

Moritz Henle (1850–1925)



Some of Laupheim's German-Jewish families, such as the Henles and Laemmlers, had family connections in the nearby town of Ichenhausen, roughly 40 kilometers away. One such connection was forged when Klara Adler, of Laupheim, married highly respected glazier Elkan Henle, a member of Ichenhausen's German-Jewish community. Examples of Elkan Henle's works in Laupheim include the design of the cemetery gate as well as the small prayer room in the castle, which was the first meeting place of the town's small Protestant community. The couple's son Moritz, the third of their eleven children, was born on August 7, 1850.

The stages of Moritz Henle's life were defined by his education and work. At twelve he began studying at the conservatory in Stuttgart, where he took lessons in piano, violin, and singing. For the son of a Jewish craftsman, such an artistic path was certainly unusual and most likely posed a financial burden on his parents. Fortunately, Henle's musical studies were made possible partly through the financial support of Simon Heinrich Steiner, a Laupheim businessman. In 1864, Henle went on to study at the evangelical teachers' college in Esslingen, which had begun accepting Jewish students in 1821. He was drawn to the teaching profession by the strong economic footing it offered.

According to Geoffrey Goldberg, an expert on Jewish music, the training to become a cantor, or *hazzan* in Hebrew, at this time marked a radical change in the world of choral music during the period of Jewish emancipation in Germany. The traditional oral system of apprenticeship was replaced by a highly-organized training system and under the influence of hazzan Maier Levi a large choral compendium reflecting these changes was developed. There was also an upheaval in the training of rabbis beginning in 1828 in Württemberg and elsewhere. Jewish religious authorities began requiring young teachers-in-training to be qualified as hazzanim, making them a mixture of teacher and musician. This measure was also meant to improve the income level of Jewish teachers. The hazzan had a wide range of duties. He was responsible for performing the Jewish liturgy and the Torah recitation according to the respective musical tradition of the synagogue; following reforms in Württemberg, the hazzan was also commissioned by the rabbi to preach and carry out rituals. Despite these independent developments, Württemberg still fell under the influence of Salomon Sulzer, the head hazzan of Vienna. He represented this new liturgical model and a new style of connecting western musical forms with traditional synagogal singing.

In 1868 at the young age of eighteen, Moritz Henle began his work as a teacher and hazzan in Laupheim,

helping to organize the worship service. He was the leader of a Jewish choir called *Frohsinn* and founded a mixed-gender choir for the synagogue. In addition to other liturgical innovations, Rabbi Abraham Walder of the Reform Movement also introduced the organ to the worship service around this time. Incidentally, Henle's work in Laupheim coincided with that of Abraham Rosenthal as a volunteer prayer leader (Rosenthal's grandson, the great religious philosopher Schalom Ben-Chorin, then, also has roots in Laupheim). One prayer leader sat among the congregation, while the other stood on the Bimah with his face turned to Jerusalem.

Henle also began working with secular compositions. At the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the city council notably commissioned the young cantor with the composition of a peace hymn with lyrics by Victor Heinrich Steiner to be performed by the city's three male choirs. This commission shows the favorable reputation enjoyed by the then 21-year-old. In 1873, Henle took a position at the new synagogue in Ulm and concentrated on choral direction as well as religious and music education. He also participated in the musical life of the city and was able to resume his composition and singing studies at the Stuttgart conservatory. In 1876 and 1877, he successfully passed the second teaching examination and the second cantor examination.

Larger German-Jewish communities evidently embarked on national searches for candidates when filling open positions. For instance, a Hamburg rabbi called Dr. Sanger invited Moritz Henle to a trial run in 1879 with the prospect of a permanent position; Henle even received a similar invitation from the distant East Prussian city of Konigsberg. He accepted the position in Hamburg, where he served as head hazzan for 34 years. He formed a mixed-gender choir and used an organ as accompaniment – both revolutionary developments at the time. Still today, Reform synagogues can be recognized by the presence of an organ. It was in Hamburg that Henle met his wife, Caroline Franziska Herschel, whose family could be traced back to the Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. They married in 1882. Henle became chairman of the German cantors’ association and was also active as a music critic.

It was a time of rapid change in Jewish musical traditions. According to Goldberg, there were two main traditions in Germany, roughly divided by the Elbe River, though these overlapped in certain areas like Berlin. Southern Germany was at the center of the western musical tradition – songbooks differentiated between the “German” and “Polish” musical styles. Henle found himself directly at the crossroads of these traditions in Hamburg, a city whose musical alignment highlighted the complex intersections of the two styles. The Israel-

itischer Tempel, which opened in 1818 as Germany's first Reform synagogue, was unique in that its congregants were Ashkenazim, but its liturgy and music were strongly influenced by Sephardic traditions. Reform Judaism in general was strongly rooted in the Sephardic model of worship associated with Amsterdam at that time. The services even sporadically included German choral music in the Protestant style. Here Henle first got to know the Sephardic tradition of Portuguese origin and its influence on Hebrew pronunciation. He reinstated the use of Ashkenazi pronunciation, which caused tension with some traditionalists. As a result, the Temple's liturgical pronunciation of Hebrew shifted over time. Henle drew on the traditions of his South German homeland and the compositions of Salomon Sulzer – the same influences evident in the rich musical tradition of the Laupheim synagogue, parts of which were recorded by Laemmle after Henle's death and are available on CD today. Goldberg considers Henle both a transitional figure in the musical history of the Hamburg Temple and a representative of the new type of cantor being formed in Western Europe in the 19th century that combined the functions of choir leader and composer. As in Ulm, his musical activities were not limited to the synagogue; he also worked as a music teacher and served on the board of directors of the local musicians' association.

Liturgische Synagogen-Gesänge for hazzan, choir, and organ – sheet music of which is included in Goldberg’s collection – is considered to be the most important of Henle’s works to have been released. Henle’s *Sechs Hebräische Gesänge* draw on the tradition of the German art song and are based on a cycle of poems by Lord Byron. Seligmann, a leading personality of liberal Judaism in Germany, commissioned Henle to create arrangements and original compositions for a *Haggadah*, a prayer book for Passover. In the work *Eine Deutsche Kedeschah*, Henle entered into a sort of compositional rivalry with Louis Lewandowski, who overshadows him somewhat in the modern imagination. This is confirmed by how difficult it has been to have Henle’s works performed outside Germany, particularly in North America. His great-granddaughter Barbara Levy had tried to achieve this in New York. Goldberg sums up Henle’s music as being multicultural, at home in the world of classical music as much as in the tradition of synagogal music – an archetype of the modern German hazzan whose further development was curtailed by the tides of history.

Moritz Henle died in Hamburg on August 24, 1925. The tragic fate of his wife, who was deported to Theresienstadt and died there in 1943, shows that the world in which he lived, though very much anchored in the 19th

century, extended all the way to the Shoah, ending ultimately with the emigration of his children.

It is remarkable that all three areas of the arts are represented in the German-Jewish community of Lauheim: music by Moritz Henle, visual art by Friedrich Adler, and literature by Siegfried Einstein – it would be misleading to say that Carl Laemmle represented the cinematic arts, since he expressly rejected the idea of film as art, though his son would later have artistic ambitions. It is highly unlikely to find such a diverse array of talents in such a small group. The preservation and transmission of art through times of crisis is dependent on its medium; prints and manuscripts are easier to safeguard than paintings or sculptures. Local research into Henle's work has been led by local historian Rolf Emmerich and the choirmaster Ludwig Schwedes, whose choir held the first concert of Henle's compositions in 1990. In 1998, a CD of Henle's choral arrangements was released, ensuring the preservation of his music. Through these efforts, contact was established among Henle's grandchildren, who lived scattered across the United States, Spain, and Denmark as a result of Nazi persecution. In the year 2000, this culminated in a multi-day event celebrating sacred music in Lauheim, where the different branches of Henle's family were brought together again.

Fortunately, Emmerich's research in foreign archives has brought many traces of Henle's work to light. In German archives of synagogal choir music, on the other hand, he found almost nothing. In 2003, Geoffrey Goldberg held a historical presentation in Laupheim honoring the works of Moritz Henle. The house where Henle was born now boasts a commemorative plaque, and the street where it stands was renamed *Moritz Henle Straße* in 2001. He is also honored in a special room of the Museum of Christian and Jewish History in Laupheim. In this way, the case of Moritz Henle shows that modern action can revive decades of forgotten history.

*Translated from the German by Sara Cavicchi,
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