

# Composing the Jew's Soundscape in Operatic Versions of *The Merchant of Venice*

Judah Cohen  
Indiana University, USA

**Abstract** Opera composers adapting *The Merchant of Venice* have given Shylock a distinctive sound using musical techniques that mark him as a classic outsider. Drawing on the scores of ten of these operas this essay highlights five compositional strategies for characterizing Shylock. Separately, these strategies highlight subtle shifts in the portrayal of Jews across different eras and localities. Together, they point to a deeper portrayal of Jews as figures who live on the margins of European tonality. Shylock in these operas projects an ambiguous social status and lack of alignment with the more consonant world of the other characters.

**Keywords** Opera. Music. Shylock. The Merchant of Venice. Chromaticism. Ciro Pinsuti. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Otto Taubmann. Jews. Aldo Finzi. Reynaldo Hahn. Josef B. Foerster. Adrian Beecham.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Chromatic Jew. – 3 Strategy #1: Shylock *Tremblant*. – 4 Strategy #2: Shylock and Extended Harmony. – 5 Strategy #3: Jewish Through Musical Quotation. – 6 Strategy #4: The Melodic Shylock. – 7 Strategy #5: André Tchaikowsky. – 8 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

In Shylock, Europe found a musical foil for its 'Jewish problem' on stage. As one of a handful of Jewish characters to grace the nineteenth century stage, including Nathan the Wise, Eléazar (of *La Juive*), Barabas (the Jew of Malta), and Isaac of York (*Ivanhoe*), Shylock offered audiences a vision of the Jew as

a stranger in their midst, channelling ancient affronts and contemporary grievances alongside Shakespeare's more conventional pouting lovers. Edna Nahshon and Michael Shapiro, in their recent collection of essays on *Merchant*, highlight Shylock's role in discourses of nineteenth-century nationalism and twentieth-century antisemitism, with special attention to the English-speaking world (Nahshon, Shapiro 2017). Shylock also holds an important role on the Continent, however, as part of Shakespeare's growing influence there during the nineteenth century. And just as with many other Shakespeare plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and its characters eventually took on musical moorings as composers adapted the work to the prominent state-sponsored form of grand opera.

Opera, and its musical characterisations, sharpen and localise the complex socioethnic issues that surround any production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Nineteenth-century composers already came to the work with a romantic musical shorthand for Venice, where the lilting *barcarolles* of the gondoliers mingled with the masque-like revels from carnival (a period that supported the city's public opera scene from the seventeenth century onward) (Brown, Hamilton 2001; Brown, H. et al. 2001). With *Merchant*, composers had the chance to juxtapose that musical symbolism with music for the looming character of Shylock, and the European anti-Jewish discourse that he represented. Trading off Shakespeare's original language for a more intensely musical environment allowed opera composers and librettists to highlight differences between Christians and Jews through sonic means, while allowing them to offer their own ideas about the genre's relationship to their viewers and sponsoring governments.

In an earlier essay, I focused on four operatic adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* between 1871 and 2014, arguing for the significance of operatic conventions in shaping Europeans' experience of the play (Cohen 2017).<sup>1</sup> From the historical and literary emphasis of that essay, I move here to a deeper musical focus on the representation of Shylock. Composers, seeking to create a continuous fabric of interaction and intervention on stage, gave Shylock a distinctive sound using musical techniques that marked him as a classic outsider. Drawing on the scores of ten of these operas – out of about fourteen known adaptations – I highlight five specific compositional strategies for characterising Shylock. Seen separately, these strategies highlight subtle shifts in the portrayal of Jews across different eras and localities. When viewed together, however, they point to a deeper portrayal of Jews as figures who live on the margins of

<sup>1</sup> The opera adaptations covered in Cohen 2017, including those by Ciro Pinsuti (1871), Reynaldo Hahn (1935), Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1961), and André Tchaikowsky (1982), are included here as well, though with a different context.



Figure 1 Map of *The Merchant of Venice* opera performances, 1870-1960

European tonality. Projecting chromatic instability, Shylock becomes in these operas an agent of entropy, projecting an ambiguous social status and lack of alignment with the more consonant world of the other characters (including, often, Jessica).

Before proceeding, a brief note. The following discussion includes a number of written score excerpts that offer an efficient graphic prescription for sound in the composers' own musical language. While musically experienced readers will benefit most from these scores, less experienced readers can learn from them as well by observing the spacing, density, and contour of the notes depicting Shylock's themes.

## 2 The Chromatic Jew

Shylock troubles Venice's musical landscape. The Venetian Lorenzo does not directly implicate Shylock as "the man who hath no music in himself" in Act 1. Yet in line with other pathetic or evil characters in Shakespeare's plays, Shylock has no presence in *The Merchant of Venice's* songs or musical cues. For centuries, stage adaptations continued this practice – even composer Gabriel Fauré's now-famous score for Edmond Haraucourt's 1889 French adaptation, eventually compiled into a suite entitled "Shylock", actually lacked music for Shylock himself.<sup>2</sup> And perhaps, by excluding Shylock from European musical practices, Lorenzo sought to make a point: recent research suggests that a broadly practiced, 'Jewish' musical style only emerged in light of mid-nineteenth-century European liturgical reform, and spread slowly (Seroussi 2009, 3\*-24\* ff.). Jonathan Hess notes, for example, that incidental music for different stagings of Solomon Mosenthal's mid-nineteenth century play *Deborah* lack "the augmented seconds or the mournful melodies in minor keys that defined clichés about Jewish music in the twentieth century" (Hess 2018, 181). Similarly, the vast majority of published synagogue music before 1885 mainly utilised common major and minor modes (Cohen 2002). When opera conventions required composers to create music for a Jewish character, in other words, they at least initially had to turn to their own points of sonic reference. Shylock thus gained a contrasting musical exoticism in opera settings, often through an idiomatic series of motivic and vocal patterns that emphasised his ambivalent place in Venetian (and European) society. Composers almost always gave the (male, patrician) Shylock a bass voice, a choice that placed him in a gallery of operatic old men and villains. But just as importantly, composers used chromaticism, particularly in a lower register, as a defining characteristic.

In the world of tonal opera as elsewhere in music, chromaticism – the logical use of all usable tones between scale degrees – served as a temporary deviation from the more stable scale-based qualities of diatonicism. Often this technique helps composers define the relationship between the different characters. Expanding on Carl Dahlhaus' description of chromaticism in Wagner's operas as a blurred diatonic morality, for example, Linda and Michael Hutcheon noted of *Parsifal* (1882) how the diatonicism of "social order and spiritual salvation is consistently interrupted by the chromaticism associated with [the morally base characters of] Amfortas, Kundry, Klinsor, and Parsifal (when he is identifying with Amfortas or dis-

<sup>2</sup> Haraucourt's versified French setting generally emphasises the romantic Venice over Shylock.

tressed about his mother's suffering and death)" (Hutcheon, Hutcheon 1996, 68). The diatonic/chromatic axis also allowed composers to describe musical interactions between cultural outsiders and insiders, including the relationship of Jews to Christians in European society.<sup>3</sup> Giving Shylock a sonic profile, then, often meant framing his lines as harmonic transitions between other characters' diatonic sections. In an era of developing European nationalism, such a portrayal forces us to think about the ways that opera's oversized costs and affluent venues brought ideas about Jewish identity into the elite Continental cultural economy.

The sections that follow highlight different composers' creative approaches to 'the Jew' as a distinct musical entity within opera's sonic landscape. In addition to showing the nature of each composer's creativity, these strategies also emphasise the enduring strength of Shylock's core chromatic portrayal through harmonic, melodic, and thematic means, even as public understandings of Jewish identity changed, and Shylock's portrayals themselves shifted from outsiders to insiders.

### 3 Strategy #1: Shylock Tremblant

Perhaps the most basic use of chromaticism comes at the level of the single note. By alternating the note with an upper or lower neighbour, an otherwise stable tone gains a quality of uncertainty that can project internal anxiety, restlessness, or ire.

The most direct application of this technique to Shylock belongs to British composer Adrian Beecham (1904-1982), whose 1921 English language setting of *The Merchant of Venice*, composed at the age of seventeen, reinforced his reputation as a child prodigy.<sup>4</sup> Beecham, working with his own adaptation of Shakespeare's text, built his opera around well-conceived melodies, leading writer and critic Aldous Huxley to declare that "[t]unefulness is his gift" at the expense of most other compositional aspects (Huxley 2013, 135). Yet beneath these melodies, Beecham gave Shylock an accompaniment that featured a distinctive 'trembling' quality through chromatic alteration. Preceding Shylock's entrance, Beecham introduced his

<sup>3</sup> Ruth HaCohen (2011) has described this axis as a longstanding symbolic opposition between Jews' suffering and rage as a destabilising force, and Christian tendencies toward justice and order.

<sup>4</sup> Beecham's work received coverage on a British Pathé newsreel, which emphasised his youth and included short silent snippets from the opera's trial scene ("Shakespeare – in Opera! At the Duke of York's Theatre", 1921). At the same time, Beecham's status as the son of composer and Baronet Thomas Beecham gave him greater opportunities to stage his work: in this case since his mother rented out the Duke of York's Theatre for him.

Nº 4. **Scene.**  
ANTONIO, BASSANIO and SHYLOCK.  
ADRIAN WELLES BEECHAM

Andantino.  $\text{♩} = 72$ .

Voice.

Piano. *mp*

SHYLOCK. *ff*

How like a fawn - ing pub - li - can he looks. I

*allarg.*

hate him, for he is a Chris - tian. But more, for

*a tempo* *mp*

*ff* *a tempo*

that, — but more, for that. In

*p*

Figure 2 Adrian Welles Beecham, Shylock's Entrance from *The Merchant of Venice* (London, 1921)

**Allegro vivace assai**

Piano

**Andante Religioso**

Sop.  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - lio e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Ten.  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - lio e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Choro  
d'Israeliti

Bassi  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - lio e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Figure 3 Ciro Pinsuti, Shylock Theme from Overture to *Il Mercante di Venezia* (Bologna, 1873, 3). Engraving by Lindsay Weaver

Figure 4 Ciro Pinsuti, Prayer of the Israelites from *Il Mercante di Venezia* (Bologna, 1873, 331). Engraving by Lindsay Weaver

characters through a largely diatonic and chordal series of interactions.<sup>5</sup> From the moment Shylock's first scene begins, however, the entire musical setting changes to emphasise a set of diminished chords – a stack of four minor third intervals notable for their lack of a clear harmonic direction – only resolving to a major cadence when Shylock declares his hatred of Antonio. Beecham goes a step further in Shylock's next line, embellishing a diminished-seventh chord through wavering neighbour note figures that begin to dominate the rest of Shylock's music. From that point on (at least in the piano-vocal reduction), Beecham settles on this wavering pattern as a calling card for the character, even using it in his absence during the Finale of Act 1 to indicate Shylock's looming presence.

Beecham offers a significant amount of variety to this pattern to retain interest throughout Shylock's major scenes. At times in Act 1 he gives Shylock a vocal accompaniment similar to the other Venetian

<sup>5</sup> All references to Beecham's *The Merchant of Venice* come from the published piano/vocal score (Beecham 1921).

characters, perhaps showing his attempts to simulate the Christian world; though he always returns to his chromatic neighbour-note figure in the end. In Act 3, right before the trial officially begins, Beecham gives Shylock an aria for enumerating his grievances that eschews the chromatic figures in favour of minor-key chords and triplet rhythms. But Shylock returns to form in the trial itself, where Beecham states his agitated figures prominently, and uses them to mark the character until his final exit. In this manner, Beecham's relatively straightforward solution to Shylock's sound – akin to a constant one-half step shifting motion throughout – marks him as a contrast to the (Christian and settled) worldview surrounding him.

Nearly half a century before Beecham, Bologna-based composer Ciro Pinsuti (1829-1888) offered a similar if somewhat more complex approach to Shylock's character in his 1873 opera adaptation (the first full *Merchant* opera on record), contrasting Shylock's internal unsettledness with the more modal outward exoticism of the Jewish community. Pinsuti, whose extensive work at conservatories in both England and Italy likely influenced his decision to set the text, begins his opera with a set of arpeggiated minor-key runs that emphasise a neighbour-note figure. At first, these runs mainly drive the music forward; but they gain a clearer identity later on in Act 1, when Pinsuti uses the same gestures to dramatise Shylock's discovery of his daughter's elopement with Lorenzo (a scene only described second-hand in the play). Throughout the rest of the extended solo scene, Pinsuti utilises this figure over and over again, breaking it into its constituent elements, modifying it to follow Shylock's wildly shifting emotions, and leaving no doubt about its relationship to Shylock's inner thoughts.

Shylock's theme, however, comprises only part of Pinsuti's 'Jewish' music. As a contrast to the frantic neighbour notes, Pinsuti uses a different form of musical exoticism to craft a slower, modal-sounding prayer that evokes ancientness – a unique development in *Merchant*-based operas, and a possible reflection on what Francesco Spagnolo describes as a body of 'traditional' pre-1860s Jewish prayer chants: the "orally transmitted repertoires [that Italian Jewish populations] believed had once originated in the Orient" (Spagnolo 2012, 100\*). This 'prayer theme' begins as a sudden divine appeal during the Shylock's "My daughter – my ducats!" scene, and eventually expands into a full harmonised treatment by Venice's Jewish population. After the humiliation of Shylock's trial, which ends with the forced exile of all Jews from Venice, the Jews intone it a final time while sailing off-stage, eventually drowned out as the others in Belmont come to their own more tonal resolution. In so doing, Pinsuti offers a commentary on the axis between Shylock's individual turmoil and the Jews' collective archaic voice.

The wavering lines in these works offset the aesthetic beauty of smooth melodies and clear harmonies that pervade the rest of both



operas. On one hand, Shylock's trembling musical accompaniment illustrate the Jew's uncomfortable fit with the fantasy worlds depicted in the rest of the comedy. On the other hand, Shylock's characterisation provides a meaningful musical place of textural transition between characters in the scenes where he appears. His 'noise' becomes, in a sense, the liminal space between the realities of the other characters.

#### 4 Strategy #2: Shylock and Extended Harmony

While Beecham and Pinsuti used wavering accompaniments to present Shylock's contrasting personality and emotional arc, other composers gave Shylock unusual harmonies to reinforce his portrayal as a musical alien. For Czech composer Josef Foerster (1859-1951) and French composer Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947), the estranging chord of choice was the dominant minor ninth, a relatively uncommon yet highly charged sound comprising a major third with three minor thirds stacked on top of it. Over the nineteenth century, the chord had been used to denote moments of shock and awe, including the ghastly revelation in Schubert's 1815 setting of Goethe's *Erlkönig* and the end of Strauss's 1896 *Also sprach Zarathustra*. By combining this chord with strategic chromatic runs and distinctive articulations, composers created flexible musical cells that gave Shylock a recognisable sonic profile, while extending but not breaking the overarching tonality of Venice and Belmont.

When Josef Foerster started composing his 1905 version of *The Merchant of Venice*, later known as *Jessika*, he already had some experience writing for Jewish characters. His 1893 opera *Debora*, an adaptation of Salomon Mosenthal's 1849 play of the same name, offered a sympathetic view of a young Jewish woman whose on-again, off-again relationship with a virtuous non-Jewish man eventually ends with the two amicably returning to their own communities. Foerster approached his version of *Jessika* with the same kind of patrician sympathy, as a 'comedy' with a happy ending that emphasised an optimistic form of religious tolerance. As with other *Merchant* operas, Foerster characterised Shylock as a Bass I, and established him from the start as an awkward and often brash character. Shylock's entrance in Act 1 Scene 1, for example - perhaps more properly seen as the Jews' entrance, since his companion Tubal (a lower Bass II) sings first - interrupts an idyllic 6/8 barcarolle-like ensemble scene with a short fanfare that signals an abrupt change in key, tempo, and metre (Foerster 1909, 15).<sup>6</sup> After outlining a dominant minor ninth chord, the cell tran-

<sup>6</sup> All further references to text and music come from this score, even though it is a German translation (by R. Batka) of Vrchlický's Czech original.

**Allegro vivace assai**

Piano

*pp* *sf sf sf*

**Andante Religioso**

Sop.  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - li o e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Ten.  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - li o e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Bassi  
Dall' i - mo pet - to a te chie - dia - mo con - sig - li o e ve - nia, o Dio d'A - bra - mo.

Choro d'Israeliti

Figure 5 Josef B. Foerster, Shylock Theme from *Jessika* (Prague, 1905)

Figure 6 Reynaldo Hahn, Shylock Theme from *Le Marchand de Venise* (Paris, 1935)

sitions into a short, flowery, tonal resolution, presenting in composite what appears to be a representation of his Jewish characters' contradictory sides.<sup>7</sup> As both Shylock and Tubal attempt to insert themselves into the dialogue, this cell, which introduces each of their first few lines, betrays their success. And as Shylock later faces greater agitation over the willing elopement of his daughter, the Jews' music follows suit with increased numbers of grace notes, angular rhythmic figures, key shifts and accidentals.<sup>8</sup> Foerster becomes creative with

<sup>7</sup> On a more technical level, the first (dominant minor ninth) chord omits the fifth - what would otherwise be an A-natural - though the sound remains recognizable. Ironically, although the next (tonal) gesture begins with the same note as the first (E-flat) it tonicises A-flat Major, a relatively distant choral relation that can be interpreted as highlighting the schizoid nature of the Jews' double-consciousness in European society.

<sup>8</sup> The first appearance of Shylock's music takes place on p. 15 of the published score (Foerster 1909). It repeats, among other places, on p. 22 (harmonically very different), p. 87 line 2 (close to the original version), p. 88 line 1, and p. 91 line 1. The theme also appears during the trial scene, which was added in 1911 (see note below): for example, on p. 171, lines 4-5.

his approaches as well: at times, the 'Shylock' ninth chord loses its tonic and transforms into a chameleonic diminished seventh (which, as noted in the previous section, can resolve almost anywhere). This chordal relationship reinforces Shylock's status as an interloper in European society, who seeks to connect with those around him yet can only conceal his own difference temporarily.

As a comedy, however, Foerster's ending leads to both social and musical reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> In Act 3, Scene 2, the opera's final scene, the ruined Shylock reappears, despondent after his humiliation in the trial, and willing to have a change of heart. Approaching Jessica, he pleads successfully to be accepted back and offers to assume a false name and nationality. The next time Shylock sings, he is nearly consonant with the rest of the cast, joining five other characters and the opera chorus as the romantic triple meter tunes of Venice prevail. Foerster still gives Shylock subtle musical hints of his outcast status - he begins his part of the sextet one eighth note earlier than Jessica and a quarter note earlier than the rest of the cast, he sings his own character-specific line, and he continues to use financial metaphors to celebrate his reunion with his daughter (including the opera's last line: "My gold is mine again!" [Mein Gold ist wieder mein!]) (Foerster 1905, 232-37). Yet despite Shylock's *faux pas*, Foerster nonetheless appears to promote a philosophy of benevolent assimilation and humanism, treating the qualities that marginalised Jews in society as acquired rather than innate. With effort, Foerster's music implies, Shylock can ease his tensions with Christian society while looking to his daughter's decisions as a means to usher in a new era of integration.

Three decades later, composer Reynaldo Hahn used the same dominant minor ninth chord to represent Shylock in his 1935 opera *Le Marchand de Venise*. Writing as the Nazis consolidated power in neighbouring Germany, the partly Jewish Hahn placed Shylock's musical character at the meeting point of harmonic and melodic conventions. As illustrated in figure 6, Hahn created a musical cell for the character comprising a two-part, repeated sequence. Each part of the sequence features a chromatic upward run as a pair of punctuating chords builds to a dominant minor ninth sonority; at the same time, a lower voice slowly moves in contrary chromatic motion downward over the course of both parts of the sequence, from A to A-flat to G. Taken together, this cell presents, *Tristan*-like, a rich internal logic with a harmonically ambiguous function. Juxtaposed with the

<sup>9</sup> The original 1905 version of Foerster's opera notably lacked the trial scene - further suggesting the composer's lack of interest in the most anti-Jewish aspects of the play. But Foerster ultimately could not avoid the trial's prominence, and was compelled to restore it for the opera's next staging in 1911.

Renaissance-style setting that Hahn uses to introduce the opera, the cell's motivic density and complexity give Shylock a distinctive presence that precedes his entrance and continues after his exit. The theme's musical material, moreover, becomes the basis of elaboration later on in the opera: not only through small modifications to mark emotional shifts, but also to prepare extended chromatic runs that mark Shylock's two rage arias ("Je le hais" [I hate him] early on, and "Depouillé" [Ruined] after the trial). For Hahn, this musical estrangement remains stubbornly separate, perhaps reflecting the growing castigation of Jews on institutionalised racial terms in contemporary politics. Rather than assimilate at the end of the opera, Shylock defiantly maintains his dissonance, exiting only with a promise to return.

By encapsulating Shylock in a relatively rare, semi-dissonant chord, both opera composers added nuance and structure to their views of Jews' place in European society. Although the two operas embraced different era-based conclusions for the 'problem' of Jewish identity, they agreed on the nature of the difference itself as built into the overall structure of each musical landscape.

### 5 Strategy #3: Jewish Through Musical Quotation

When the German composer Otto Taubmann (1859-1929) wrote his only opera *Porzia* (1916), he went beyond neighbour note figures and unusual chords to characterise Shylock, giving him the incipit of a broadly understood 'Jewish' melody. A professor of music in Berlin's University of the Arts, Taubmann had experience with interpolating well-known melodies into his music, often in the name of nationalism: his 1915 choral cantata *Kampf und Freide* (War and Peace), for example, incorporated the *Deutschlandlied* as a symbol of German national pride and struggle during World War I (Eckhard 1994, 25 fn. 22). His decision to set *The Merchant of Venice* to an adapted libretto by Richard Wilde appeared similarly motivated by nationalism, if not outright antisemitism. To illustrate his dramatic musical battle between the European Portia and the Jewish outsider Shylock, Taubmann turned to the recognisable prayer melody 'Kol Nidre' ("All [Our] Vows") – a piece associated with the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) that featured prominent melodic chromaticism, a minor-mode melody, and the 'Jewish/exotic augmented second interval in its opening phrases. The prominence of 'Kol Nidre' as a touchstone for Jewish liturgical music had made it an emblem of Jewish sonic identity: Taubmann's (non-Jewish) senior colleague Max Bruch even gave the tune a celebrated cello/piano arrangement in 1880 (Idelsohn 1931-32). Thus, when evoked in *The Merchant of Venice*, 'Kol Nidre' efficiently imbued Shylock with public perceptions of collective Jewish heritage, and provided the subtle justification for a Jewish character to seek revenge for past treatment.

**Shylock** (stutzt und weicht ein paar Schritte zurück).

B. Gruß! *stacc.* Grüßt Ihr mich so? Und nennt mich, wack . rer Shylock?\*

Sh. Und kennt den Ju . den auf der off . nen Gas . se?

Sh. Das nimmt mich Wunder, Herr, und mein Verstand mag nicht dran glauben, daß um .

Figure 7 Otto Taubmann, Interpolated Kol Nidre (second system) from *Porzia* (Berlin, 1916)

Taubmann features the tune in the first act, which otherwise exhibits an idiomatic extended tonality endemic to the era. When Bassanio greets Shylock on the street in the hope of receiving a loan for Antonio, Shylock immediately becomes suspicious: “Why do you greet me this way and call me ‘Dear Shylock’?” he responds. Then, with a fully accompanied ‘Kol Nidre’ tune playing underneath, Shylock speaks in a collective mode and asks why Bassanio would “recognise Jews open-

ly on the street?" (Taubmann, Wilde 1916, 21).<sup>10</sup> Later in the conversation, Taubmann again interpolates 'Kol Nidre' in a lower register right before Shylock declares of Antonio "I hate him because he is a Christian" (25). In both cases, the tune underscores a rhetorical shift from individual identity (Shylock) to collective Jewish identity. But the tune also leaves its mark on Shylock. The chromatic three-note 'roll' that introduces each chord of 'Kol Nidre' quickly makes its way into the rest of Shylock's music, especially when he talks of revenge – becoming its own motive epitomising Shylock's own wariness.

Taubmann's work appeared at a time when 'Jewish music' remained a topic of debate. On January 18, 1917, on the page before a review of *Porzia's* premier, a writer for American music journal *The Musical Courier* cast doubt on a local concert billed as 'Jewish Music' by claiming: "strictly speaking there is no national Jewish music: nor can the compositions by Grossman [the composer] claim to be based on Jewish national melodies" ("Jewish Music in the Concert Hall" 1917). Similarly, antisemitic German musicologist Karl Storck made no mention of 'Kol Nidre' in celebrating *Porzia*, but nonetheless lauded the work for its stark musical characterisations, stating: "Here the primordial powers of Light and Shadow are so uniformly pitted against each other in plot, characterisation and music, that it creates a fundamentally convincing structure" (Storck 1919, 72).<sup>11</sup> Taubmann's use of 'Kol Nidre' as a key indicator of Shylock's sonic identity clearly spoke to some audiences; but the symbolic tune also contained inherently the unresolved qualities that cued others in the significant contrasts between the titular hero and the villain of the piece.

## 6 Strategy #4: The Melodic Shylock

In two operas related to Italy's fascist period, Shylock took a decidedly melodic turn for two self-identified Jewish composers. While once again emphasising the Jew's overarching chromatic nature, both Aldo Finzi (1897-1945) in his partly completed opera adaptation and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968) in his completed version opted to represent Shylock through extended, often unaccompanied musical phrases that emphasised the Jew's near independence from Western harmonic structures – and in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's case, conventional rhythms as well.

<sup>10</sup> "Grüßt Ihr mich so? | Und nennt mich 'wackrer Shylock' | Und kennt den Juden auf der offenen Gasse?"

<sup>11</sup> "Hier sind die Urkräfte von Licht und Schatten in Handlung, Charakteren und in der Musik so einheitlich gegeneinander geführt, daß ein elementar überzeugender Aufbau zustandekommt".

The image displays two musical scores for the Shylock Theme. The top score, labeled Figure 8, is a single-staff bass clef piece in 4/4 time, featuring a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes and a final sharp sign. The bottom score, labeled Figure 9, is a three-staff score in 4/4 time, marked 'Rude e incisivo (ben sostenuto e ritmo)'. It includes a vocal line starting with a forte 'f' and 'aspro' dynamic, a piano accompaniment with a fortissimo 'ff' dynamic and complex rhythmic patterns, and a bass line with a forte 'f' dynamic and a 'rude' marking. The piano part includes fingering numbers 5, 7, and 3.

Figure 8 Aldo Finzi, Shylock Theme from *Il Mercante di Venezia* (started 1937)

Figure 9 Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Shylock Theme from *The Merchant of Venice* (1933-56)

By the thirties, 'Jewish music' had become a subject of much interest, both through work by Jewish and/or Zionist scholars such as Abraham Z. Idelsohn who sought to define music for the Jewish community, and by anti-Jewish movements that followed nationalist composer Richard Wagner in trying to *exclude* Judaism from Western music (Idelsohn 1929; Loeffler 2009). This two-sided understanding of Jews and music created a narrow path for composers to write Jewish characters into their operas, especially with such notoriety as Shylock. Yet as Jewish composers faced their own narrowing paths in the face of fascism and Nazism, some appeared to see *The Merchant of Venice* and Shylock as an appealing option for considering their own dimming prospects in Europe.

Italian-Jewish composer Aldo Finzi began to adapt *The Merchant of Venice* in 1937, the year before Mussolini instituted Italy's anti-Jewish racial laws. Working initially with librettist Arturo Rossato, Finzi completed only the piano-vocal score for the overture and first act. Despite his Jewish background, Eleonora Carapella suggests, Finzi saw himself and his family as deeply Italian, though his choice of subject leads to speculation about Shylock's emergence as a symbol of an identity forced upon him by the State. While he almost fled to Chicago in 1938, migration difficulties for his family led Finzi to remain in Italy; and his ordeals evading Nazi capture after their invasion in 1942 may have led to his death from a heart attack in 1945 (Carapella 2004, 311-12).

Finzi's incomplete opera presents what might be best described as a Shylock contour: a motif that outlines a chromatic rise from below, followed by a leap up and a chromatic descent. Most clearly defined in the overture, the contour there consistently completes a major sixth interval, first moving from low E up to G, and then leaping to C and descending chromatically to G#. Finzi continues to use this contour, though with greater flexibility, in Act 1. In the only existing recording of the partial work, the music that sets Shylock's lines provides a similar chromatic rise, leap, and fall pattern, creating wave-like patterns that emphasise Shylock's musical discomfort (*Aldo Finzi* 2016).<sup>12</sup>

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's version of *Merchant*, meanwhile, straddled the fascist period. He first conceived of his extended melodic theme for Shylock in a 1933 overture he wrote for *The Merchant* while still in Italy. His Shylock theme boldly began the overture as an unharmonised melody nearly half a minute long, played in unison by the string section with an occasional kettle drum for emphasis. Castelnuovo-Tedesco opened with a gesture that outlined a 'Jewish' augmented second leap, both ascending and descending, before transitioning into time-bending runs that include 5- and 7-tuplets. Ultimately the theme covers all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, perhaps knowingly striking an A-natural at the end of the line in the penultimate measure to complete the full set of pitches. When Castelnuovo-Tedesco extended this overture in his completed 1956 opera, this long melodic theme became its own element of Venice's musical world - with the opening augmented second gesture often appearing as shorthand for Shylock himself. It unapologetically strikes against Italian aesthetics of beauty in opera, both during and after the fascist period.

## 7 Strategy #5: André Tchaikowsky

Finally, representing the post-war, and especially the post-1968, revolutionary period, is André Tchaikowsky (1935-1982, born Robert Andrzej Krauthammer), who composed his version of *The Merchant of Venice* with English text between 1968 and his death in 1982. Tchaikowsky, in his writings about this work, openly described his sense of rootlessness both as a Polish-born Jew who survived the Holocaust by taking a fake name, and as an 'old world' Jew who felt out of place in the recently established country of Israel. While his opera takes a decidedly modernist form, Tchaikowsky nonethe-

<sup>12</sup> The notes to this recording indicate that Finzi altered Shakespeare's ending to give Jessica a stronger identification with her father: Shylock dies of humiliation after the trial, and Jessica steps forward to speak for him, reclaiming - to at least some extent - her Jewish identity. One can only speculate as to whether her final lines would take on the same chromatic contours as her father.





Figure 10 André Tchaikowsky, Shylock Entrance music from *The Merchant of Venice* (1968-82)

less peppers his score with classical exoticisms. When Antonio and Bassanio first meet Shylock, for example, Tchaikowsky introduces a sinewy line that slowly expands chromatically from a single note to a major third. The theme, scored for oboe in the completed version, evokes exoticism, from the Middle Eastern conventions of a maqam slowly expanding from a centre note, to his outline of the Jewish-referencing augmented second interval at the end. Going beyond other composers' characterisations, Tchaikowsky's Shylock spends a good deal of time both emulating and mocking the other characters through imitation, in essence developing his character by serving as a distorting mirror to others. However, the opera ultimately comes to show such efforts as manifestations of insecurity in a world where the hegemonic culture is constantly changing the rules to Shylock's disadvantage.

## 8 Conclusion

Through nearly a century and a half of opera, Shylock the Jew appears as a musically-coloured character, tightly wound and complex yet unable to shake his dissonance with the surrounding, often diatonic society. Through a particular combination of slipperiness and suffering, contrasting with the *barcarolle*-like lyricism of Venice and Belmont, composers reflected the sonic complexities of Jewish identity to show both internal anxiety and external alienation. In this manner, the Jew paradoxically seeks music of his own, yet finds in the end that despite his efforts, his host society denies him resolution, forcing him forever to play the interloper.

In the last several years, both Hahn and Tchaikowsky's *Merchant* operas have received greater interest and new appreciation, perhaps becoming the standard for opera adaptations of *Merchant* in the same way that Verdi's *Otello* and Gounod's *Romeo and Juliet* did for those plays. Yet future productions open fascinating possibilities for continued portrayal of the undiatonic Jew, whose very existence appears in these operas as transitional and reactive to the world around him. By looking at this one character and his struggles to establish his own musical foothold in a world that constantly frustrates his efforts, we can gain further insight into the broader map of harmonic, dramatic, and vocal conventions that opera holds in lending relevance and depth to Shakespeare's oeuvre, especially in Europe.

## Bibliography

- Aldo Finzi: *Set Music to Shylock, Adaptation of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice"* [recording] (2016). Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra: Bel Air Music, BAM 2065.
- Beecham, A.W. (1921). *The Merchant of Venice: A Shakespearean Opera*. London: Schott & Co.
- Brown, H.; Rosand, E.; Stroh, R.; Noiray, M.; Parker, R.; Whittall, A.; Savage, R.; Millington, B. (2001). "Opera (i)". *Grove Music Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40726>.
- Brown, M.; Hamilton, K. (2001). "Barcarolle". *Grove Music Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.02021>.
- Carapella, E. (2004). "Musicisti ebrei nell'Italia delle persecuzioni: il caso Aldo Finzi". Iliano, R. (ed), *Italian Music During the Fascist Period*. Turnhout: Brepols, 301-30.
- Cohen, J. (2002). "Modes of Tradition?: Negotiating 'Jewishness' and Modernity in the Synagogue Music of Isadore Freed and Fredrick Piket". *Jewish Culture and History*, 5(2), 25-47.
- Cohen, J. (2017). "Shylock in Opera, 1871-2014". Nahshon, E.; Shapiro, M. (eds), *Wrestling with Shylock*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 381-411.
- Eckhard, J. (1994). *Musik-Bolschewism: Die Politisierung der Musik in Deutschland 1918-1938*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Foerster, J.B. (1909). *Jessika: Komische Oper in Drei Aufzügen nach Shakespeares 'Kaufmann von Venedig'*. Vienna: Universal Edition.
- HaCohen, R. (2011). *The Music Libel Against the Jews*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hess, J. (2018). *Deborah and Her Sisters. How One Nineteenth-Century Melodrama and a Host of Celebrated Actresses Put Judaism on the World Stage*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hutcheon, L.; Hutcheon, M. (1996). *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press.
- Huxley, A. (2013). "Some Very Young Music (23 September 1922)". Allis, M. (ed.), *Temporaries and Eternals: The Music Criticism of Aldous Huxley*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 134-7.
- Idelsohn, A.Z. (1929). *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development*. New York: Henry Holt.
- "Jewish Music in the Concert Hall" (1917). *Musical Courier*, January 16, 36.
- Idelsohn, A.Z. (1931-32). "The Kol Nidre Tune". *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 8, 493-509.
- Loeffler, J. (2009). "Richard Wagner's 'Jewish Music': Antisemitism and Aesthetics in Modern Jewish Culture". *Jewish Social Studies*, 15(2), 2-36.
- Nahshon, E.; Shapiro, M. (eds) (2017). *Wrestling with Shylock*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Seroussi, E. (2009). "Music, the Jew of Jewish Studies". *Jewish Studies*, 46, English section 3\*-84\*.
- Spagnolo, F. (2012). "Those Notes in Minor Tones: Oriental Themes, Liturgical Debates, and Musical Icons in Nineteenth-Century Italy". Avitsur, E.; Ritzarev, M.; Seroussi, E. (eds), *Garment and Core: Jews and their Musical Experiences*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Press, English section 83\*-100\*.

- “Shakespeare – in Opera! At the Duke of York’s Theatre” [newsreel clip] (1921).  
<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/shakespeare-in-opera-at-the-duke-of-yorks-theatre>.
- Storck, K. (1919). *Die Musik der Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Muth’sche.
- Taubmann, O.; Wilde, R. (1916). *Porzia: Opera in drei Aufzügen*. Berlin: Drei-Masken-Verlag.

