succeeded in unifying the modern Jewish nation.

Móricz begins the third part of her book with a description of utopias and dystopias. To fully explain these terms here is impossible, which raised the question: why did Móricz bother with a discussion of these terms? Móricz argues that artists’ interest in wholeness, perfection, and progress made them susceptible to utopian vision and that avant-garde art at the beginning of the twentieth century was especially

¹³ Móricz, Jewish Identities, 153


¹⁵ Móricz, Jewish Identities, 173.
utopian. She further comments that Arnold Schoenberg was one of these artists with a strong utopian persuasion. According to Móricz, Schoenberg was closely related to Wassily Kandinsky’s utopian visions of spiritual art and Adolf Loos’s similarly utopian architectural designs, which were stripped of ornament so that only “essences” remained. Móricz lists Schoenberg’s *Die Jakobsleiter, Der Biblische Weg,* and *Moses und Aron* as his most utopian works, but Móricz also admits their incompletion signaled contradictions in Schoenberg’s attempt to fuse his spiritual, musical, political, and Jewish concerns into personal artworks. There is no answer to the question: which was Schoenberg’s primary concern, the manifestation of his utopian ideas or his political ones; Móricz only raises awareness in the reader that this issue existed in Schoenberg’s life.

Explaining someone’s life with social theories is a unique but nevertheless questionable approach. What I also found conflicting was one comment about Schoenberg’s *Survivor from Warsaw.* This work can be seen as a story parallel to the events of Schoenberg’s spiritual struggle after his conversion to Protestantism, yet Móricz comments that Schoenberg can be placed between two extremes: a Jewish hero or a Holocaust idolater who exploited the Holocaust by assimilating it to his artistic idiom. Discussing the full impact of the Holocaust is not something I intend to do in this review, but I would like to draw more attention to why *Survivor from Warsaw* should be considered Schoenberg’s personal parable about his return to Judaism.

Schiller sees the “Holocaust…as impinging on all modern Jewish creativity” and in 1947, Theodor W. Adorno, a German sociologist, philosopher and musicologist stated that “writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric;” but Schoenberg sought to dissociate the story in *Survivor* from a specific incident, deliberately obscuring details of time and place which allowed him to emphasize the symbolism of the work. Indeed, the piece finishes with *Sh’má Yisrael,* Hear O Israel, which is a fundamental prayer in Judaism. Throughout his life, Schoenberg struggled with his compositions not being accepted by Jews. When he had to leave Germany, he found himself no longer accepted by his Gentile supporters. For Schoenberg, *Survivor from Warsaw* was a way for him to

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16 Móricz, *Jewish Identities,* 203.


19 Móricz, *Jewish Identities,* 293.

push away the humiliation bestowed on him and to forcefully reassert his Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{21}

In \textit{Jewish Identities} the reader is left to wonder if national purity in music is ever achievable. Sabaneyev, Bloch and Schoenberg were certainly not able to achieve purity. Bloch’s and Schoenberg’s exploration for purity led them beyond music activity and toward religion. Why were these composers not able to achieve purity? Móricz finishes \textit{Jewish Identities} with this: “acknowledging that the nature of Jewish identity is multifaceted is a necessary requirement for understanding the protagonists of this book. For not only do countries host multiple cultures, but so do individuals.”\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Jewish Identities} is a book with a balanced representation of musical and non-musical discussions, but it can be overwhelming to read and understand, because of its many references to philosophical ideas and religion. Presenting music and religious ideas side by side is another issue. I think these two ideas should be handled in different books even though they were intertwined in Bloch’s and Schoenberg’s lives. In her book, Móricz tries to explain both music and religion in great detail, but does not fully succeed—perhaps the most glaring omission being she does not spend any time on Schoenberg’s conversion to Protestantism. Móricz presents other sources to support her arguments, however for the reader who does not know a lot about this topic, it might be easy to make the assumption that Russian Jews were the only ones responsible for the attempt to unify the Jewish people. Móricz’s visit to Hungary inspired her to write this book, but I believe her exploration of Jewish identity is incomplete unless she acknowledges the efforts of Jews from other parts of Europe. In my opinion, the topic of Jewish identities is really broad and can never be fully explored, especially today with the growth of globalization, but Klára Móricz attempts to raise awareness in the reader on the subject of Jewish identity and its expression in this text.

\section*{For Further Reading}


\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] Móricz, \textit{Jewish Identities}, 352.
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