

The creation of Israel convinced Tansman about the relevance of Biblical heritage which served to legitimise the modern state's fight for independence and its social structure. In 1949-50 the composer, "impressed by the reconstitution of the State of Israel," writes the symphonic oratorio *The Prophet Isaiah*. The title is far from coincidental: the founders of Israel conceived of "the Bible as the point of departure" and based their political vision on Isaiah's prophecy. In the second and the seventh part of the oratorio, the choir repeats Isaiah's words rendered by Tansman as follows:

And the children of Israel be gathered up one by one

...

And they in Assyria who had been doomed to perish  
And outcasts that wondered far in the land of Egypt shall return  
And bow the knee before the Lord Jehova  
In the holy mountain at Jerusalem

...

In the desert and in the waste land is rejoicing,  
The desert shall blossom forth as the rose,  
They shall sing rejoicing,  
Flowers shall spring everywhere, they shall leap in gladness

...

Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees!  
Strengthen all them that falter!  
Say to them that are of fearful heart:  
Be strong and fear nothing.

<sup>510</sup>

In 1955, on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jewish settlement in America, *The Prophet Isaiah* was performed at the Los Angeles Royce Hall Auditorium and conducted by Franz Waxman<sup>511</sup>. Three years later the oratorio was performed in Israel to commemorate

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<sup>510</sup> Fragments of Isaiah's prophecy used in the oratorio have been provided, in the score, in three languages: English, French and German. The exception is the *Shema Yisrael* prayer in the Interlude, which should always be sung in Hebrew.

<sup>511</sup> The Polish premiere and so far the only performances of *The Prophet Isaiah* oratorio were held in 2004 and 2012. Both concerts were initiated, managed and recorded by the Tansman Association for the Promotion of Culture in Lodz, organiser of the Tansman International Festival and Competition since 1996. 1<sup>st</sup> recording (CD, 2004): Aleksander Tansman. *The Prophet Isaiah. Three Cantors and the Jerusalem Great Synagogue Choir*. Perf. Yaakov Motzen, Alberto Mizrahi, Benzion Miller, Dani Gildar, and Elli Jaffe. Polish Radio Choir in Kraków, Camerata Silesia, Jerusalem Great Synagogue Choir, and Sinfonia Varsovia orch. Cond. Wojciech Michniewski. CD. Classica, Polish Radio II, Tansman Association for the Promotion of Culture in Lodz, 2004. 2<sup>nd</sup> recording (CD, 2012): Aleksander Tansman. *Isaïe, le Prophète. Psaumes*. Perf. Rafał Bartmiński. Lodz Philharmonic Orch. and Choir, Dawid Ber. Cond. Daniel Raiskin. CD. Classica, Tansman Association for the Promotion of Culture in Lodz, 2012.

the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the state's creation. Tansman dedicated this concert to the memory of six million Jews murdered during the Second World War.<sup>512</sup> *The Prophet Isaiah* held a special place in the rich programme of commemorative festivities.

Before the celebrations started, the Israeli Radio Corporation had been broadcasting presentations of the complex process of the Eretz Israel foundation, starting with the first settlements through the panorama of social and national life of the last decade (1948-1958). The majority of the events, including quizzes and competitions of the knowledge of the Bible, were transmitted by the EBU (European Broadcasting Union), which at that time affiliated Western European countries as well as Israel (since 1957), Morocco, Egypt, Syria et al. The anniversary agenda also involved a weekly "Round Table" attended by Arab and Jewish intellectuals, and discussions between Arabs based in Israel and their families abroad. The great exhibition devoted to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israel's existence opened with a concert performed by the Jerusalem Radio Orchestra and the Tel Aviv Choir. The programme consisted of two oratoria: Joseph Haydn's *The Creation* and Alexander Tansman's *The Prophet Isaiah*.

Full of admiration for the architects of Israel, Tansman called them "modern Essenes." They managed, he wrote, "to synthesise the spiritual past and its remnants with fervent faith in the future." Despite the powerful impression the Far East exerted on him during his pre-war tour, Tansman believed that only Israel, with its "centuries-old landscape" which he "would dream of throughout the years," is "the country which seems to be always ruled by God's spirit."

His consequent journey to Israel made him experience and consolidate his faith in one eternal and infinite spiritual source, "one religion." Invited for a tour in 1958, the composer maintains the grand scale of his European and American tours. It involves a series of concerts, lectures on contemporary music, and recordings of chamber and symphonic pieces. Later, in an album entitled *The Visit to Israel: Travel Notes*, he gathers musical impressions of the places he visited: kibbutzim, the ruins of ancient Capernaum, the Negev Desert, the sources of the Jordan River, etc.

He was moved by "the idea to visit the country where a substantial part of humankind's spirituality has originated from." It was in Safed, the cradle of Jewish mysticism (kabbalah), and in Jerusalem, where he visited a series of synagogues (including Persian, Bukcharian, Yemenian and Chassidic ones) and met representatives of various religions, that

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<sup>512</sup> Shortly after that Tansman joined the initiative of erecting the International Memorial Monument at Auschwitz.

Tansman could again approach the universal perpetual source of all denominations. The previous time he had that occasion was on his meeting with Ghandi. This time, when staying at Lake Tiberias, he was addressed in Hebrew by a Christian monk: "There is only one religion. Everything else is literature and politics." Another time, at the Bukcharian synagogue in Jerusalem, the composer met an old rabbi in a noble hieratic pose of a patriarch: he was giving a blessing to a Catholic pilgrimage. On seeing that, Tansman jotted down: "All religions spring from one source." Eventually, at the Negev Desert on 23 July, he felt "transported to the Biblical times" when participating in a Bedouine holiday. They travelled with Roger Pradalier, a radio producer he met at the University of Jerusalem a few days before. The night was falling and the first stars twinkled in the sky. "The whole land got wrapped in peace. . . [G]entle breeze was blowing here and there . . . as if the merciful wind superseded hatred and longing with a shadow." When the night "spread its wings over the inhabitants of the Earth," the Bedouines started to depict the Judgement of Solomon. The performance was followed by a staged fight on camel backs, and later, by a fireworks display.

Tansman wanted "the voice of Israel" to persist in proclaiming "the law of truth and justice." He believed in Europe's moral revival which, he reckoned, can be founded on Biblical heritage. How did he render this vision in music? And what role of language did he conceive of? Ever since Auschwitz questioned traditional concepts and "dreadfully transformed the state of being chosen into a curse" there was a need to look for new answers to centuries-old questions and associated issues.