MUSICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE BINDING OF ISAAC STORY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY:
AHARON HARLAP AND MENACHEM ZUR’S AKEDAT YTZCHAK
AND STEVE REICH’S THE CAVE

BY

EMILY SARAH ISAACSON

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Andrew Megill, Chair
Professor Emeritus Fred Stoltzfus, Director of Research
Assistant Professor Andrea Solya
Assistant Professor Erin Gee
Abstract

Genesis 22 is among the most ideologically evasive stories in the Bible. Abraham is prepared to murder his favorite son to show his devotion to God. We, the audience, are left with questions about the disposition of God, the morals of Abraham, and the nature of faith. This dissertation will examine three compositions from the twentieth century that engage the story of Genesis 22: Aharon Harlap and Menachem Zur’s *Akedat Ytzchak* (The Sacrifice of Isaac) (1979 and 1989, respectively) and Steve Reich’s *The Cave* (1993).

This project has four aims. First, it explores how Harlap, Zur, and Reich engage the text to center or deconstruct the essential aspects of the narrative. Second, it investigates how these composers use musical and extramusical devices to build a dramatic or theological narrative. Third, it compares and contrasts these works to the Binding of Isaac art of writers, painters, sculptors, and composers before them. Finally, it probes what insights these modern works offer this ancient story.

This work is inherently comparative. I compare how Harlap, Zur, and Reich use Genesis 22 as a frame and how their compositions resonate or clash with the story. I rely on primary sources such as scores and libretti, as well as contemporary reviews, published dialogues with the composers, and interviews I took with Harlap and Zur. I also utilize articles on the works of these composers, as well as monographs on the Sacrifice Story in the fields of theology, religious history, art history, cultural studies, literature, and historical politics.

I argue that while Harlap, Zur, and Reich have very different compositional styles, they reflect established trends in the artistic and religious tradition of Genesis 22. Harlap explores Abraham, Isaac, and God as if they were real human beings with conflicting emotions and loyalties. Zur’s composition subdues the text and approaches the story as an abstraction. Reich uses the narrative as an object to meditate on the role of religion in the twentieth century. While Harlap, Zur, and Reich’s renderings echo visual, literary, and musical art from the past, their compositional techniques allow for new implications for the story and, in turn, for the meaning of faith.
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Introduction

Genesis chapter 22, verses 1 through 24, known by religious scholars as the Akeidah, is one of the most theologically confusing and emotionally heart-wrenching stories in the Old Testament. In the account, Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is prepared to murder his favorite son to show his devotion to God. In the thousands of years since the narrative was recorded, the story stands at the center of all three monotheistic faiths. Artists, writers and composers throughout history have used the story as a foil to discuss not only theological questions but also social and political events. This dissertation will investigate three compositions from the late twentieth century that may have employed the Binding of Isaac narrative to address these charged topics.

During Israel’s War of Independence in the first part of the twentieth century, Zionists invoked the Akeidah to inspire people to fight for, and if necessary die for, the land of Israel. While this image may have empowered early settlers, the post-Holocaust Israeli generation rejected the Akeidah as their model. As Israel, Egypt, and the United States engaged in peace negotiations in the late 1970s, Aharon Harlap composed Akedat Ytzchak (The Sacrifice of Isaac) (1979). In 1989, shortly after the First Intifada, or Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, Menachem Zur turned to the same subject for his setting. In the early 1990s, Jewish-American composer Steve Reich collaborated with his wife, the video artist Beryl Korot, to create The Cave (1993), a multi-media “musical theater” piece that employs not only the Old Testament account of the binding of Isaac, but also its Koranic counterpart, Surah 37, the binding of Ismail.¹ In this work, Reich and Korot juxtapose interviews with Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans about the two versions of the story, placing contemporary political tension in the Middle East into an artistic framework.

This dissertation will examine how Harlap, Zur, and Reich engage both the story of Genesis 22, and its religious, artistic, and social history. I will begin by exploring the central role

¹ The Old Testament, and thus Jews and Christians spell the name "Ishmael" while the Koran and Muslims spell it "Ismail." I will be following the conventional spelling for each religion.
the Sacrifice Story plays in the three monotheistic faiths -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- in order to have a more complete understanding of the theological implications of the text. I will examine the religious, cultural, and political significance of this narrative within, and between, these religions. In the second chapter, I will explore how artists -- visual, literary, and musical-- have reflected these theological questions in their creations. I will survey Harlap and Zur’s Akedat Yitzchak and Reich’s The Cave, so that I can explore how composers use the text, instrumentation, and motivic themes to build a dramatic or theological narrative. I have interviewed Zur and Harlap about their respective compositional processes and will share some of their comments in the analyses of each score. My goal is to understand how contemporary composers make meaning out of this ancient and evasive story. In the final chapter, I will compare how Harlap, Zur, and Reich use musical and extra-musical devices to advance an exegetical or psychological narrative. I will compare and contrast these three works and reference the Akeidah art of writers, painters, sculptors, and composers before them. I will argue that while the compositional styles of these modern works are diverse, they all reflect and expand on established traditions in the Binding of Isaac artistic tradition.
Chapter One:

History of a Sacrifice

The Akeidah

The story begins simply: “Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test.” After decades in partnership, God gives Abraham a trial of faith. In the Old Testament story (Genesis 22: 1-24) God calls out to Abraham and presents him with a task: “Take your son, your favored son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering” (Genesis 22: 2). Abraham agrees and, without informing Isaac or his wife Sarah of God’s decree, guides Isaac on a three-day trek to Mount Moriah. Once they arrive at the base of the mountain, Abraham tells his servants “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go there; we will worship and we will return to you” (Genesis 22: 5). Abraham prepares the materials for the ritual. He piles the wood for the burnt offering and the slaughtering knife and “put it on his son Isaac” (Genesis 22: 6). The animal offering, however, is noticeably absent and Isaac questions his father (Genesis 22: 7). Abraham promises Isaac that “G-d will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22: 8). Together they climb Mount Moriah. At the top of the mountain Abraham binds Isaac (Genesis 22: 9). At the last moment, an angel calls out to Abraham, who responds, “Here am I” (Genesis 22: 11). The Angel commands Abraham to stop and offers a ram as a substitute. The angel declares, “For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me” (Genesis 22: 12). Abraham has

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http://www.ccar.org/rabbis-speak/ccar-journal-reform-jewish-quarterly/submitting-material/master-word-list/
passed the test. As a result both he and Isaac are blessed with a divine genealogical promise:

Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.  (Genesis 22: 16-18)

**Figure 1.1: Text of Genesis 22:1-24**

1. Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.”

2. And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”

3. So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.

4. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

5. Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go there; we will worship and we will return to you.”

6. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

7. Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

8. And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.

9. They arrived at the place of which God had told them. Abraham built an altar there; he laid the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

10. And Abraham pick up the knife to slay his son.

11. Then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”

12. And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”
Figure 1.1 (cont.)
13. When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

14. And Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”

15. The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

16. and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,

17. I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

18. And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.

19. And Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

20. Some time later, Abraham was told, Milcah too has born children to your brother Nahor:

21. Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram;

22. and Chesed, Hazo, Piddash, Jiddaph, and Bethuel.”

23. Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother.

24. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maachah.3

This story plays a central role in all three monotheistic religions. This chapter will examine interpretations of Genesis 22 in Judaism and Christianity and those of its Koranic counterpart, Surah 37, in Islam. All three composers central to this project – Harlap, Zur, and Reich – make implicit or explicit reference to these religious exegeses. Steve Reich not only alludes to these interpretations, but includes many of them as source material in The Cave.

Jewish Exegesis

Genesis 22, known as the Akeidah (meaning “to bind” in Hebrew), is the source of several Jewish rituals.\(^4\) It is the Torah portion on Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year). On both Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and Rosh HaShanah a ram’s horn, or shofar, is blown at the peak of the service. This ritual commemorates the animal sacrificed in Isaac’s stead while reminding God of the near sacrifice in hopes that he will show his mercy again.\(^5\) Because of its role in these annual holidays, every practicing Jew is familiar with Genesis 22.

The Jewish tradition of Biblical commentary is not a coherent, fixed, canonical set of interpretations; rather a variety of sources are viewed as authoratative.\(^6\) The earliest source of commentary on the Akeidah appears in Jewish Antiquities, a narrative written by Josephus in 37 C.E. Rome.\(^7\) The most frequently-cited exegesis stems from the midrash, a collection of rabbinical reinterpretations on the Old Testament written and compiled over the first four centuries.\(^8\) Genesis Rabbah, the section of the midrash that deals with the Akeidah, is of special interest because it contains narrative details not found elsewhere. Harlap and Zur draw upon some of these reinterpretations and Reich quotes directly from the midrash. The twelfth century French Rabbi Rashi introduced Satan into the story.\(^9\) Ronald M. Green, a modern theologian and Jewish scholar, provides an anthropological interpretation.\(^10\) Each of these sources interprets or

\(^{4}\) As with many transliterations from Hebrew to English, there is a discrepancy around the spelling of this word. I am using the spelling put forth by the Central Conference of American Rabbis unless I am quoting another source. For example, Zur uses “Akedat Ytzchak.”

\(^{5}\) Green, “Abraham, Isaac and the Jewish Tradition, 16.


retells the *Akeidah* in various ways, in some cases adding information that changes the implications of the story.\(^{11}\)

Two key questions are prompted in any exploration of Genesis 22: 1) Why does God try Abraham? and 2) Why does the trial take such a horrible form? Ultimately these queries provoke the larger question of why God imposes demands and hardships on his faithful servants. According to Ronald Green, the Jewish position here is consistent:

trials are not meant cruelly to break the will or spirit of those tested; nor are they meant to prove to God the purity of the believer’s devotion. Rather, a central rabbinic teaching is that ‘God tries the righteous.’\(^{12}\)

Green and many midrashic writers believe that because God is omniscient, he knew the outcome of Abraham’s test before it began. Furthermore, God, being merciful and just, tries only those he knows can sustain the affliction.\(^{13}\) For many believers, however, this explanation is unsatisfying. Later in this chapter I will demonstrate how Jews who endured the Holocaust found this answer incongruent and patronizing.

Despite Green’s assertion that “the Jewish position is almost unvarying,” historical commentators have offered alternative retellings.\(^{14}\) Indeed, the midrash contains multiple interpretations. Midrash: *Genesis Rabbah* 55:1 and *Numbers Rabbah* 17:2 argue that the story attempts to draw special attention to Abraham. In these sources, God explains “It was my wish that the world should become acquainted with thee, and should know that it is not without good reason that I have chosen thee from all the nations.”\(^{15}\) The test highlighted Abraham’s qualifications as the patriarch of monotheism for all time. And yet, later in *Genesis Rabbah* there appears a much less favorable portrait of Abraham. According to this source, God did not intend to test Abraham; rather, Abraham misunderstood his directions. In this version God declares, “What, do you think I meant for you to slay him? No! I said only to take him up…and now I say

\(^{11}\) Green, “Abraham, Isaac and the Jewish Tradition: An Ethical Reappraisal,” 4.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.; *Genesis Rabbah* 55:1.

\(^{13}\) *Genesis Rabbah* 55:2.


\(^{15}\) Neusner, *midrash Rabbah: Genesis Rabbah*, 55:1; *Numbers Rabbah*, 17:2.
take him down.”  

This section of *Genesis Rabbah* paints Abraham as a religious fanatic, unthinking and unable to clearly understand God’s commands.

To explain why God tests Abraham, many commentators insert the character of Satan. Rashi claims that it was Satan who suggested that God test Abraham’s devotion. In this version, God pleads with Abraham to stand firm so that he may prove his authority to Satan. Rashi argues that God did not intend to sacrifice Isaac and was merely proving Abraham’s willingness to obey his orders. In Rashi’s description, God experiences the human emotions of insecurity and jealousy, while Abraham and Isaac are not heroic members of the founding family, but rather pawns in a conflict between good and evil.

Another interpretation found in *Genesis Rabbah* has Satan serving as God’s adversary and speaking with a logic that many readers find appealing. In *Genesis Rabbah 56*, Satan appears on the road to Moriah to dissuade Abraham from his task and to inform Isaac of his father’s intentions. Satan cries:

> What has happened to you, old man? Have you gone crazy? How can you even think of doing such a thing? How do you know it is God? Maybe tomorrow he will change his mind and call you a murderer.

This interpretation is confounding because Satan is attempting to persuade Abraham not to follow God’s command while asking many of the same questions that would occur to any thoughtful reader.

To make sense of the trial’s parameters, Torah scholars throughout centuries have employed several rationales. Several commentators eliminate the moral problem by magnifying Isaac’s role. In *Genesis Rabbah 56*, the authors explain that although the Biblical text refers to Isaac as a lad (*na’ar*), rabbinic sources describe him as a young adult, commonly believed to be around thirty-seven years of age. By so interpreting Isaac’s age, these writers argue that it is folly to believe that an elderly Abraham could bind Isaac to the altar without his consent. In addition, Isaac’s active participation in the sacrifice -- carrying the fire wood and instructing

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16 Midrash: *Genesis Rabbah* 56:8
17 James Henry Lowe trans., "Rashi" *On The Pentateuch."
18 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4
19 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:8.
20 *Genesis Rabbah* 56:8.
Abraham how to perform the rite, asking Abraham to bind his hands and feet tightly lest he blemish the offering by his indecision -- turns the Isaac of the midrash from a passive victim to a willing servant.\(^{21}\) Consequently, the theological implications of the story change when both Abraham and Isaac are willing participants in the sacrifice.

Some midrashim take Isaac’s free participation in the Akeidah a step further, suggesting that the trial was really Isaac’s idea.\(^{22}\) According to Josephus and Genesis Rabbah 55:4, Ishmael, Isaac’s half-brother by the handmaid Hagar, argued that he was circumcised voluntarily at the age of thirteen, whereas Isaac was circumcised involuntarily as an infant. As a result, Ishmael believed that his sacrifice to God was greater, earning him Abraham’s blessing. Isaac’s retort was that he, not Ishmael, was deserving because of Ishmael’s illegitimacy. Isaac also affirmed that he would willingly have given God anything he asked:

> All that thou didst lend to the Holy one, blessed be He, was three drops of blood. But low, I am now thirty-seven years old, yet if God desired of me that I be slaughtered, I would not refuse.\(^{23}\)

The argument about legitimacy and birthright is a subject Steve Reich takes up in *The Cave*.

Ronald Green offers a unique perspective on the relationship between Isaac and Abraham. For most twenty-first century readers, a parent and child are independent individuals. Traditionally, however, young children were legally viewed as the property of the parent, or, in more intimate terms, as a physical-emotional part of the parent’s personhood. Thus, the suffering of a child is seen as an extension and, perhaps, an intensification of any chastisement received by the adult. This view, supported by Genesis Rabbah 56:7 and Numbers Rabbah 17:2, suggests that there is no essential moral distance between Abraham and Isaac: by sacrificing Isaac Abraham essentially was committing a kind of self-immolation.

While the dominant tradition asserts that Isaac was spared, religious anthropologist Carol Delaney explains that many scholars believe Isaac was, in fact, killed.\(^{24}\) In this version of the

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\(^{22}\) Green, “Abraham, Isaac and the Jewish Tradition: An Ethical Reappraisal,” 9.

\(^{23}\) Genesis Rabbah 55:4.

\(^{24}\) Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 124.
story, Isaac was slain, but restored to life, either immediately or three days later.\textsuperscript{25} Such commentaries focus on two aspects of the story. First, they point to Genesis 22 verse 19:

And Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

Isaac’s absence from this passage suggests to many scholars that Isaac was in fact sacrificed.\textsuperscript{26} This theory gains support in verses twenty through twenty-four in which Abraham’s lineage stems from Abraham’s brother, Nahor, rather than from Isaac.\textsuperscript{27} The second detail supporting Isaac’s death is the dramatic prolongation of the moment when Abraham puts the knife to Isaac’s throat, forcing God to call Abraham by name twice. Gerald Friedlander speculates that perhaps the first command may not have come in time to prevent Isaac’s death.\textsuperscript{28} Friedlander concludes that when the blade touched Isaac’s neck, his soul departed his body, returning only after the second command. In this way Friedlander explains, “Isaac knew that…the dead in the future will be quickened.”\textsuperscript{29} For many Jewish thinkers, Friedlander among them, the \textit{Akeidah} is the first basis for the belief in the resurrection of the dead.\textsuperscript{30}

Some theologians have argued that the \textit{Akeidah} may have caused an irreparable rift between God and Abraham. The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism notes that Abraham lived for 74 years without God speaking to him.\textsuperscript{31} It was not until he was 75 that, “The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

God then directs Abraham’s actions as recorded in Genesis 12-22, over a period of at least several decades.\textsuperscript{32} After the near sacrifice, however, there is no record of Abraham and God ever

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. As I will demonstrate later in this chapters, the three days later is a prefiguration of the Christian belief in Jesus’ resurrection on the third day.

\textsuperscript{26} Delaney, \textit{Abraham on Trial}, 124.

\textsuperscript{27} Delaney, \textit{Abraham on Trial}, 124.

\textsuperscript{28} Gerald Friedlander, \textit{Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer}, (New York: Herman Press. 1965), 228.

\textsuperscript{29} Friedlander, \textit{Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer}, 228.

\textsuperscript{30} Green, “Abraham, Isaac and the Jewish Tradition,” 13.

\textsuperscript{31} Lieber, ed. \textit{Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary}, 69-70.

\textsuperscript{32} When God tells Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah, “Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.” (Genesis 18:11)
speaking again. In fact, although Abraham lived another 75 years, it appears Abraham and Isaac never spoken again either.

_Akeidah_ as a Model

For the past two-thousand years, religious and political leaders have invoked Abraham and Isaac not only as icons of faith, but also as models of political behavior. The concept of _kiddush HaShem_, which translates directly as “sanctification of God’s name,” but refers to martyrdom on behalf of God, is considered by some the supreme religious act, an act for which the _Akeidah_ is the Biblical prototype. As early as the second century B.C.E., Jewish leaders used the story as an exemplar for behavior under political tyranny and social oppression. In book 4, Maccabees, (a collection of early Jewish homilies not included in the Bible but often found in the Apocrypha of the Greek and Georgian bible), Seleucid Antiochus IV forced Jews to eat meat from Roman sacrifices. When Eleazar, an elder in the community, refused to do so, he was bound and scourged, crying out “O children of Abraham, you must die nobly for piety’s sake.” Eleazar asked God to consider him a sacrificial victim, like Isaac: “Make my blood their purification and take my life as ransom of theirs.” A similar approach was taken in the Middle Ages during the persecution of European Jews by the Crusaders. In 1096, and again in 1146, in Mainz, Speyer, Worms, Cologne, Trier and elsewhere, Jews were tortured if they refused to relinquish their religion and convert to Christianity. Rather than accept this fate, many Jews reportedly killed their children and themselves, “everyone of them like the _Akeidah_ of Isaac, son of Abraham.” As Jewish historian David Roskies explains, “the events on Mount Moriah continued to structure perceptions and influence behavior. The choice of analogy imparted both a

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33 Delaney, _Abraham on Trial_, 125.
34 4 Macc. 6:20-30.
35 4 Macc. 6:23.
36 4 Macc. 6:29-30.
37 Delaney, _Abraham on Trial_, 126.
biblical sanction and a sense of election to the martyrs of Mainz."\(^{38}\) Eleazar, and the Jewish martyrs of Europe took the *Akeidah* as inspiration for self-sacrifice instead of apostasy.

During these Medieval persecutions a new ideology of suffering emerged: an “affliction of love.”\(^{39}\) In this theory, suffering is viewed as a sign of divine favor for God only tests the faith of those he knows to be faithful.\(^{40}\) Historian Allan Mintz sees such suffering not as an indication of punishment but of worthiness, its purpose being to strengthen further those already strong in the faith.\(^{41}\)

For the next eight hundred years, this “affliction of love” became the dominant interpretation of the *Akeidah*, influencing the morale of the Jewish people in both religious and political behavior.\(^{42}\) Prime examples of this phenomenon are the nineteenth century Zionists and twentieth century settlers of the state of Israel, both of which used the *Akeidah* to inspire people to fight, and, if necessary, die for, the land of Israel.\(^{43}\) In this context, the “affliction of love” was transformed into “*osher Aqedah*” (the bliss of the *Akeidah*) - dieing for faith and country as a kind of ecstasy.\(^{44}\)

The Holocaust marked a turning point in the *Akeidah* as a metaphor. Literary historian Michael Brown explains that some Jewish writers viewed “the Nazi Holocaust as a reenactment of the *Akeidah* and the *Akeidah* as a prefiguration of the Holocaust.”\(^{45}\) While some narrative elements make this explanation attractive, most scholars have rejected this notion. Jack Cohen, an American-Israeli Rabbi, is troubled by the theological and ethical implications of interpreting

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\(^{40}\) Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 127.


\(^{42}\) Mintz, *Hurban*, 102.

\(^{43}\) Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 129.


the Holocaust through the lens of the *Akeidah*. He argues that it is dubious to believe that faith in God alone was compelling enough to

elicit the consent of hundreds of millions of men and women of all nations and religions...to accept as the voice of God a command to sacrifice their sons.*46*

This interpretation also troubled youth in the new state of Israel.*47* After the War of Independence in 1948, Isaac became a young sabra (a person born in Israeli territory) “sacrificing himself on the national altar, with the connivance of his father, Abraham.”*48* After the Six Day War in 1967, this metaphor was thoroughly rejected. Soldiers explicitly refused to accept the notion of self-sacrifice represented by the *Akeidah*, directing their anger at the fathers who had sent them into battle.*49* As sociologist T. Gideon reported, one solider said “I am not willing to be an eternal Isaac climbing onto the altar without asking why, or understanding.”*50* As I will demonstrate in chapter two, artists in the twentieth century have used the *Akeidah* not as a model of faith but to denounce the older generation’s justification for violence, war and death.

As a fundamental cornerstone of over two-thousand years of Jewish religious, cultural and political history, the *Akeidah* has morphed from a parable of faith into a model for suffering in the face of political oppression, and from violence in the name of the Almighty into violence in service of the state. By the end of the twentieth century, Glenda Abramson of Oxford University notes that the “*Akeidah* has become a national symbol representing the tragedy of Israel in general and of sons in particular.”*51*

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*Christian Commentary*

*46* Jack Cohen, “Is this the Meaning of Life? Israelis Rethink the *Akedah*.” (*Conservative Judaism* vol. xliii (1), 1990), 54.

*47* Delaney, *Abraham on Trial*, 130.


Christian interpretations of the Biding of Isaac story appear as both implicit and explicit references in all three focus compositions discussed in this study. Central to the Christian interpretation of the Akeidah is the idea that the sacrifice of Isaac was a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ.52 Just as Abraham accepted that his son had to be killed, so too God knew that Jesus would have to be sacrificed.53 The monumental difference between these two stories is found in the last moments of their narratives. In Genesis 22, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, but at the critical moment stops the sacrifice, whereas in the Passion story God allows Jesus to be killed.54

Christian theologians note many similarities linking the two stories. The births of Isaac and Jesus required God’s intervention and their conception was announced by an angel or messenger of God.55 Abraham and Isaac walked three days to Mount Moriah, and there is a three-day period between Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection.56 Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice just as Jesus carried his own cross.57 The ram caught in a thicket that became Isaac’s proxy is analogous to the crown of thorns made from the brambles of a bush.58 Finally, the ram

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54 The primary Christian interpretation of Genesis 22 is that Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac. Some theologians, however, interpret Hebrews 11:17–19 to mean that Abraham did in fact kill Isaac, only to have God raise him from the dead:
17. By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,
18. even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”
19. Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.
56 Delaney, Abraham On Trial, 138
57 John 19:17; Kugel, How to Read the Bible, 17.
58 Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, 13:251
(or lamb) sacrificed in Isaac’s stead finds a parallel in Jesus’ appellation as “The Lamb of God” (John 1:29 and Peter 1:19-20).

Many Christian scholars argue that if Isaac is symbolically synonymous with Christ, then Abraham is similarly synonymous with God. Ireneaus, a second-century Bishop, used Abraham as a model for God. He wrote:

Righteously also do we, possessing the same faith as Abraham and taking up the cross as Isaac did the wood, follow Him...For in Abraham man had learned beforehand and had been accustomed to follow the Word of God. For Abraham, according to his faith, followed the command of the Word of God, and with a ready mind delivered up, as a sacrifice to God, his only begotten and beloved son, in order that God also might be pleased to offer up for all his seed His own beloved and only-begotten Son, as a sacrifice for our redemption.  

Irenaeus argued that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac prepared God for his eventual sacrifice of Jesus.

The notion of prefiguration established a connection between Genesis 22 and the Passion story that was both theologically and politically useful to the Church. Christian theologians consider Abraham a priest at Isaac’s immolation and thus view the episode as equivalent to the Eucharistic sacrifice. As Jean Daniélou explains, the prayer of consecration in the Canon of the Mass suggests

First that the Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifices of Abel, Melchisedech, and Abraham, and then that it is the memorial of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension. So the Mass is seen to be the continuation in the present time of the priestly actions of both Testaments.  

Christian scholars view the Hebrew Bible as the “Old Testament,” a body of scripture that prefigures the New Testament. When the Gospel of Matthew was written down, the author used the first sentence of the New Testament to clarify any remaining confusion: “The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”  

59 Irenaeus [c. A.D. 120-202] 1903, 46 as quoted in Delaney Abraham on Trial, 149.  
62 Matthew 1:1.
David to Abraham, Christians asserted a direct genealogical line from the Old Testament to the New, without any sense of religious division.

Early Christians used the repurposed Akeidah to convince both Jews and Gentile to embrace the new covenant.\(^{63}\) Genesis 22:18 states that by your descendants shall “all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.” Many Christians have asked whether “all the nations” referred only to the descendants of Isaac and Jacob, i.e. to the Jews (the circumcised) or to uncircumcised Gentiles as well.\(^{64}\) They argue that if Jesus were the fulfillment of the law then Christians are the true “seed” of Abraham.\(^{65}\) Following this logic, the tangible promises God made to Abraham for Isaac’s attempted-sacrifice - many descendants and vast tracts of land - are commensurate to the spiritual promises God made to Christians for Christ’s sacrifice - saved souls and guaranteed a home in heaven.\(^{66}\) Tertullian claimed that this transformation was prophesied in God’s promise to Abraham (Genesis 16-18) because the phrase “the sand on the seashore and the stars in heaven” was, for him, “an intimation of an earthly as well as a heavenly dispensation.”\(^{67}\)

Two of the four Christian Gospels use the Akeidah as a way of separating Jews from Christians. Saint Paul’s tactic was to make a distinction between physical and spiritual kinship.\(^{68}\) In his view, Jews were enslaved by their orthodox observance of Biblical laws: “Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are the two Testaments.”\(^{69}\) Here Paul considers the Jews as the “children of the flesh” through Hagar, whereas the Christians are the “children of promise” through Sarah.\(^{70}\) Many Jewish scholars have interpreted Paul’s analysis as a ploy by Christians to separate Jews

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\(^{63}\) Daniélo, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 145.

\(^{64}\) Delaney, *Abraham On Trial*, 151.

\(^{65}\) Delaney, *Abraham On Trial*, 151.

\(^{66}\) Delaney, *Abraham On Trial*, 151.

\(^{67}\) Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 249.

\(^{68}\) Romans 4:11-18; Delaney, *Abraham On Trial*, 142, 147.

\(^{69}\) Gal. 4:22-24.

\(^{70}\) Gal. 4:23.
from Christians and degrade their religious practice. 71 Interestingly, the same aspect of the story has been used to distinguish Muslims (the children of Hagar) from Jews (the children of Sarah).

The Gospel of John goes even further in an attempt to disinherit Jews. In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus preaches

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life..... Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.72

In John’s Gospel, the Jews respond: “We are Abraham’s seed and were never in bondage, how sayest though Ye shall be made free?”73 Jesus explains that he accepts them as the seed of Abraham, but that if they truly were Abraham’s kin, they would exhibit his kind of faith.74 Because the Jews do not conform to his beliefs, Jesus declares “Ye are of your father the devil.”75 John uses the figure of Abraham to polarize Jews and Christians, separating them into the faithful and the infidels.

The Binding of Isaac story is central not just to Christian thought but to its practice as well. In Catholicism, the prayer recited at the deathbed, the commendatio animae (Commendation of the Departing Soul to God) or 'paradigmata of deliverance,' recalls the events of the near sacrifice: “Deliver, Lord, the soul of Thy servant (handmaid), as Thou didst deliver Isaac from being sacrificed by his father.” The daily Eucharist ritual is viewed as a memorial of Abraham’s sacrifice.76 Until recently, Genesis 22 was read as a lesson during the Easter Vigil. Despite its complicated tradition, the Sacrifice Story plays an important role in both historical and contemporary Christianity.

Islamic Interpretation

71 Delaney, Abraham On Trial, 147.
72 John 8:13, 23.
73 John 8:33.
74 John 8:39.
75 John 8:44.
76 Longsworth, “Art and Exegesis in Medieval English Dramatization of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” 119.
The Sacrifice Story, already replete with religious and political issues, is made even more complicated because two quite different versions of the story exist: the Biblical version and the Koranic version (Surah 37:102-111) (Figure 1.2).77 In the Koranic version of the Sacrifice Story, the name of the name of the sacrificial son is never revealed. Ibrahim simply says “My son” (37:102):78

**Figure 1.2: Text of The Koran-Surah 37: Verses 100-113**

100. “O my Lord!
Grant me
A righteous (son)!”

101. So We gave him
The good news
Of a boy ready
To suffer and forbear.

102. Then when (the son)
Reached (the age of)
(Serious) work with him,
He said: “Oh my son!
I see in a vision

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77 Rashad Khalifa, trans. *Quran: The Final Testament: Authorized English Version*. (Fremont: Universal Unity), 2001. Scholars disagree on the spellings Koran verses Qu’ran verses Quran. “For nearly 25 years, the Associated Press Stylebook adhered to "Koran" and "Mohammed" as the correct way to spell two commonly used Arabic words. Then, in 2000, it opted instead for "Quran" and "Muhammad," and in the 2003 print edition it added an entry for "al-Qaida." The changes reflect a balancing act taking place not only at the AP but also in newsrooms around the country. In an e-mail interview, Stylebook Editor Norm Goldstein wrote: "We try to come up with a spelling that is understandable to United States readers and as close as possible to the actual pronunciation." (Andy Zieminski, “Quran or Koran?,” *American Journalism Review*, December 2006/January 2007), However, the arbiters of style do not necessarily agree. Since one of our focus pieces, Reich’s *The Cave* uses “Koran,” this paper will use that spelling, unless I cite a source that chooses an alternative spelling.

78 For the English translation, I have chosen the same version Reich uses, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1952), an Indian Islamic scholar whose translation of the Koran is one of the most widely known and used in the English-speaking world.
**Figure 1.2 (cont.)**

That I offer thee in a sacrifice:
Now see what is thy view!”
(The son) said:
“Oh my father! Do
As though art commanded:
Thou will find me,
If Allah so will one
Practicing patience and
Constancy!”

103. So when they
Had both
Submitted their will
(to Allah),
And he had laid him
Prostrate on his forehead
(For sacrifice),

104. We called out
to him,
“O Abraham!

105. “Thou hast already fulfilled
The vision!” – thus indeed
Do We reward
Those who do right.

106. For this was
obviously
A trial

107. And We
Ransomed him
With a momentous
sacrifice:

108. And We left
(this blessing) for
Him among
generations
(To come)
In later times:

109. “Peace and
Figure 1.2 (cont.)
salutation
To Abraham!”

110. Thus indeed do
We reward
Those who do right

111. For he was
Of Our
Believing Servants.

112. And We gave him
The good news
Of Isaac – a prophet -
One of the Righteous.

113. We blessed him
and Isaac:
But of their progeny
Are (some) that do right
And (some) that
Obviously do wrong,
To their own souls.79

Muslims believe that Ishmael was the intended victim. A survey of Islamic commentary,
however, reveals nearly equal statistics: 130 authoritative statements favor Isaac to be the
designated victim, whereas 133 believe that Ishmael was the intended sacrifice.80 Steve Reich’s
The Cave quotes both the Koranic versions, as well as retellings by Palestinian Muslims.

In addition to the disagreements over who was actually to be sacrificed, there are other
significant differences between the Biblical and Koranic account. In Genesis 22, Abraham keeps
his orders secret, while in Surah 37 Abraham tells his son of God’s command and asks for his
opinion: “My son, I see in a vision that I am sacrificing you. What do you think?” (Koran
37:102) Rather than shying away, the son urges Abraham to do as God has commanded: “O my

79 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Qur’an: Translation, (New York: Tahrake and Distributors of the
Holy Qur’an), 2007. In Reich’s version of the text he consistently replaces the modern form of
you with the antiquated form thee, thy or thou.
80 Reuven Firestone, Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in
father, do what you are commanded. You will find me, God willing, patient.” (Koran 37:102). A similar interpretation of the son’s response is given by Josephus and in the Jewish midrash. This is a significant detail for it changes the son from a naïve victim to a willing participant. Another variation found in both the midrash and Islamic tradition is the role of Satan. According to Islamic lore, on three separate occasions Satan tries to persuade Abraham not to complete his task and all three times Abraham ignores the intruder.\footnote{Firestone, \textit{Journeys in Holy Lands}, 111; Alexander Kynsh, \textit{Islam in Historical Perspective}, (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011); David Waines, \textit{An Introduction to Islam}, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 309.}

The binding of Ishmael version is particularly noteworthy as it serves as the basis for the \textit{Hajj}, or pilgrimage to Mecca, whose completion is considered one of the five tenets of Islam.\footnote{Firestone, \textit{Journeys in Holy Lands}, 135; Kynsh, \textit{Islam in Historical Perspective}, 309.} According Surah 22:27, Abraham was given a divine command to summon all humanity to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca: “Call the people for the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of camel, lean from the journey’s through deep and distant mountain highways.” The rites of the \textit{Hajj} are intended as a reenactment of the story of Abraham and his other wife and child, Hagar and Ishmael.

Sarah, the wife of Abraham, had difficulty conceiving a child. In her stead, Abraham fathered a child with Sarah’s handmaid, Hagar. They named the son Ishmael. When Sarah conceived Isaac shortly afterward, she feared that Ishmael might try to claim her son’s birthright, so she sent Hagar and Ishmael into the desert to wander, starve, and die. Hagar scoured the desert in search of water and implored Allah for help. Hearing Hagar’s plea, Allah sent the angel Gabriel to create a well at Zamzam. This well allowed Ishmael and Hagar to survive and to build a new life in the city of Mecca.

Nearly all of the rituals in the \textit{Hajj} are designed as a reenactment of this story. Upon arriving in Mecca, pilgrims circumambulate a sacred monument built by Abraham and Ishmael called the \textit{Ka’ba}.\footnote{Kynsh, \textit{Islam in Historical Perspective}, 311.} To pay homage to Hagar’s quest for water, pilgrims run between the hills of Safa and Marwa and drink from the Zamzam well.\footnote{Ibid.} To commemorate Abraham rejecting Satan
on three separate occasions, pilgrims throw rocks at three pillars in the town of Mina.\textsuperscript{85} The culmination of the \textit{Hajj} is the sacrifice of an animal and distribution of meat to the poor to commemorate that God offered a ram in place of Abraham’s son.\textsuperscript{86} This last ritual is celebrated both in Mecca and by Muslims around the world because, according to Islamic tradition, everyone on earth, including those not yet born, heard Abraham’s call to complete the \textit{Hajj}.\textsuperscript{87}

The Sacrifice Story provides not only the rites of the \textit{Hajj}, but also the prayers. According to the Arab chronicler Tabari, the \textit{takbir}, or prayers recited during the \textit{Hajj}, are direct quotes from Gabriel, Abraham, and Ishmael.\textsuperscript{88} As a result, pilgrims are embodying the patriarchs in both words and actions.

The role of the Sacrifice Story in Islamic religion and culture is hard to overemphasize. The \textit{Hajj} is one of the five tenets of Islamic life. Abraham is mentioned frequently in the Koran and is viewed as a prophet almost of the same stature at Muhammad. Most pertinent to this project, the variations in the sacrifice story presage the religious differences and political tension between Muslims and Jews.

\textit{Conclusions}

The Binding of Isaac story has been a point of contention nearly from its inception. The narrative has been used as a political tool by early Christians to convert Jews, as a rallying force for Muslims, by leaders in the Jewish Diasporas to embolden their flock, by the Israeli government to inspire their soldiers, and by theologians in Judaism and Islam to highlight both commonality and discord. It is this evolving complex of ideas that influenced how Harlap, Zur and Reich composed their musical setting. Each composer wrestled not only with the theological

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} Kynsh, \textit{Islam in Historical Perspective}, 312.

\textsuperscript{87} Firestone, \textit{Journeys in Holy Lands}, 97.

\textsuperscript{88} Meyer Schapiro, “The Angel with the Ram in Abraham’s Sacrifice: A Parallel in Western and Islamic Art.” (\textit{Ars Islamaic}, Vol. 10, 1943), 136.
implications of the story, but also its political history. And the musical creations they fashioned represent significantly differing artistic responses to the story and its implications.
Chapter Two:

Art of the Sacrifice:
A Survey of the Art, Music and Literature
of the Binding of Isaac

In the section of the Poetics devoted to the art of arousing pity and fear, Aristotle wrote when...the tragic event occurs within the sphere of the natural affections - when, for instance a brother kills or is on the point of killing his brother, or a son his father, or a mother her son, or a son his mother, or something equally drastic is done - that is the kind of event a poet must try for. 89

In this chapter, I will explore how writers, painters, sculptors, and especially composers have dealt with the Binding of Isaac story. What themes do they highlight, and which do they suppress? Do they advocate or criticize a religious doctrine? Historically, artists have engaged the Sacrifice Story in three different ways: as a guide to moral conduct, as an exemplar of theatrical drama, and as means of discussing contemporary politics. How an artist portrays Abraham and Isaac reflects not only the ideas of the individual artist, but also the social or political themes of their era.

Hundreds of works focus on the Binding of Isaac story, especially in the visual arts. It is neither the place nor the aim of this dissertation to thoroughly examine all these works. Rather, in this chapter I will examine masterpieces of visual art, literature, and music that have influenced our focus pieces – Harlap and Zur’s Akedat Ytzchak, and Reich’s The Cave. This project is inherently comparative. I will compare how artists use the Akeidah as a frame and how their compositions resonate or clash with the story. Our focus will be on how composer’s utilize the Genesis 22 text and the relationship between the text and the music. I will also analyze the political and artistic environment in which these works were conceived. Our primary sources will be scores, libretti, and contemporary reviews. Our survey will include several earlier musical settings (of which there are relatively few) and a selection of art and literature that confront the themes listed above.

The music and dramatic arts examined in this chapter are drawn from the Western Judeo-Christian tradition. Since the first century, there has been vigorous debate in Islam over the permissibility of music, dance and other performance arts.\textsuperscript{90} The question involves what is considered \textit{sama} (lawful music and dance) opposed to \textit{ghina} (music making and performance viewed as secular and unlawful).\textsuperscript{91} The Koran contains almost nothing that expressly deals with this subject. Consequently, theologians and social commentators have turned to Islamic legal sources and the \textit{hadith}, or “Tradition of the Prophets,” for guidance.\textsuperscript{92} Opinions vary widely. Some sources claim that music related to religious function - such as Koranic cantillation, the singing of unaccompanied hymns, and folk tunes that mark events in the life of an individual or community - are \textit{sama}, hence acceptable.\textsuperscript{93} Only music that is specifically intended for pleasure or involves instruments is illicit. Other sources, however, argue that no music is acceptable.\textsuperscript{94} A famous \textit{hadith} often quoted in support of this position states:

There are four upon whom Allah will not look on the day of resurrection, the sorceress, the wailing-woman, the singing-woman, and the woman who is unfaithful to her husband.\textsuperscript{95}

For those who oppose any type of music or dance, singing is believed to be as sinful as adultery or black magic. Because of this debate, most composers have avoided setting to music stories from the Koran. Steve Reich adopts this task in \textit{The Cave}, but navigates the issue extremely carefully.

\textsuperscript{90} Amnon Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam,” \textit{(Acta Musicologica. Vol. 69, Fasc. 2)}, 143-144.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 143.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 144.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 143-145; The caliphs, known as the commanders of the faithful, were especially strong advocates of art music in Islamic civilization. See Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam,”145.
\textsuperscript{94} Shiloah, “Music and Religion in Islam,” 146. Ibn abî l’Dunya (823-894), author of the first full-scale treatise on the subject, was strongly opposed to any music making.
\textsuperscript{95} James Robson, \textit{Tracts on Listening to Music and Ancient Arabian Musical Instruments}, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1941), 27.
While music and dance based on stories from the Koran are considered forbidden, visual art is permissible. Most visual art renders the moment when Abraham is about to commit the sacrifice and the Angel Gabriel stops him. Although the ram is not mentioned in Surah 36, starting in the fourteen century artists depicted the animal caught in the thicket or the angel presenting the ram. This image is based on Islamic literary tradition.

The Sacrifice Story as Guide to Moral and Religious Conduct

In the Western tradition, the most prevalent interpretation of the Binding of Isaac story is as a parable of faith. The story explains how one should conduct himself in the face of hardship. Abraham and Isaac model the proper relationship not only between father and son but also between man and God.

Throughout the Early Christian Period, the Medieval Period, and the Renaissance, the imagery of the Binding of Isaac was widely known. As Van Woerden explains, “The frequency…with which this scene was represented can only be explained by the great significance attributed to this event by ecclesiastical writers.” Art from the East – especially Egypt and Syria – tended to follow the Genesis text exactly, whereas, beginning in the fourth century, Western artists presented the story more freely. For example, images found in Roman catacombs that date from 313 C.E. differ in the depiction of the dramatic climax. These images not only show Abraham about to strike Isaac, but also the arrival on the summit of Mt. Moriah and the moment Abraham offers thanks for Isaac’s deliverance.

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97 Ibid, 35. The ninth-century Persian scholar Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari writes that “God had Gabriel descend from heaven with a ram.”
98 Van Woerden, ” The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Abraham,” 214.
99 Ibid, 221-223
100 Ibid, 222.
101 Ibid.
Around 340 C.E., artists begin to transform Abraham from a shepherd into a patriarch. Italian and Frankish sarcophagi from this period portray Abraham as a statesman-philosopher, a familiar Greek archetype that suggests a certain kind of moral rectitude.\textsuperscript{102} The most important sarcophagus from this era is one created for Junius Bassus, prefect of Rome and an early Christian. This work portrays Abraham as a paragon of stoicism and subservience. Religious and cultural art historian Diane Apostolos-Cappadona believes the images on the sarcophagus associate the inhabitant of the coffin with these characteristics.\textsuperscript{103}

The Church of San Vitale in Ravenna (dedicated 548 C.E.) uses the \textit{Akeidah} in frescoes demonstrating the proper relationship between humans and God.\textsuperscript{104} Abraham appears in glowing garments with one hand obediently lifting a sword, the other pushing on the head of the Isaac, who kneels compliantly at the altar. Above them God is represented as a hand rising from the clouds. Like the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, these figures are intended as perfect images of obedience, Isaac to Abraham’s command, Abraham to God’s directive.

Around the tenth century, art and literature began not only to recount the Biblical narrative, but to emphasize the story’s liturgical function by suggesting the Binding of Isaac as a paradigm of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{105} Six of the Medieval Miracle Plays, written in England between the tenth and sixteenth centuries, explicitly reference Isaac’s brush with death as a prefiguration of Christ’s crucifixion.\textsuperscript{106} Dramaturgist Robert Longsworth argues that these dramatists were less interested in the story’s “inherent dramatic appeal,” than with the story’s “basic didactic purpose of explaining the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection.”\textsuperscript{107} The plays do so by exploiting Christian typological interpretations. For example, in the \textit{Chester} play, Abraham and Isaac, represent God and Jesus:

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 107.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 108.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 111.
By Abraham I may vunderstand [sic]  
The father of heaven that can fand  
With his sonnes blood to break that band  
The Devil has brought vs too.

By Isaac vnderstand I may  
Ihesu that was obedient aye  
His fathers will to worke alway,  
His death to vnderfonge. (469-76)\(^{108}\)

At the end of the story the narrator summarizes Abraham’s deed was done “in example of Ihesu.”\(^{109}\)

To make this typological interpretation clear, the writers of the Medieval Mystery plays rewrite some narrative elements.\(^{110}\) In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham is the central figure and Isaac serves as tool in the narrative. Since Christ is the central figure in these redemption cycles, however, Isaac had to replace Abraham as the primary character in the Medieval Mystery plays. This reorientation required that Isaac wrestle verbally with the meaning and manner of his death.\(^{111}\) The Medieval Mystery plays set an artistic precedent for experimenting with how Abraham and Isaac are characterized and reorienting the central themes of the story.\(^{112}\) This concept was explored by future poets, painters, and composers, and ultimately influenced the twentieth-century composers whose works are the focus of this study.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) twice used the text of the *Chester Mystery Play* that retells the Binding of Isaac story. This first setting uses the story as a guide to religious conduct. As I will show later in this chapter, the second setting is composed with a more political purpose in mind. In 1952, Britten wrote *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, Op. 51 for piano and two voices:

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\(^{108}\) Elliot, “The Sacrifice of Isaac as Comedy and Tragedy,” 41.


\(^{110}\) Elliot, “The Sacrifice of Isaac as Comedy and Tragedy,” 39; Longsworth, “Art and Exegesis,” 120.

\(^{111}\) Longsworth, “Art and Exegesis,” 121.

tenor and alto. The tenor represents Abraham and the male alto Isaac; Britten uses these two voices together in a homophonic texture to represent the voice of God (Example 2.1).

Example 2.1: Britten - Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac, Op. 51, mm. 1-4

Britten sets the ancient text in a traditional, straightforward manner: simply and syllabically.

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Drama is achieved by the relationship between the narrative and the music.\textsuperscript{114} Britten’s presentation of God’s voice may have influenced Harlap and Zur, for both represent God with multiple choral voices.

\textit{The Bible as Drama}

The Humanist movement that swept Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century changed the conversation regarding Old Testament stories. There was a renewed interest in classical learning, a focus on humanistic forms of philosophy and an impetus towards an increasingly secular vision of truth that was formerly the exclusive domain of the church. Despite this shift, the Bible retained its prominence as the primary cultural text in Europe through the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{115} The characters in the Bible were no longer depicted as stoic prophets and noble patriarchs, however, but increasingly seen as human beings with feelings, thoughts and bodies.\textsuperscript{116}

Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt (1606-1669) was fascinated by Abraham’s complex response to God’s command.\textsuperscript{117} Rembrandt returned to the \textit{Akeidah} numerous times, each time adding visual nuance to his understanding of the patriarch. In 1635, he painted a life-size portrait of Abraham, depicting him as an old man with white hair and wrinkled brow. Below him, Isaac lays contorted against a pile of wood, his head in Abraham’s hand. Rembrandt uses shadow to hide all but Abraham’s face and to draw focus to the terror in Abraham’s eyes.\textsuperscript{118} Old Testament scholar John Durham writes “We feel Abraham’s agony, his resolve to obey, and his disbelieving

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Debora Kuller Shuger, \textit{The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice and Subjectivity}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{117} Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., \textit{Art, Creativity and the Sacred}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
relief.” ¹¹⁹

In 1637, Rembrandt turned to an earlier moment in the story, focusing this time on Ishmael. This etching depicts Abraham as he is prodded by Sarah to banish Hagar and Ishmael into the wild. Abraham’s agony is palpable; his hands and feet are divided between the home from which his son has come and the wilderness to which he is being sent. ¹²⁰ Two drawings, completed in the early forties and fifties of the seventeenth century return to the same subject. ¹²¹ This is the first known example in Western art in which Abraham, Ishmael and Hagar appear together and parallels a key structural aspect of Steve Reich’s work in the 20th century.

In 1645 Rembrandt created an etching of the moment preceding the sacrifice, when Isaac asks “‘Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?’” (Genesis 22:7). Abraham clutches his heart, explaining to Isaac that “G-d will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” (Genesis 22:8). This etching’s drama is in its realistic depiction of what would be a normal conversation between father and son, save for the wood on which Isaac soon will lay, the smoke from the fire in the background, and the knife in a sheath at Abraham’s side. ¹²²

In 1655, Rembrandt returned one last time to the subject. Here we see most clearly Rembrandt’s sympathy for Abraham’s struggle. Like the earlier works, Abraham covers Isaac’s face with one hand and grasps the knife with the other. The Angel, Abraham and Isaac are again locked together, but this time, rather than having their eyes be the binding force, Abraham uses his body to hold Isaac down while the Angel attempts to restrain Abraham from behind. The scene is both intensely physical--muscular, even-- and also tender; the Angel seems to reach out both to stop and console the patriarch. Rembrandt’s interest in Abraham’s psyche and compassion for his trauma foreshadows Harlap, Zur and Reich; for all three artists seek to portray Abraham realistically, not as prophet or patriarch but as a humble, troubled man.

In the seventeenth century, the Italian composer Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674) explored

¹²⁰ Ibid, 43.
¹²¹ Ibid, 44.
¹²² Ibid, 72.
how music could retell scriptural stories in a way both theological and theatrical. He developed a form of sacred opera known as oratorio.\textsuperscript{123} Around the same time Carissimi composed the well-known oratorios Jepthe and Jonas, he also composed Historia di Abraham et Isaac.\textsuperscript{124} This work is scored for \textit{basso continuo} (organ) and five voices - soprano (Isaac), alto (angel), two tenors (\textit{historicus} (narrator) and Abraham), and bass (God).\textsuperscript{125} Carissimi’s choice of vocal scoring suggests certain assumptions about the characters. For example, by having Isaac sung by a soprano, which mimics the unchanged voice of a young boy, Carissimi takes the view that Isaac was a naive young boy rather than a mature adult (Example 2.2).\textsuperscript{126}

\textbf{Example 2.2: Carissimi - Historia di Abraham et Isaac, mm. 38-42}

Furthermore, as Carissimi scholar Graham Dixon describes, Isaac’s “ignorance of his fate is emphasized by the way he sings blandly in a major tonality to ask about the identity of the sacrificial victim.”\textsuperscript{127}

As the first known musical setting of the Akeidah, Carissimi created an approach to musical story-telling that influenced the works of later composers. For example, Historia di

\textsuperscript{124} Historians do not have an exact date for either of these works. Jephe was written sometime before June 16 1648.
\textsuperscript{125} Dixon, \textit{Carissimi}, 49.
\textsuperscript{126} Referring to \textit{Genesis Rabbah} 56:8 that Isaac was 37-years old at the time of the sacrifice.
\textsuperscript{127} Dixon, \textit{Carissimi}, 35.
Abraham et Isaac is the first of many compositions on the Binding of Isaac that include text not found in Genesis 22. In addition to verses 1-18, Carissimi uses Psalm 117: Laudate Dominum as a conclusion:

1. Alleluja. Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes; laudate eum, omnes populi.
2. Quoniam confirmata est super nos misericordia ejus, et veritas Domini manet

1. Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.
2. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.\(^{128}\)

This Psalm, reinforces the moral that God is benevolent (Example 2.3).

Example 2.3: Carissimi - Historia di Abraham et Isaac, mm. 180-185

This is the first time in musical history that a composer has exercised an exegetical choice on the
significance of the Sacrifice Story by including additional text. As I will prove later in this chapter, Britten and Reich have built upon this tradition.

A lesser known setting of the story appears in a series of Lenten meditations on Christ’s Passion entitled *Méditations pour le Carême* (c.1694) by Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704). In the motet “Tentavit Deus Abraham” Charpentier sets text from Genesis 22. It is not surprising to find the Binding of Isaac amongst reflections on Christ’s Passion since Isaac’s sacrifice has long been viewed as a prefiguration of Jesus’ death on the cross. Despite the label “motet,” these pieces are, in fact, like small oratorios, highly dramatic works where each character is represented by a distinct voice, accompanied only by *basso continuo*. In “Tentavit Deus Abraham,” Abraham is a bass, Isaac a *hautecontre*, and God a bass. The narrator, or *Historicus*, is realized as a homophonic recitative using all three soloists (Example 2.4). A similar use of homophonic choral recitative appears in the works of Reich and Harlap.

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Example 2.4: Charpentier - *Méditations pour le Carême*, “Tentavit Deus Abraham,” mm. 1-4

Meant to convey the assurance that faith in God will bring salvation, the text ends just as God is about to intervene:

*Et venerunt ad locum quem ostenderat ei Deus. Cumque alligasset Isaac, posuit eum super altare et extendens manum arripuit gladium ut immolaret filium suum.*

(And they came to the place which God had showed him. And then he bound Isaac, placed him on the altar, and, stretching forth his hand, seized the sword to slay his son.)

By ending the motet at the apex of the drama, Charpentier omits the anticipated interjection that saves Isaac’s life and the blessing from God that makes Abraham’s suffering meaningful.

If the picture on Junius Bassus’ sarcophagus emphasized the ritual aspects of the binding of Isaac, and Rembrandt’s paintings and etchings offer a more intimate perspective, Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) features the story’s the drama. In his 1603 rendering *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, Caravaggio’s second painting on this subject, a balding Abraham holds a glistening knife in the air as he pushes Isaac’s head upon a hard stone. Isaac’s
mouth is open as if screaming or sobbing, his eyes taut in preparation for the seemingly inevitable horror. The sense of immediacy and violence are heightened by the diagonal thrust of the body parts and the sudden contrast of highlights.\textsuperscript{131} Most striking, the frame cuts off each body as if the viewer is only steps away.\textsuperscript{132} Art historian Desmond Seward explains how Caravaggio’s painting radically changed the interpretation of the Sacrifice Story: “What was so revolutionary was to show Abraham as savagely cruel and Isaac as struggling desperately, instead of piously submissive.”\textsuperscript{133} Caravaggio depicts the binding of Isaac not as a parable of faith but as an attempted manslaughter; Abraham is not a religious patriarch but an assassin.\textsuperscript{134}

Genesis 22 so distressed the Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) that he devoted an entire book, \textit{Fear and Trembling} (1843), to exploring four different possible explanations for why the story takes the form that it does.\textsuperscript{135} In the first version, Abraham’s face “epitomized fatherliness” as he blesses Isaac.\textsuperscript{136} But when Isaac realizes his father’s intentions, he lunges at Abraham’s legs and begs for his life. Kierkegaard repeats the refrain “Isaac did not understand him.”\textsuperscript{137} When Isaac looks his father in the face, he finds him changed: his "gaze was wild, his whole being was sheer terror."\textsuperscript{138} Abraham rebukes Isaac and screams, “Stupid boy, do you think I am your father? I am an idolater. Do you think it is God's command? No it is my desire."\textsuperscript{139} Abraham then prays softly, "Lord God in heaven, I thank you; it is better that he believes me a monster than that he should lose faith in you."\textsuperscript{140} In this first version, Abraham’s goal is to protect God by blaming himself for the brutal command.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{131} Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., \textit{Art, Creativity and the Sacred}, 115.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Seward, \textit{Caravaggio: A Passionate Life}, 73.
\textsuperscript{134} Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., \textit{Art, Creativity and the Sacred}, 115.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 11.
\end{flushleft}
Kierkegaard’s second telling of the sacrifice story is similar to Genesis 22 until the story’s postscript. At this point, Kierkegaard imagines the consequences of this event on Abraham’s psyche. The father is traumatized and psychologically scarred for the remainder of his life: “From that day henceforth, Abraham was old; He could not forget that God had ordered him to do this...His eyes were darkened and he saw joy no more.”\(^{141}\) In the second version, Kierkegaard’s asks whether Abraham’s act of faith in fact caused him to lose his trust in God.

While the second version envisions Abraham’s depression after the sacrifice, the third version imagines his regret. In this telling, Kierkegaard focuses on the agony and self-doubt Abraham experiences after attempting to murder his son. Abraham threw himself down on his face, he prayed God to forgive him his sin, that he had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, that the father had forgotten his duty to his son...He could not comprehend that it was a sin that he had been willing to sacrifice to God the best he had, the possession for which he himself would have gladly died many time; and if it was a sin, if he had not loved Isaac in this manner, he could not understand that it could be forgiven, for what more terrible thing was there?\(^{142}\)

In this version, Kierkegaard highlights the tension Abraham feels between his duty to his son and his duty to his God. Ultimately, in this telling, Abraham concludes that he misunderstood God’s directions and that he has betrayed his family.

Kierkegaard's fourth account of the Sacrifice Story deviates the most from Genesis 22. In this rendering, whether by loss of nerve or as an explicit act of disobedience, Abraham fails to act. He cannot bring himself to kill Isaac, and, as a result, Isaac loses his faith: “Not a word of this is ever said in the world, and Isaac never talked to anyone about what he had seen, and Abraham did not suspect that anyone had seen it.”\(^{143}\)

In these four retellings, Kierkegaard probes Genesis 22 as a human drama and imagines how the characters might have responded to the trauma. In “Eulogy on Abraham,” Kierkegaard asks some of the fundamental questions prompted by the sacrifice story: Were Abraham’s intentions morally or religiously justified or were they murder? Is there an absolute duty to God?

\(^{141}\) Ibid, 12.
\(^{142}\) Ibid, 13
\(^{143}\) Ibid, 15.
Was Abraham justified for not telling Isaac his intentions? Ultimately, Kierkegaard sees faith as a paradox that cannot be understood by reason or conventional morality.

The Akeidah as a Political Foil

In 1330, when Florence and its merchants were at the height of their power, wealth and prestige, Andrea Pisano (1290-1348) created a set of bronze doors for the octagonal baptistery in front of the city’s cathedral. Over the next eight decades, Florence was bombarded by famine, disease, political unrest, and economic depression. And so it was, at the dawn of the Quattrocentro, a time of plague and religious revival, of warfare and economic crisis, a time when the fate of the once great city on the Arno seemed to hang by a thread as a delicate as Florentine silk, that…the merchants’ guild, the Calimala, announced the most exciting artistic opportunity since the halcyon days before the Black Death.

In 1401, despite these persistent hardships, a competition for a new set of doors was arranged. Although we have no substantiation of the Calimala’s intentions, art historian Paul Robert Walker argues that the decision to fund the Baptistry doors during a time of such hardship was viewed as “a sacrifice on the altar of republican idealism: a well-considered gift to God…a financial and artistic prayer for deliverance from the clutches of tyranny.” The Sacrifice of Isaac was chosen as the theme for, like Florence, it told the story of a man who was willing to offer his son, and was repaid for that faith with the promise of the birth of a great nation.

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144 Ibid, 16.
146 Walker, The Feud that Sparked the Renaissance, 15.
147 Ibid, 12.
149 Walker, The Feud that Sparked the Renaissance, 16.
150 Walker, The Feud that Sparked the Renaissance, 16; Krautheimer, Ghiberti’s Bronze Doors, 3.
other words, the new Baptistry doors were a sacrifice to God from the people of Florence, as well as a plea that God would intervene on their behalf. Seven sculptors were asked to submit a trial piece; included in the short-list of artists were two sculptors barely twenty years old, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) and Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455). \(^{151}\)

There are some striking similarities in how these two sculptors engaged the Sacrifice Story in accordance with the new humanistic aesthetic. Both conceived their design more as a dramatic narrative, full of intriguing characters and a suspenseful plot, than as a religious parable. \(^{152}\) Brunelleschi’s design, in particular, highlights the sense of urgency. In the center of the frame, Abraham has one hand around Isaac’s throat while the other points a knife at his jugular. Isaac is looking up at the sky, mouth open, as if screaming or gasping for his last breath. The angel locks eyes with Abraham as he reaches out, firmly grasping Abraham’s arm, forcing him to stop. The sense of physical struggle and emotional tension is further heightened by the taut muscles of the figures and the jagged lines of the bronze plate. Brunelleschi’s design may have informed Caravaggio’s painting two-hundred years later and the tone of theatrical urgency likely influenced Harlap and Zur’s music nearly six-hundred years later.

Compared to Brunelleschi’s muscular bodies, Ghiberti’s figures hearken back to classical form. The head of Abraham recalls Zeus, Isaac’s resembles a Greek youth, and the servants are reminiscent of those found on Roman sarcophagi. \(^{153}\) In late 1402, the Calimala guild awarded the commission to Ghiberti for his attention to storytelling and beautiful depiction of human bodies. \(^{154}\) Coincidentally or not, Florence’s fate began to change. To the Calimala and the people of Florence, the new bronze doors, a sacrifice of time, money and manpower, “had propitiated a benevolent God.” \(^{155}\)

Ghiberti’s Florentine Baptistry doors are the first example of an artist using the Binding of Isaac story to address social and political issues. Over the next five-hundred years, the Sacrifice Story became a meme among visual artists and composers used to reflect on the values and

\(^{151}\) Krautheimer, *Ghiberti’s Bronze Doors*, 3.

\(^{152}\) Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity and the Sacred*, 112.


\(^{154}\) Ibid.

characteristics of modern society. Benjamin Britten’s first use of the story, *Canticle II* (1952), is small in scale and conservative in both its musical and theological tone. But having watched World War II unfold, Britten’s attitude towards the story changed dramatically. When Britten was commissioned in 1958 to create a work for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral destroyed in 1940 by German bombs during World War II he chose to reference the *Akeidah*.\(^{156}\) Britten’s libretto for the *War Requiem*, op. 65 (1961-62), intertwines the liturgical text of the Latin Requiem Mass with poetry by Wilfred Owen, an antiwar poet who died just days before the armistice.\(^{157}\) Angry and melancholy in tone, Owen’s poetry comments on the Mass by decrying the fate of young men, sent to their deaths by an unfeeling patriarchal system.\(^{158}\)

For the Offertorium movement, Britten chose Owen’s ironic take on the *Akeidah*, “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young.” As is the case in all of Britten’s juxtaposition of Owen’s poetry with the mass, there is a textual prompt. The offertory text assumes the traditional liturgical format of a respond (A B C B); what surely caught Britten’s eye was the two-fold presentation of “Quam olim Abrahamis promisistis et semini ejus” (Which once you did promise to Abraham and his seed forever), a clear reference to Genesis 22:18.\(^{159}\) Britten sets this text to a melody taken from *Canticle II* (Example 2.5).

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\(^{157}\) Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, op. 66, text from *Missa pro defunctis* and original text from the poems of Wilfred Owen, (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1985).


\(^{159}\) Genesis 22:18 “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Another prominent reference to this covenant appears in the Magnificat (Luke 1:55) “As He spoke to forefather Abraham and his seed forever.”
Example 2.5:

a. Britten - *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, 30-33

b. Britten - *War Requiem*, “Offertorium,” mm. 40-4

Britten uses this melody to morph into a setting of Owen’s sardonic retelling of the Abraham and Isaac story. As Abraham prepares the materials for the ritual sacrifice, the music is underlined by motives from earlier movements, changing both the meaning and emotional tone of the text.\(^\text{160}\)

At the moment of the intended sacrifice an angel sent from heaven begs Abraham not to kill his son, but Abraham ignores the angel’s plea:

> But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
> And half the seed of Europe, one by one.\(^\text{161}\)

\(^{160}\) Peter Evans, Britten’s ‘War Requiem,’ *Tempo*, (New Series, No. 61/62 (Spring - Summer, 1962)), 32.

\(^{161}\) Benjamin Britten, “Offertorium” *War Requiem*, 130- 139.
The two male soloists convey this shocking text as an “explicit refutation … of the mass’ evocation of the holy promise of salvation made to Abraham ‘and his seed’.”\textsuperscript{162} This calamity is interrupted by a recitation of the verse “Hostias et preces tibi” sung by the boys choir against a hypnotic organ drone.\textsuperscript{163} \textit{War Requiem} is an impressive example of Britten’s abilities both as librettist and composer to transform traditional religious imagery into a critique over political conflict specifically and mankind’s capacity for violence in general. By using Owen's ‘Parable of the Old Man and the Young,’ musicologist James Herbert believes that Britten “recasts the Great War as justifiable grounds for the breaking of that promise [in Genesis 22] by God to humanity.”\textsuperscript{164}

Shortly after the premier of \textit{War Requiem}, Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) composed \textit{Abraham and Isaac: A Sacred Ballad for Baritone and Orchestra} (1963).\textsuperscript{165} According to Stephen Walsh, Stravinsky was inspired when he heard Isaiah Berlin read biblical Hebrew.\textsuperscript{166} Stravinsky chose the Sacrifice Story because it was “a symbolic account of the origin of the Israeli nation.”\textsuperscript{167} As a result, Stravinsky decided to make his first visit to Israel at the end of August 1962, and by the time he arrived he already had a rough draft of the composition in hand.\textsuperscript{168} In several ways, Stravinsky approaches \textit{Abraham and Isaac} as an abstraction. First, the composition uses a twelve-tone series composed almost entirely from minor and major seconds (Example 2.6)

\textsuperscript{162} James D. Herbert, “Bad Faith at Coventry: Spence's Cathedral and Britten's "War Requiem,"," (\textit{Critical Inquiry} 25, no. 3 (Spring, 1999), 549.
\textsuperscript{163} In chapter three, I will demonstrate a similar use of drone by Harlap in \textit{Akedat Yizchak}.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 549.
\textsuperscript{165} Igor Stravinsky, \textit{Abraham and Isaac}, (New York: Boosey & Hawkes,) 1964.
\textsuperscript{167} Walsh, \textit{Stravinsky: The Second Exile}, 446.
As the foundation of scalar music like chant, these intervals allow Stravinsky to create motives that “gain a signature rather as neumes in plainsong do.”\(^{169}\) Secondly, Stravinsky was interested in “Hebrew as sound,” thus a single baritone voice sings the Genesis text in Hebrew.\(^{170}\) Walsh explains that Stravinsky chose to use Hebrew “not only out of deference to the people of the State of Israel (to whom the work was eventually dedicated), but also as a language at once sacred and secret.”\(^{171}\) Stravinsky did not know a word of Hebrew and relied on advice from Berlin for pronunciation and syllabic accentuation.\(^{172}\) In fact, in the liner notes to the first recording, Stravinsky writes

> No translation of the Hebrew should be attempted, the Hebrew syllables, both as accentuation and timbre, being a principal and a fixed element of the music. I did not try to follow Hebrew cantillation, of course, as that would have imposed crippling restrictions, but the verbal and musical accentuation are identical in the score, which fact I mention because it is rare in my music. The vocal line is partly melismatic (bel canto), partly an interval-speech of single syllables.\(^{173}\)

The result is a vocal melody that is syllabic with little variation or decoration, a style that

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\(^{169}\) Ibid.


\(^{172}\) Ibid.

mirrors, but does not follow, ritual cantillation. As Griffiths writes, "The repetitive elements in the vocal line, the little melismas, the ululations and the iterated notes all evoke religious chant, and in particular Jewish chant." Thirdly, Stravinsky accompanies the recitation with sparse instrumental support, a musical "landscape of flickering, abrupt chords and brief contrapuntal inventions… rare vegetation in the desert." As I will demonstrate in chapter four, although Zur’s Akedat Ytzchak is not a twelve-tone piece, the sparse musical landscape, abundance of dissonances, and interest in chantlike vocal lines show an affinity to Stravinsky’s work.

Stravinsky composed Abraham and Isaac at the height of the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Like Britten and Owen’s perception of the mendacity of political conflict, young Americans grew suspicious that they were being sacrificed for the narrow aims of an antiquated political class. Students erupted in protest on college campuses around the country. These hostilities came to a head on May 4, 1970, at Kent State University when the Ohio National guard shot into a crowd of unarmed college students protesting an American incursion into Cambodia. In response to the shootings, 500 campuses across the country shut down or experienced serious disruptions.

In 1978, American sculptor George Segal (1924-2000) received a commission from Cleveland’s Mildred Andrews Foundation to commemorate the Kent State shootings. He chose Genesis 22 as his theme, and created Abraham and Isaac - In Memory of May 4, 1970. A cast-from-life bronze sculpture, it shows Abraham as an Everyman in jeans, standing over a shirtless young man, bound kneeling before him. Brage Golding, the president of Kent State,

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174 Griffiths, Stravinsky, 185.
175 Griffiths, Stravinsky, 183.
178 Ibid.
179 George Segal Papers, 46.
refused the sculpture, stating “it was ‘inappropriate to commemorate the deaths of four students and the wounding of nine on the campus with a statue which appears to represent an act of violence about to be committed.”180 Princeton University viewed the sculpture differently, accepting the work in 1979.181 It currently resides there between the University chapel and the library.

At the sculpture’s unveiling, George Segal told the press, “There is a strong connection in my mind between the image of Abraham and Isaac and the killings at Kent State. It is an attempt to introduce difficult moral and ethical questions as to how older people should behave toward their children.”182 Segal believed that just as Abraham used his son Isaac in his attempt to demonstrate loyalty to God, so too the U.S. used its young soldiers to demonstrate its vast power on the political stage. Segal acknowledged that he viewed Abraham and Isaac as equally tragic pawns, placed by destiny at a terrible impasse.183

Conclusions

In his landmark essay discussing poetry and criticism, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliott writes:

Tradition…involves, in the first place, the historical sense… not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. … No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his

181 George Segal Papers, 82.
183 Ibid.
relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. ¹⁸⁴

The story of the Binding of Isaac has animated and plagued artists for over two thousand years. Some champion the religious creed it puts forth and use the Akeidah as a guide for religious and political conduct. Others, use the story to demonstrate flaws in the ideology. For all, how the story is used and how Abraham and Isaac are rendered reflect not only the individual artist’s perspective but a history of artistic dialogue.

In the next three chapters I will examine three compositions on the Binding of Isaac story written by 20th-century composers Aharon Harlap, Menachem Zur and Steve Reich. First I will survey the composers’ biographies and the origins of their compositions. Then, I will provide an overview of how the compositions function, so that I may then explore how the composers use the text, instrumentation, motivic themes, and contrasting textures to build a dramatic or theological narrative. My goal is to understand how contemporary composers make meaning out of this ancient and evasive story.

Chapter Three:

The Binding of Isaac as a Human Drama:
Aharon Harlap’s Akedat Yitzchak

Biographical Information

Aharon Harlap (originally Aharon Charloff) was born in Chatham, Canada in 1941. In 1964, at the age of 23, he immigrated to Israel, where he settled on the Ein Hashofet Kibbutz. Although Harlap had studied music in college, it was only on the kibbutz that he began to compose seriously. Desiring a greater foundation in compositional theory, Harlap enrolled in the Rubin Academy in Tel Aviv to work with the famous Israeli composer Ödön Pártos and then at the Royal College of Music in London, England to study with P. Racine Fricker. Later, he studied conducting with Sir Adian Boult in London, and Hans Swarovsky in Vienna. In 1971, he returned permanently to Israel.

Harlap’s primary conducting and compositional focus has been vocal music. Since 1976, he has served as the music director of the Opera Workshop at the Rubin Academy and the

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186 Fleisher, Twenty Israeli Composers, 172-173.
190 Ibid.
Chamber Opera Theater in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{191} He conducted the Artzi Choir from 1976 until 1990, when he left to assume the position of music director for the Tel Aviv Philharmonic Choir.\textsuperscript{192} He has won many awards for his vocal music, including the Reuben Hecht Foundation Award for his oratorio, \textit{The Fire and the Mountains} (1978), the ACUM, Israel's music and literary rights association, prize for \textit{Three Songs for Mezzo-Soprano and Symphony Orchestra} (1983), and the Marc Lavry award for the choral-orchestral work, \textit{For Dust You Are, and to Dust You Shall Return} (1993). In 1998, Harlap received the coveted Prime Minister’s Prize and in 2007 he received a lifetime achievement award from ACUM.\textsuperscript{193}

His vocal music is dominated by Jewish themes and Biblical texts.\textsuperscript{194} Most of Harlap’s compositions use Biblical texts as they appear in the Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew Bible, which includes the five books of Moses (the Torah), “the Prophets” and “the Writings.”\textsuperscript{195} Harlap tends to use these texts in a straightforward manner, without editing or restructuring the language. As he told the author in an interview “The text as writing in the Bible is so well constructed in itself that there is no need whatsoever of changing the order of the text.”\textsuperscript{196}

These original writings dictate not only Harlap’s librettos, but also his musical structures. As he explains:

Each text takes one on a different journey: the rhythm and meaning of the words, the hidden messages (especially with Talmudic texts-commentaries, etc.), the tension, release, harmonic and melodic elements, [and] the building of the  climaxes and sometimes anti-climaxes.\textsuperscript{197}

Harlap never quotes Torah chant directly, and yet nearly every textual, musical and dramatic

\textsuperscript{191} Fleisher, \textit{Twenty Israeli Composers}, 171, 177.
\textsuperscript{192} Fleisher, \textit{Twenty Israeli Composers}, 177.
\textsuperscript{194} Fleisher, \textit{Twenty Israeli Composers}, 173.
\textsuperscript{196} Aharon Harlap, interview by the author, e-mail, October 26, 2013.
\textsuperscript{197} Aharon Harlap, interview by the author, e-mail, February 14, 2013.
element of his work is influenced by the original source material.\textsuperscript{198}

Stylistically, Harlap describes his work as “very modal...but not specifically Middle Eastern modes.”\textsuperscript{199} Harlap actively avoids writing in what he calls “the Mediterranean or \textit{yam tichoni} style” used by the Yemenite and Sephardic communities in Israel.\textsuperscript{200} He believes that there is a “danger in quotation,” both in terms of how it influences the compositional process and the kind of political or social issues it may raise.\textsuperscript{201} Harlap also writes frequently “in a serial style, and based on motives, on all kinds of variations.”\textsuperscript{202}

Up until 1978, most of Harlap’s compositions were written for small instrumental ensemble, with focus on the piano, flute and bassoon.\textsuperscript{203} In 1979 Harlap wrote the \textit{a cappella} choral piece \textit{Akedat Yitzchak} (The Sacrifice of Isaac).\textsuperscript{204} This dramatic choral idiom proved so successful for Harlap that he has subsequently written many works for choir: mini-oratorios, concert pieces, choral/orchestra works, short \textit{a cappella} compositions, and, in 2005, a full-length opera, ”Therese Raquin.”\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{Akedat Yitzchak (1979)}

\textit{Akedat Yitzchak} (The Sacrifice of Isaac) was premiered in 1979 at the eleventh Zimriya

\textsuperscript{198} Harlap, interview by the author, October 26, 2013.
\textsuperscript{199} Fleisher, \textit{Twenty Israeli Composers}, 174.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem} (1969) a mini oratorio for choir, soprano and baritone solo and instruments; \textit{La’kol zman} (To Everything There is a Season) (1976), a short a capella piece, and \textit{Ha’esh ve he’ harim} (The Fire and the Mountains) (1978) another short oratorio. Fleisher, \textit{Twenty Israeli Composers}, 171-172; Tischler, \textit{A Descriptive Bibliography}, 163; http://www.classical-composers.org/comp/harlap (accessed May 3, 2013).
\textsuperscript{204} Harlap’s transliterated spelling of “The Sacrifice of Isaac” is \textit{Akedat} not \textit{Akeidah}.
World Assembly of Choirs in Israel. Stanley Sperber conducted the Wiener Minoritenchor of Austria, The Zamir Chorale of Boston, and the Studio Choir of Radio Norway. The piece was subsequently performed in the home venues of the participating choirs--Boston, Austria and Norway.

*Composition Overview*

*Akedat Yitzchak* Harlap set the first fourteen verses of Genesis 22 (Figure 3.1).

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207 Program notes, Eleventh Zimriya, Gala Closing Concert, Tel Aviv, Thursday, December 7th, 1979 at 20:30.
208 Joshua Jacobson, director of the Zamir Chorale of Boston, interview by the author, Boston, MA, June 4, 2012.
### Figure 3.1: Harlap - *Akedat Yitzchak*, Text and Transliteration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 <em>Vayehi achar hadvarim haele vehaelohim nisa et avraham vayomer elav avraham hineni.</em></td>
<td>Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 <em>Vayomer kach na et bincha et yechidcha asher ahavta et yitzchak velech lecha el erets hamoriya vehalehu sham leola al achad heharim asher omar elecha.</em></td>
<td>And He said, “Take your son, your favored son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 <em>Vayashkem avraham baboker vayachavosh et chamoro vayikach et shnei nearav ito veet yitzchak beno vayevaka atsei ola vayakam vayelech amar lo haelohim.</em></td>
<td>So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 <em>Bayom hashlishi vayisa avraham et einav vayar et hamakom merachok bayom hashlishi vayisa avraham et einav.</em></td>
<td>On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 <em>Vayomer avraham el nearav shvu lachem po im hachamor vaani vehanaar nelcha ad ko venishtachave venashuva aleichem.</em></td>
<td>Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go there; we will worship and we will return to you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 <em>Vayikach avraham et atsei haola vayasem al yitzchak beno vayikach beyado et haesh veet hamachelet vayelchu shneihem yachdav.</em></td>
<td>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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209 Writing music in Hebrew is inherently problematic because music is written left to right but Hebrew is written right to left. Salamone Rossi (ca. 1570-1630), a Jewish Italian composer, solved this problem by writing the music left to right and keeping the Hebrew syllables in tact but reversing the order within the word. Harlap has adopted Rossi’s technique. *Don Harran, Salamone Rossi: Jewish Musician in Late Renaissance Mantua*, (New York: Oxford University Press,) 1999.
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Vayomer yitzchak el avraham aviv vayomer hineni beni vayomer hine haesh vechaetsim veaye hase leola.</td>
<td>Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vayomer avraham vayomer elohim yire lo hase leola beni vayelchu shneihem yachdav.</td>
<td>And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vayavou el hamakom asher amar lo haelohim vayiven sham avraham et hamizbeach vayaaroch et haetsim vayaakod et yitzchak beno vayaseem oto al hamizbeach mimaal laetsim.</td>
<td>They arrived at the place of which God had told them. Abraham built an altar there; he laid the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vayishlach avraham et yado vayikach et hamaachelet lishchot et beno.</td>
<td>And Abraham pick up the knife to slay his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Vayikra elav malach adonai min hashamayim vayomer avraham hineni.</td>
<td>Then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Vayomer al tishlach yadcha el hanaar veal taas lo meuma ki ata yadati ki yere elohim ata velo chasachta et bincha et yechidcha mimeni.</td>
<td>And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vayisa avraham et einav vayar vehine ayil achar neechaz basvach bekarnav vayelech avraham vayikach et haayil leola tachat beno.</td>
<td>When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vayikra avraham shem hamakom hahu adonai yire asher yeamer hayom behar adonai yerae.</td>
<td>And Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harlap’s text begins with God’s instruction to Abraham to sacrifice his son and ends after God’s
intervention.\footnote{Lieber, ed. \textit{Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary}; 117-122.}

Harlap divides these fourteen verses into three distinct, yet unequal sections (Figure 3.2).

\textbf{Figure 3.2: Harlap - \textit{Akedat Yitzchak}, Structural Outline}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>A’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4-11</td>
<td>12-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-43</td>
<td>44-169</td>
<td>170-202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This tripartite division is based on:

a. The unity of time, place and action in verses 1-3;

b. The dramatic narrative of the event (vss. 4-12), and

c. The synoptic closure provided by the final two verses.

Harlap reinforces this textual division by use of musical motives that are generally unique to each section. The first of these, which appears in the opening measures of the piece (m. 1-2), consists of of two ascending fourths followed by a series of major and minor seconds (Example 3.1).

\textbf{Example 3.1: Harlap—\textit{Akedat Yitzchak}, Theme I, mm. 1-2}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{harlap主題I_1-2.png}
\end{center}

This motive reappears in mm. 187-189, transposed down one minor second (Example 3.2).
Example 3.2: Harlap—Akedat Yitzchak, Theme I, mm. 187-189

The presence of this theme at both the beginning and end of the composition creates an inevitable sense of musical recapitulation and finality at the end of the story.

The absence of this theme in the middle of the composition (mm. 44-169) accentuates the separateness of this segment. For the setting of verses four through eleven Harlap introduces a new theme, with a pitch centricity around A (Example 3.3). This motive utilizes ascending and descending minor seconds and a descending tritone, followed by ascending and descending minor thirds. As we will see, these pitches are expressively meaningful to Harlap.

Example 3.3: Harlap—Akedat Yitzchak, Theme II, mm. 71-75

This second theme appears almost continuously throughout this middle portion of the composition.

Each segment of the larger ABA structure may, in turn, be seen to contain smaller formal structures. Section A demonstrates an internal tripartite structure in which each verse of text
constitutes one portion of the formal design. As in the larger structure, the b section of this group is distinguished from the flanking a sections based on the absence of theme 1 (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3: Harlap—Akedat Yitzchak, section A, Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrostructure</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microstructure</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>10-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>31-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text of verse 2 (b) is the command issued to Abraham by God; as such, Harlap creates an entirely new theme for God’s speech, sung by the *tutti* bass section (Example 3.4). This melody begins in the locrian mode, starting on F, and evolves into pitches from the chromatic scale.

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211 Perhaps Harlap is aware of the tradition in the passions of the Christian liturgy that the voice of Jesus is portrayed by the bass voice (*Vox Christi*).
Example 3.4: Harlap - *Akedat Yitzchak*, Theme III, mm. 10-30

Like the first motive, this theme also reappears at the end of the composition, this time as the Angel’s speech (God’s surrogate) in verse 12 (Example 3.5). Although Harlap uses the same music, the Angel’s version is transposed up a major third and sung by the *tutti* basses and an alto solo.
Example 3.5: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme III, Angel’s voice, mm. 170-186

The return of this theme marks the formal reprise of the opening A section to close the composition’s musical form. In this concluding section (A’), however, Harlap reverses the order
of the themes, using theme III (Example 3.4) for verse 12, theme I (Example 3.1) for verse 13 and several different, previously-heard motives for the concluding coda.

**Figure 3.4: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Form, Section A’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrostructure</th>
<th>A’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microstructure</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>170-186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subdivisions of the lengthy B segment are more complicated. While the music is essentially strophic (all but one verse using theme II (Example 3.3)), Harlap changes vocal texture for each verse.

**Figure 3.5: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Form, Section B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>44-78 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence or absence of these three themes creates a macro-formal structure for Akedat Yitzchak. Harlap uses variations of each of these themes to create internal variety. These variations include repetitions, modifications, expansions, and transformations of each theme.

Theme I (Example 3.1) undergoes the most variations, and yet contains the most chordal, tertian harmony found in Akedat Yitzchak. While this theme and its variations are not in a specific key, Harlap uses seventh-chords to harmonize the melody. By composing a tertian, chordal harmonization in the lower voices Harlap emphasizes the distinctive melodic content of his theme.

After an initial straightforward presentation of theme I, Harlap elongates the theme by expanding the first intervallic gesture from consecutive fourths to a fourth and a minor sixth (Example 3.5). This happens within the context of a rather traditional phrase structure.
Example 3.6: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme I Expanded (mm. 2-8)
Example 3.6 (cont.)

Harlap repeats this process in measures 30 through 43 and in the recapitulation at the end of the piece (mm. 187-196, Example 3.7). This final version is nearly the same as measures 33-36 but transposed down a minor second. It uses the same pitch content and rhythms, modifying only slightly to accommodate the different text.
Example 3.7: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme I Expanded (mm. 187-193)
In the first two statements of theme I (Example 3.1) Harlap omits the pitches A-natural, B-natural and E-natural from an otherwise completely chromatic pitch set. The transposition of this third statement down a minor second enables these pitches to be present. Harlap’s early omission of these pitches may well have been intentional, knowing that he wished to end the work in “A,” a tonal center in which these pitches fill the traditionally prominent roles of “tonic” (A), “dominant” (E) and V/V B.

Theme II (Example 3.3) also undergoes a number of variations, all of which are connected by the use of minor seconds and tritones, intervals which, as we will see, are evocative for Harlap. The most common version of the second theme begins on either A or F (Example 3.8).

**Example 3.8: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IIa (mm. 73-75)**

Harlap uses the initial version of theme II 37 times in the B section (mm. 47-53, 63-65, 69-76, 87-90, 98-111, 113-119, 125-126, 122-129, 151-156). In several of these instances Harlap repeats the theme consecutively without additional melodic material in between (mm. 47-53, 69-76, 87-90, 98-105, 125-129).

In three instances, Harlap extends theme II (53-63--Example 3.9, 88-98--Example 3.10, 103-112--Example 3.11). All three of these expansions use the same melody; the middle version displaced down an octave. In Theme IIa Harlap uses the same melodic gesture as the initial statement but replaces the tritone with a descending fifth and adds a scalar passage of major and minor seconds.
Example 3.9: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme II’ (mm. 53-63)

This extended version lasts eleven measures in length.

Although theme II occurs 37 times within the B section, this portion of the composition commences with a simplified version of the theme that maintains the pitch centricity of A (Example 3.10)

Example 3.10: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IIb (mm. 44-46)

Harlap presents theme IIb a total of four times—twice in its initial presentation of the rhythm (mm. 44-45 and 65-67) and twice in augmentation (mm. 52-61 and 87-99).

The second half of the B section contains yet another, even simpler version of theme II that focuses on the tritone (Example 3.11).
Examples 3.11: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IIc (mm. 137-138)

Harlap treats this version (theme IIc) in a variety of contrapuntal manipulations, including retrograde and inversion, that occur twenty-five times in the second half of the B section (mm. 135-140, 159 and 160-165).

As the following chart illustrates (Figure 3.6), Section B is divisible into eight sections, one for each verse of the Biblical text; all but one of these sections use some variant of the Theme II.

**Figure 3.6: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Section B Micro form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>44-78 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Motive</td>
<td>II a, b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only portion of the B section that lacks any version of Theme II is Harlap’s setting of Genesis 22:7, in which Isaac speaks. Harlap composes Isaac’s voice avoiding the tritone-half-step laden pitch content of Theme II in favor of a diatonic melody. Perhaps he felt that Isaac’s natural if naïve question, “Here is the fire wood but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” requires more traditional tonality (c minor) and melodic diatonicism?
The large ABA framework of *Akedat Yitzchak* has both an organizational and psychological function. On the whole, the music changes for each verse of text. This frame holds the piece together and creates a sense of unity across the music. Psychologically it provides a musical return that brings closure to the story.

To further enhance the sense of musical cohesion, Harlap creates a fourth theme that appears throughout *Akedat Yitzchak*. This fourth theme assumes one of two related melodic contours, both which utilize a fourth

**Example 3.12: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IV**

a. m. 7

![Example 3.12: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IV (a) m. 7](image)

b. mm. 8-9

![Example 3.12: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Theme IV (b) mm. 8-9](image)

Sixteen times in the course of *Akedat Yitzchak*, Harlap sets the words vayomer ("said") or amar lo ("said to him") to a motive comprised of an ascending minor third, a descending fourth, and a half step (Example 3.12a). Often, theme IV appears in the B section as interjections accompanying dialogue between Abraham and Isaac or as imitative counterpoint primarily between the alto and soprano voices.\(^{212}\) As the music transitions from the B section to a return of the A material, theme IV appears again in the soprano and alto (solo) voices (mm. 166-169).

Given the prominent association of the motive with the word "vayomer," we shall refer to it as the "vayomer" motive. That said, it should be noted that the motive occasionally appears within longer melodic passages that do not contain either "vayomer" or "amar lo" (e.g. the soprano part,

\(^{212}\) A single entry appears in the bass part in m. 146.
Closely related to the vayomer motive is another motive that substitutes a perfect fifth in place of the earlier perfect fourth (see Example 3.12b). This theme appears in association with four different words: hineni (“Here I am,” mm. 8-9 and 169-170), Nineni beni (mm. 146-7) Avraham (“Abraham,” mm. 149-150) and haelohim (“the God,” mm. 42-43).

Not only do these motives share similar melodic outlines and pitch centers, but they also appear in the same sections of text. The text of Genesis 22 frequently uses various combinations of the two different texts: vayomer...hineni (“and he said...here I am,” mm. 7-9, 146-147, 149-150, 167-169) or amar lo...haelhim (“he [God] said to him,” mm. 42-43). Accordingly, Harlap uses both motives, even though the words pass between different voices of the choir (Example 3.13).
Example 3.13: Harlap - *Akedat Yitzchak*, Theme IV (mm. 7-9)

The musical function of this fourth theme is to provide accompaniment figures and musical continuity across the 202 measures of *Akedat Yitzchak*. These recurring motives are the exception in what is otherwise a highly-sectionalized composition.

Harlap also uses motive four to maintain the sentence structure of his Biblical text. In the Old Testament, *vayomer* (“and he said”) is used as a tool to differentiate dialogue from narration in a language without punctuation. As Harlap told the musicologist Robert Fleisher in 1996, he attempts to use the Biblical texts exactly as written, without variation.\(^{213}\)

The musical similarity of this pair of motives allows Harlap to create music that imitates the text. When God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son (vs. 1), Abraham responds *vayomer... hineni* (“and he said ‘Here I [Abraham] am’”). Harlap uses the “vayomer” motto in the soprano voice (m. 7) followed by its companion as a baritone solo (mm. 8-9) (Example 3.14a). Later, when Abraham responds to Isaac’s inquiry about the absence of a sacrificial animal, Harlap sets the same text to the same motives. Thus, in mm. 144-145 Harlap sets *vayomer*

\(^{213}\) Fleisher, *Twenty Israeli Composers*, 172.
Yitzchak (“and Isaac said to Abraham”) to the “vayomer” motive (mm. 144-145), while Abraham’s response, Hineni beni (“Here I am, my son”) as a baritone solo that uses the alternate version of the motive (mm. 146-147) (Example 3.14b).

Example 3.14: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak

a. mm.7-9
Example 3.14: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak

b. mm. 144-147

By using the same text, theme and vocal scoring, Harlap clearly delineates Abraham from both
his God and his son, despite the conflicting loyalties involved.

Harlap uses this motive not only to make this thematic connection, but also to increase dramatic tension. In verse seven, the word *vayomer* appears five times:

*vayomer* ytizack *vayomer el avraham aviv* *vayomer hineni beni* *vayomer hine haesh vehaetsim veaye hase leola vayomer avraham*

(“And Isaac said to his father Abraham,” ’My father!’ and he [Abraham] said ‘Here I am, my son’ and he (Isaac) said ‘Behold the fire and the wood but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ And Abraham said…”)

When Harlap sets verse seven, he uses *vayomer* eleven times. Nine of these instances use the “vayomer” motive to indicate dialogue, the other two appearances of the word being set to different musical material. In this passage (mm. 144-147), Harlap delineates what Abraham says he will do from what he actually does. The question of where Abraham’s allegiance lies—his God, his family or himself—is the central theological question of this Torah portion.

*Extra Musical Devices*

Now that I have explained understand how *Akedat Yitzchak* functions as a composition I will how these elements support a theological argument or build a dramatic narrative. Although a practicing Jew, Harlap’s fascination with Genesis 22 is less as an allegory of faith than a drama depicting Abraham’s moral dilemma. As he explains “There is no doubt that this is a human and not a religious drama *per se.*”\(^{214}\) In this section we will examine how Harlaps utilizes tone painting and musical characterizations to emphasize specific theological and dramatic interpretations.

Harlap sets only the first fourteen verses of the twenty-four that comprise Genesis 22, a selection that excludes the angel’s second address to Abraham:

The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,/ and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,/I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your

\(^{214}\) Harlap, interview by the author, e-mail, October 26, 2013.
descendants shall seize the gates of their foes./And all the nations of the earth shall bless
themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

One could interpret the angel’s speech as the moral of Genesis 22: because Abraham was willing
to sacrifice his son, his family will become numerous and favored. In a way, this blessing
foreshadows the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel and the growth of the Jewish people.
This focus on legacy is furthered in verses twenty-three and twenty-four by the long line of
Abraham’s descendants. By ignoring the last ten verses Harlap tightens the focus of the narrative
to the relation between a father and his son rather than the hundreds of future generations that
result from his act of faith.

This omission excepted, Harlap sets the Biblical text fairly straightforwardly (excepting
occasional alterations of syntax) to emphasize the parable’s drama. Harlap emphasizes two
specific verses in particular (4 and 5), devoting ninety of the composition’s
two-hundred-and-two measures to the description of the journey to Mt. Moriah and the moments
preceding the sacrifice. These verses come after God’s command (vs. 2) but well before the
story’s *denouement*. By devoting so much music to these two verses, Harlap builds considerable
suspense by textual and musical repetition.

The only change Harlap makes in the Biblical text involves the angel’s dramatic
intervention to prevent Abraham from killing Isaac (mm. 160-163). Harlap changes the word
order so that the cry, “Avraham, Avraham” comes after, rather than before, the setting of the
scene itself: “And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” Harlap’s
aim was that this delay would heighten the drama in such a way that “we actually see the angel
stopping Abraham from slaying his son.”

Although Harlap rarely changes the text, he manipulates it by inserting pauses that build
dramatic tension. Twice during God’s command to Abraham (mm. 10-30), Harlap inserts
measures of rest. The first pause (m. 17) separates the descriptor “whom thou lovest” from its
object, *Yitzchak*. Harlap intends this silence to question which of his two sons Abraham loves
more - Isaac or Ishmael. This moment of tension is essential to Harlap’s understanding of the
story:

———

215 Ibid.
The great importance of this test by God is to determine that Abraham is willing to sacrifice, not any of his sons, but the one he loved the most ie. Isaac and not Ishmael.\textsuperscript{216} Harlap uses the second silence to separate \textit{velech lecha el erets hamoriya…} (“go to the land of Moriah…”) from \textit{vehaalehu sham leola} (“…and sacrifice him as a burnt offering”). Only now does Abraham know what God expects him to do. Harlap explains that “the reality of the tragedy comes with these words.”\textsuperscript{217} By inserting a pause in the musical setting of this passage, he heightens the suspense once more.

Later in the composition, Harlap uses not silence, but melodic and harmonic stasis to create a similar sense of suspense. At measure 148, Isaac asks \textit{Hine haesh vehaetsim veaye hase leola} (“Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”) to which Abraham replies \textit{Elohim yire lo hase leola beni} (“God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”). Here Harlap has the choir narrate “\textit{vayelch shneihem yachdav}” (so they went both of them together) in unison octaves. After over a hundred measures of imitative and contrapuntal writing in the previous section, this unison octave writing is startling. This texture change paints the image of Abraham and Isaac leaving their servants and going to the mountain alone. By bringing the harmony to a standstill, Harlap draws our attention to Isaac as he realizes that he is to be the sacrifice.\textsuperscript{218}

Just as Harlap uses musical devices to dramatize the story, he represents the characters as human beings with conflicting emotions and loyalties rather than as as religious icons. Harlap asserts that

There is no doubt that Abraham (along with Isaac and Yaakov), were great religious patriarchs whose love and obedience for God was unlimited, but they were great human beings as well…with emotions and empathy.\textsuperscript{219}

To humanizes the characters, Harlap gives each a musical identity- a specific range and vocal scoring (often a solo voice). \textit{Akedat Yitzchak} is not unlike Mendelssohn’s \textit{Elijah} where the central character has a specific recognition motive heard when the prophet is about to speak or, occasionally, when indirect references to Elijah are made by others. Harlap uses specific

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
motives, intervals and/or harmonies as descriptors of Abraham, Isaac, the Angel and God. The result is a group of musical characterizations that project their humanity (in the case of Abraham and Isaac) or authority (God and the Angel).

Abraham, the father protagonist, is sung by a baritone soloist. Whenever Abraham speaks Harlap uses one of the following two motives (Example 3.15 a-b):

**Example 3.15: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Musical Characterization of Abraham**

a. Motive III, mm. 87- 100

![Motive III, mm. 87- 100](image)

b. Motive IVb, m. 8

![Motive IVb, m. 8](image)

The first motive (3.15a) contains multiple descending minor seconds and a descending tritone. For the second (3.15b), Harlap uses an ascending perfect fourth, descending perfect fifth and diatonic return to the starting note. Harlap has commented that these intervals are “symbolic
dissonances of the great drama which is about to unfold.” In other words, the chromatic movement in Abraham’s speech parallels the character's fear and anxiety. Similarly, we may read the perfect intervals of the second motive as reflecting Abraham’s loyalty to God.

In addition to motives used expressly for Abraham’s speech, Harlap expresses Abraham’s suffering through use of the minor seconds and tritone (Example 3.16 a-b). These intervals appear in the first half of the composition whenever Abraham is mentioned (tritone: mm. 57-58, 92-93, 121-124 and 159; minor seconds: mm. 55-57, 88-91 and 159.)

Example 3.16: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, Musical Characterization of Abraham
  a. m. 121-124

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220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
In verse five, Abraham tells his servants to stay at the base of the mountain while Isaac and he proceed with the sacrifice preparations. Here Harlap inserts text from four vayisa Avraham (“and Abraham lifted up”) and sets the text with melodies that contain tritones. The word Avraham is set first with an ascending tritone (m. 121-122) and then a descending tritone (m. 123). When Abraham builds the sacrificial altar, Harlap describes the passage with Avraham descending from c' to b'.
During the B section Harlap primarily uses open fifths (a-e) to describe Abraham’s actions (mm. 62, 70-71, 80, 91, 121-125, 137). The absence of a tonally defining third helps to create suspense. Occasionally, the missing third is included resulting in an a-minor chord (mm. 97-99, 104, 108) or the e is lowered a minor second (e-flat) to create a diminished triad (m.113) over the omnipresent A pedal. The resolution of the open fifths to either an a-minor or a-diminished chords suggests that the drama will not end happily.

After the dramatic climax (mm.160-170), Harlap’s representation of Abraham is no longer predictable. Now, the intervals and chords used to represent Abraham’s speech and action are more varied (Example 3.17a-b).

**Example 3.17: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak**

a. mm. 192-193
In verse 13, when Abraham substitutes the ram for Isaac, Harlap has the choir chant homophonic seventh-chords (Ex. 3.17a). Harlap uses a similar textural gesture at the end of the composition when the text reads, *Avraham shem hamakom hahu adonai yire* ("and Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”). The lower voices sing the text over homophonic seventh-chords and G-major while the sopranos sing an ornamented melodic version of the same material in their upper register. While these two examples are similar, they are unlike the other musical characterizations of the Patriarch.

By creating a consistent motive pattern for Abraham’s speech in the first part of the composition and then ignoring this scheme at the drama’s end, Harlap implies a fundamental change in Abraham’s character and faith. Many theologians have noted that the near sacrifice may have caused an irreparable rift between God and Abraham and between Abraham and Isaac.

222 After the *Akeidah*, Abraham lived another seventy-five years, but God never spoke with him again.223 Similarly, there is no record that Isaac spoke with Abraham after the *Akeidah*. If the trial proved Abraham’s loyalty to God, it also destroyed Abraham’s faith in God and Isaac’s trust in


223 Ibid.
his father. By developing a motivic pattern for Abraham’s speech in the first part of *Akedat Yitzchak*, and then abandoning this design after the sacrifice, Harlap suggests that Abraham has been transformed by the sacrifice drama.\(^{224}\)

Although God speaks only once in *Akedat Yitzchak*, Harlap nonetheless uses musical devices to create a complex portrait of the Creator. The entire bass section of the choir personifies the voice of God, but Harlap uses polymetric music performed at a rapid tempo (*allegro ritmico*) (Example 3.18). As compared to the more straightforward use of meter and tempo for Abraham and Isaac’s speech, this use of polymeter suggests that God is mysterious and unpredictable.

**Example 3.18: Harlap - *Akedat Yitzchak*, mm. 10-3**

![Musical notation](image)

Had Harlap chosen to represent God using diatonic melody and tertian harmony moving at an even, consistent pace, that would have conveyed a very different and more traditional view of the Deity as paternal, trustworthy and just. Harlap’s use of irregular meter and non-diatonic scalar passages evokes an image of God that is more mysterious and temperamental.

\(^{224}\) Ibid.
Like Abraham, the intervals of the minor second and tritone dominate God’s speech as well as his actions. When the text invokes God’s name, Harlap uses either half-steps (m. 165, mm. 179-80, m. 18, Example 3.19a) or tritones (m. 159, Example 3.19b).

**Example 3.19: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak**

a. mm. 179-182
Additionally, words that relate to God’s commandment – “vayaaroch” (he prepared), “hamizbeach” (the altar) and “laetsim” (the wood), “vayishlach” (he stretched), “lishchot et beno” (to kill his son) – are set using tritones. In an interview with the author, the composer explained that these intervals represent suffering: “To represent this pain I have used both the minor second and tritone.” Consequently, we can interpret Harlap’s interpretation of suffering as having two possible meanings. The first is that this trial was as painful for God as it was for

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225 Ibid.
Abraham. Like a parent teaching his child a lesson, God suffers putting his child through this trauma. For this reason Harlap suggests that God has empathy for his flock. The second similarity between the musical language used for both Abraham and God may indicate a deep connection between the deity and the patriarch, i.e. they think and speak alike.

The Angel, as a servant of and spokesperson for God, receives the same musical treatment as God (Example 3.20). For the Angel’s speech (mm. 170-186), Harlap uses the same music (albeit transposed up a minor second) now scored as a duet between an alto soloist and the tutti basses.
Example 3.20: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, mm. 170-186

While the specific musical features used to portray God and his angelic messenger create a sense of mystery, the consistency with which Harlap uses this style suggests a certain steadiness. Harlap seems to propose that while God’s ways may not always be clear or decipherable to humankind, there is a certain constancy, perhaps perfection, in his ways.
Although Isaac is the object of the sacrifice, the Old Testament text records little reaction, verbal or otherwise, from him. Accordingly, in Harlap’s composition Isaac sings only once (mm. 146-149, Example 3.21). Harlap chooses a tenor soloist to represent Isaac. As the reader may recall, considerable theological debate surrounds Isaac’s age at the time of the sacrifice. Harlap’s choice of a high male voice supports the interpretation that Isaac is a young boy. Unlike the voices of Abraham, the Angel and God, Isaac’s speech melody is strikingly diatonic, centering around c-minor and composed primarily of fifths and thirds.

Example 3.21: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, mm.147-149

Harlap’s use of lyric diatonicism for Isaac’s speech, especially coming in the midst of so much angular, chromatic writing, seems to suggest that Abraham’s son is both unaware of his possible fate and utterly without guile.

Although Isaac’s voice is diatonic, when the textual narrative refers to him as Yitzchak beno (“Isaac, his son”) Harlap consistently uses tritones (m. 140, Example 3.22 and mm. 162-163).

Example 3.22: Harlap - Akedat Yitzchak, (mm. 139-140)

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The use of this interval reminds us that Isaac is a child of both Abraham (physically) and God (spiritually) and that his story is one of suffering.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explored aspects of Harlap’s biographical and musical experiences that provide useful background for the genesis of *Akedat Yitzchak*. I then provided an overview of the composition, exploring how Harlap uses various themes to create macro and micro structures and as well to build musical cohesion. Finally, we have explored how Harlap uses musical devices to characterize Abraham, Isaac, God and the Angel and to build dramatic tension.

It is clear that Harlap is interested in the story as a human, rather than religious, drama. Harlap uses range and instrumentation, as well as the intervals of a minor second and tritone, to represent the characters as human beings with varied and conflicting emotions rather than as religious paragons. Harlap views the patriarchs as mortal, experiencing the very human emotions of fear and suffering. In a summary of his intent, he states:

> If the audience will empathize with the pain of such an inhuman test of a Father towards his son, and a sense of elation at the end where Isaac is saved through God’s hand, then I will have succeeded in accomplishing what I have set out to do.

Harlap’s interpretation of the *Akeidah* has similarities to those by Brunelleschi, Caravaggio and Rembrandt. All of these artists depict Genesis 22 not as an allegory of faith but as a story about real humans experiencing hardship and suffering.

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227 Ibid.
Chapter Four:

The Binding of Isaac as Creative Challenge: Menachem Zur’s Akedat Yitzchak

Biographical Information

Menachem Zur was born in Tel-Aviv, Israel in 1942. After completing his undergraduate studies at the College of Music Teachers in Tel Aviv, Israel (1964), he studied music theory at the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem (1967). He then came to the United States where he completed a second Bachelor’s in Music from Mannes College of Music in New York (1971), a Masters of Fine Arts from Sarah Lawrence College (1972), and a Doctorate of Musical Arts from Columbia University (1976).

Since returning to Israel, Zur has become one of the country’s most celebrated composers, winning the International Society for Contemporary Music’s (ISCM) Electronic Music Competition (1975), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1981), two ACUM awards (Israeli Association of Composers), the Joel Engel Prize (Tel-Aviv, 1991), the Mark Lavri Prize (Haifa), the ACUM Judges' Prize (1992), the Prime Minister’s Prize (2001) and the ACUM prize for life achievements (2001). Zur has also served as chair of the Israel League of Composers (1992-4) and the Israeli delegate to the ISCM (1992-6).

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229 Ibid.


232 Ibid.
Zur’s academic areas of specialization are music theory, composition, electro-acoustic music, Schenkerian analysis, and the works of Igor Stravinsky.233 Zur has taught at academic institutions in both the United State and Israel (he holds dual citizenship).234 Early in his career was a professor at Queens College, CUNY (1972-76), Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1985-1987, 1991-present) and New York University.235 He served the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance for over 30 years (1976-2011) as professor of music and continues to teach and advise students as an Emeritus professor.236

Zur’s compositions range in scope from chamber to symphonic works, from a cappella choral pieces to electronic music to opera. His primary focus is on instrumental works for chamber and large-scale ensembles.237 In the former he has developed a series of works collectively titled Discussions that explores the technical and aesthetic boundaries between various groups of instruments.238 His most famous work is Symphony, No. 2 ‘Letters’ (1988-94), is a series of “musical correspondences” between Zur and the composers he considers the founding fathers of modern music: Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Berg.239 ‘Letters’ contains no musical quotations, but adopts the style or compositional procedures of each of the composers. Zur considers his compositional style to be a late twentieth-century extension of of the work of

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236 Schleifer, "Zur, Menachem" 2014.
239 Schleifer, "Zur, Menachem," 2014
Schoenberg, Stravinsky and, especially Berg.\textsuperscript{240}

Jewish ideas and themes permeate Zur's work, especially his many vocal compositions.\textsuperscript{241} His short choral pieces tend be conservative settings of liturgical or sacred texts.\textsuperscript{242} His longer, more dramatic vocal works use a more experimental style and typically set texts from the Hebrew Bible or Jewish legends.\textsuperscript{243} Although Zur writes for a wide array of vocal and instrumental combinations, two textures predominate: works for vocal ensemble and computerized, magnetic tape and compositions for children’s choir.\textsuperscript{244 245} Of the latter, many were commissioned and performed by the Ankor Children's Choir between 1986 and 1996.\textsuperscript{246}

\textit{Akedat Yitzchak (1989)}

\textit{Akedat Yitzchak (1989)} is scored for piano and four-voice women or children’s choir.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{240} Schleifer, "Zur, Menachem," 2014
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{And There Arose a Mist}, Cantata for Choir, Magnetic Tape, Percussion and Brass Quartet (1972); \textit{Shiluvim (Combinations)} for Children's Choir and Magnetic Tape (1986); \textit{Alleluia} for vocal sextet and magnetic tape (1999); Schleifer, "Zur, Menachem," 2012, 2014; Zur, interview by the author, May 7, 2014.
\textsuperscript{247} Zur, Menachem. \textit{Akedat Yitzchak (The Sacrifice of Isaac)}; Zur, interview by the author, e-mail, January 26, 2012.
Originally written for the Ankor Children’s Choir of Israel at the request of their conductor, Arnon Merzo,248 the work has been performed only once (in Brno, Czechoslovakia) as part of a European tour.249 According to the composer, this performance was historically significant to the local audience, many of whom were attending the concert in a hall that had been the headquarters of the Nazi Gestapo during World War II.250 Several audience members told the composer that the last time they had been in this hall with children was when the Nazi’s had gathered families for transport to the death camps. Understandably, audience members cried when, several decades later, Jewish-Israeli children sang about the Sacrifice of Isaac.

Zur’s relationship to the emotional content of the story of the binding of Isaac is a complicated one. In an interview with the author Zur explained that although “the story of the Akeidah is the most dramatic of the Jewish stories,” he perceived a difference between the theatrical nature of the narrative and the way it was originally presented in worship:

I recognized a contrast between the way it is “performed” in the synagogue with the regular biblical cantillation of the tropes, cantillation that injects an objective, impersonal manner of retelling the story in spite of the drama that the characters undergo.251 Zur became interested in cantillation, the method of chanting used in Jewish services, because of how it creates tension between textual and musical content. As Zur sees it, cantillation allows one to tell a story objectively, without engaging a personal or emotional lens. Zur does not quote or use musical material from the Torah trope. Instead, he uses the aesthetic of chant to “contrast” the text and the drama.252 As I will demonstrate, in his setting of Akedat Yitzchak Zur achieves this contrast by means of changes in dynamics, register, texture and pitch content.

In choosing an aesthetic stance in which the music exists “in spite of” the text, Zur aligns himself with the compositional tradition of the early twentieth century composers he so admires: “Stravinsky in Oedipus Rex and Akedat Yitzhak got it right.”253 This sense that there is a “right”

249 Zur, Menachem. Akedat Yitzchak (The Sacrifice of Isaac); Menachem Zur, interview by the author, e-mail, January 26, 2012.
251 Ibid.
and “wrong” way to compose is something that Zur emphasizes throughout his interviews. Zur sees expressive or emotional representations of religious stories as “kitsch.” The University of Chicago Theories of Media glossary defines kitsch as “a source of pleasure for a mass audience” that “reaffirms rather than challenges the collective norm.” Zur uses the term to suggest a lesser form of art; for Zur kitsch is “Stating the obvious, highlighting the biblical drama in a symmetrical way to the text.” Indeed, Zur is critical of colleagues who have turned Biblical text “into a Hollywood-like drama.” He argues that

> It is easy to hear cinematic-like crescendo in obvious places in that story. That would be bad taste. A similar cheap effect would be to write about the Holocaust in a realistic way, something that I can't conceive of.

This is not to say that Zur aspires to the kind of emotional distance that is perhaps implicit in twelve-tone music. Instead, Zur aims for “a counterpoint of drama and musical tension.” Furthermore, by subduing the obvious emotional content, he feels that the music has a “chilling” effect.

*Composition Overview*

Zur sets nineteen out of the twenty-four verses of Genesis 22, five more verses than Harlap does (Figure 4.1). These additional verses add the Angel’s second blessing, Abraham’s return to his manservants, and the homecoming to Beersheba.

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254 Whitney Rugg, University of Chicago Theories of Media glossary, last modified Winter 2002, \[http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/kitsch.htm.\]
258 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vayehi achar hadvarim haele vehaelohim nisa et avraham vayomer elav avraham hineni.</td>
<td>Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vayomer kach na et bincha et yechidcha asher ahavta et yitzchak velech lecha el erets hamoriya vehalehu sham leola al achad heharim asher omar elecha.</td>
<td>And He said, “Take your son, your favored son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vayashkem avraham baboker yayachavosh et chamoro yayikach et shnei nearav ito veet yitzchak beno vayevaka atsei ola vayakam vayelech amar lo haelohim.</td>
<td>So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bayom hashlishi vayisa avraham et einav vayar et hamakom merachok bayom hashlishi vayisa avraham et einav.</td>
<td>On the third day Abraham looking up and saw the place from afar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vayomer avraham el nearav shvu lachem po im hachamor vaani vehanaar nelcha ad ko venishtachave venashuva aleichem.</td>
<td>Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go there; we will worship and we will return to you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vayikach avraham et atsei haola vayasem al yitzchak beno yayikach beyado et haesh veet hamachelet vayelchu shneihem yachdav.</td>
<td>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Vayomer yitzchak el avraham aviv vayomer hineni beni vayomer hine haesh vehaetsim veaye hase leola.</td>
<td>Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vayomer avraham vayomer elohim yire lo hase leola beni vayelchu shneihem yachdav.</td>
<td>And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vayavou el hamakom asher amar lo haelohim vayiven sham avraham et hamizbech vayaaroch et haetsim vayaakod et yitzchak beno vayasem oto al hamizbech mimaal laetsim.</td>
<td>They arrived at the place of which God had told them. Abraham built an altar there; he laid the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vayishlach avraham et yado vayikach et hamaachelet lishchot et beno.</td>
<td>And Abraham pick up the knife to slay his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Vayikra elav malach adonai min hashamayim vayomer avraham hineni.</td>
<td>Then an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven: “Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Vayomer al tishlach yadcha el hanaar veal taas lo meuma ki ata yadati ki yere elohim ata velo chasachta et bincha et yecheidcha mimeni.</td>
<td>And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vayisa avraham et einav vayar vehine ayil achar neechaz basvach bekarmav vayelech avraham vayikach et haayil leola tachat beno.</td>
<td>When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vayikra Avraham shem hamakom hahu adonai yire asher yeamer hayom behar adonai yerae.</td>
<td>And Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vayikra mal‘ach Adonai el Avraham shenit min ha shamayim.</td>
<td>The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Vayomer, “bi nishbatim n’um Adonai, ki ya’an asher asita et ha -davar ha-zeh, v’lo chasachta et bincha, et y’chidcha.</td>
<td>and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ki varech avarech’cha v’harbah arbeh et zar’acha k’kochvei ha shamayim v’kachol asher al s’fat ha yam, v’yirash zar’acha et sha’ar oyvav.</td>
<td>I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>V’hitbaruachu v’zr’achah kol goyei ha aretz eikev aher shamatah b’koli.</td>
<td>And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1 (cont.)  

| 19 | Vayashav avraham el ne arav vayakumu vayelchu yachdav el be er sheva vayeshev avraham biver sheva. | And Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba. |

Based on observations of the score, it appears that Zur makes musical divisions that divide the nineteen verses of Biblical text into ten sections:

a. God’s commandment (vss. 1-2);

b. The journey to Mt. Moriah (vs. 3)

c. Abraham and Isaac’s departure from the servants (vss. 4-6);

d. Isaac’s question about the absence of the sacrificial offering (vss. 7-8)

e. The attempted sacrifice (vss. 9-11);

f. The Angel’s interruption and the sacrifice of the ram (vss. 12-14);

g. The Angel’s first blessing (vss. 15-16);

h. The Angel’s second blessing (vs. 17);

i. The conclusion to the blessing (vs. 18);

j. Abraham and Isaac’s return to their servants and to Beersheba (vs. 19)

Obviously, not all of these textual segments are of equal dramatic significance; nevertheless, Zur uses his perception of the inherent structure of the narrative as the basis for creating a musical form.

Figure 4.2: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, Text and Music

<p>| | | | | | | | | | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>I</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verses</td>
<td>1-2 (2)</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
<td>4-6 (3)</td>
<td>7-8 (2)</td>
<td>9-11 (3)</td>
<td>End of 11-14 (3)</td>
<td>15-16 (2)</td>
<td>17 (1)</td>
<td>18 (1)</td>
<td>19 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm.</td>
<td>1-15 (15)</td>
<td>16-20 /1 (4)</td>
<td>20/3-40 /1 (21)</td>
<td>41-53 /1 (13)</td>
<td>53/2-68 (16)</td>
<td>70-88 (19)</td>
<td>89-10 /1 (12)</td>
<td>101/2-117 /1 (17)</td>
<td>118-1 /1 (8)</td>
<td>126/4-135 /1 (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we can see from this table, the length of each musical section varies widely, from as little as four measures (Section B) to as many as 21 measures (Section C). Zur realizes the structural divisions of the text by using a number of musical devices: changes in texture and dynamics (two times); the inclusion of piano interludes (four times), and, perhaps most obviously, by insertions of rests that mark a complete cessation of musical activity (four times).

In addition to these divisions that create musical form, in *Akedat Yitzchak* Zur creates dramatic emphasis by repeating certain text three times. First, at the height of the drama (vs. 11), the Angel stops the sacrifice by calling out *Avraham*, to which the patriarch responds *vayomer hineni* (“and he said ‘Here I am.’”). Zur restates this text *vayomer hineni* and inserts a measure of rest between the iterations to dramatize the action (Example 4.1).

**Example 4.1: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, mm. 66-70**

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260 This system is printed crooked in the score.
Zur’s use of silence and repetition underscores this pivotal moment in the story.

Zur uses a different kind of repetition two other times to emphasize the text - at the end of verse six (mm. 35-40) and at the end of the narrative, verse seventeen (mm. 101-116). In both cases, the appearance of this technique coincides with Abraham’s response to angelic directives that he clearly perceives as expressing the will of God. Based on this observation alone, one might be tempted to propose the following textual musical design:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vss. 1-6</th>
<th>Vss. 7-11</th>
<th>Vss. 12-17</th>
<th>Vss. 18-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-40</td>
<td>41-70</td>
<td>71-117</td>
<td>18-135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One might propose this structure if one was focused on the repeated text. You could imagine an argument that the repetition of words creates a marker between musical sections and provides for structural symmetry. And yet, the repeated words are found within the musical sections and thus do not function as structural markers. The first repetition uses the end of verse six and reiterates the phrase vayelchu shneihem yachdav (“and they went both of them together”). Indeed, this text is at the end of section C but the music moves seamlessly into section D, thus this repetition does not serve as a formal division between large sections of music. The second repetition of text is found in verse seventeen. Here all of verse seventeen is repeated with no break between the statements. Additionally, a section of the last clause veyirash zaracha is restated two additional times before the end of the sentence. This is followed by a piano interlude and then a final
statement of *veyirash zaracha* which leads directly into verse eighteen. Again, the textual repetition seems to serve no structural purpose. While these two sections of repeated text may underscore theological issues or highlight moments of drama, they do not function as markers in a clear structural design.

Clearly, this is not the final word on the musical structure of *Akedat Yitzchak* for this analysis fails to take into account some other, quite significant pieces of direct musical repetition.

The first of these involves two nearly identical musical sections that provide a “frame” to Zur’s telling of the ancient story. There are many similarities linking Zur’s setting of verses 1-4 (mm. 1-23) and the final nine measures of the composition. Indeed, measure 1-3 (Example 4.2a) and measure 127-129 (Example 4.2b) share nearly identical pitch material but the format is restructured.

**Example 4.2: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, Musical repetition, Frame**

a. mm. 1-3

![Musical notation image]

Similarly, the other side of the frame, uses this same pitch content, but reorganized (Example 42.b).
Example 4.2: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, Musical repetition, Frame
b. mm. 127-129

The overall effect is a musical frame in which the end of Akedat Yitzchak is reminiscent of the beginning.

Structurally more important than these bookends, however, is Zur’s literal repetition of the music he uses to set verses 4-11a (mm. 24-68) and 11b-17 (mm.70-116). Indeed, this musical correspondence covers the entirety of the actual story; all that precedes it being a setting of the stage and all that follows being the dénouement. Measures 24 to 68 and measures 70 to 116 are nearly identical in pitch content and melodic contour. They vary, however, in rhythmic presentation because Zur must accommodate for the difference in syllables and text stress due to the change in text. Usually the changes involve only slight rhythmic variations but occasionally Zur obliges the variance of syllables and adjusts for the change in the text stress by altering rhythms and/or time signatures, and adding adds or subtracting a vocal part.

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261 This musical example is short one sixteenth-note in the voice part. It is possible that Zur intended either that the eighth note rest in the first measure of the voice parts should have a dot or that the last pick-up should be an eighth note and not a sixteenth. The latter seems more plausible as it would align with the sixteenth notes in the piano.
Given the existence of these two major musical shapes, it is important to discuss them in
greater detail. Zur sets the text to a musical structure comprised of essentially three parts (Figure
4.3). In Akedat Yitzchak, 99 of the 135 measures are repeated musical material. This musical
repetition occurs in two places: the beginning and end of the story (mm. 1-23 and 127-135) and
the bulk of the story per se (mm. 24-116).

**Figure 4.3: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, Macrostructure of Music**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>A’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verses</td>
<td>1 – 4</td>
<td>end of 4 – beginning of 11</td>
<td>end of 11-17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-23 (24)</td>
<td>24-68 (45)</td>
<td>70-116 (47)</td>
<td>118-125 (8)</td>
<td>127-135 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The individual components of this macrostructure are themselves divisible into smaller formal
structures. Section A, the frame, for example, consists of three sub-sections, each of which is
defined by loud piano chords followed by rests that create a break in the musical continuity
(Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, section A, Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrostructure</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microstructure</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>1-2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>1-15 (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section A operates much like the exposition of classical sonata form, in that it establishes the
harmonic language from which Zur uses in the rest of the piece. The first subset, vss. 1-2, is a
musical presentation of a major-second and a minor second, or the pitches (ABC) (Example 4.3).
By measure three, while these pitches (ABC) still dominate, Zur expands the motive to include
additional notes.
The rest of the Aa section is a play on this (ABC) material with additional neighbor notes.

The second unit in the A section, what we will call Ab, (mm. 16-19), sets verse 3 and introduces a new motive that presents consecutive minor and major seconds to create an octatonic scale (Example 4.4).
Example 4.4: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, Ab, m. 16

This octatonic scale is present in either the vocal writing or both the piano and choir part for the entirety of section Ab.

The third section (mm. 20-23) also sets a single verse of text (4) to music. This section is an expansion or development of the first section (a) in which the original pitch class (ABC) is expanded by using its intervalllic distance (3 minor seconds) both above (to E-flat) and below (to F#) the original cell (Example 4.5).

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262 This system is printed crooked in the score.
Example 4.5: Zur—_Akedat Yitzchak_, Aa’, mm. 20-21.

Thus, section A (mm. 1-23) is on some level a tripartite (ABA’) form.

The concluding A’ section (mm. 127-135) at the end of _Akedat Yitzchak_ is not subdivided into smaller sections. Rather, it simply recapitulates the initial motivic material (mm. 1-3) as measures 127 to 129.

Like classical sonata form, the B section is a development of the harmonic material established in the A section. The B section also divides into a tripartite structure. This macro section is repeated twice with a measure of rest in between. The subsections of the B section are separated by changes in dynamics and texture.

**Figure 4.5: Zur-Akedat Yitzchak, section B, Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrostructure</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microstructure</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>end of 4-6 (2.5)</td>
<td>7-8 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>24 - 40 (17)</td>
<td>41 - 53/1 (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is no introduction to the first B section, what we will call Bd. It develops seamlessly out of the A material and uses the final clause from verse four as its text. Both Bd sections use a variety of chords and melodic phrases built on a major and a minor second and conclude with a fortissimo (ABC) chord in the piano (mm. 40/86). The middle B sections, what we will call Be, are primarily pianissimo and contain less use of seconds. These subdivisions further develop the original harmonic design by exploring neighbor notes. Zur is inspired by Schenkerian theory, specifically the idea of tonal space. In Schenker’s theory of tonal space, the intervals between the notes of the tonic triad form a tonal space that is filled with passing and neighbor notes that can be used to produce new triads, thus opening up the possibilities for further tonal spaces. This means Zur uses passing tones and neighbor notes to weave in and out of the tonal centers and “to surround my main tone-centers.” This theory of neighbor notes explains many melodic material that uses intervals other than the second, especially in the piano.

By the end of the Be section the familiar harmonic material returns. This occurs first with (ABC) in the choir in measures 49-50/97-98 and then with the octatonic scale, starting on A, in the top voice of the piano in measures 50 to 53/1 and 98 to 101/1 (Example 4.6).

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At the beginning of third B sub-section, what we will call Bf, (measures 53 beat two and 101 beat two) the texture changes. Up until now the choral writing has been *tutti*, engaging textures that are either homophonic or imitative. Here Zur writes “solo” and each of the four voices act independently. These changes in texture and dynamic, as well as the use of rests, divide the B sections into three parts.
Before the end of the piece, and the recapitulation of the A material, Zur introduces new music for eight measures, section C.

**Figure 4.6: Zur - Akedat Yitzchak, section C, Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>118-125 (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This musical material is an aberration. While it does use major and minor seconds, especially in measure 120-121, the pitches are not related to previous motives or themes.

**Example 4.7: Zur-Akedat Yitzchak, C, mm. 120-121**

The text of section C repeats the last phrase of verse seventeen *veyirash zaracha et shalar oyvav* ("shall possess the gate of his enemies") as well as all of verse 18:

\[ Vehitvarachu vezaracha kol goyer ha aretz ekev asher shamata bekoli \]

(And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.)

It is possible that by repeating these words, and giving them contrasting musical material, Zur is arguing that the significance of Genesis 22 is the marking of Abraham’s descendants, his “seed,” as a blessed people. With these subdivisions in mind, the overall structure of *Akedat Yitzchak* is outlined in Figure 4.7.
While Zur has generated a logical musical form, one is left to ask why he creates textual divisions and a musical structure that are at odds with one another? In other words, why does he construct a musical form that does not relate to the text?

For centuries, when a composer set words to music, the music was meant to reinforce or amplify the meaning of the text. As Edward Levy explains in his seminal essay “Text Setting and Usage” “From the late renaissance and early baroque on, a text’s denotations became as primary a compositional concern as its form, rhythms, and inflections.” In this conservative method of setting text, the musical drama parallels the narration. Zur avoids this compositional style; what he calls an “obvious” or “kitsch” manner where the music is set in a “symmetrical way to the text.” Instead, Zur follows the path of one of the composers he considers the father of modern music: Stravinsky. Stravinsky, in *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), among other pieces, uses recurring lines of text as a musical refrain, ignoring the changing semantic function caused by their varied placement. Similarly, Zur’s music does not parallel or express the text but

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rather is set in “contrast” to the text.\textsuperscript{270} For example, Zur repeats musical material in sections where the text is seemingly unrelated. The musical material Bd is used both to describe a fairly mundane moment, Abraham and Isaac preparing for the ascent of the mountain, as well as for the peak of the drama, the angel’s intervention. Zur juxtaposes the narrative flow against the stasis of the music repetition to create a “A counterpoint of drama and musical tension.”\textsuperscript{271} For Zur, this contrast between text and music “triggers drama.”\textsuperscript{272}

Also, like Stravinsky in \textit{Abraham and Isaac}, Zur’s aesthetic vision draws on the traditions of Biblical cantillation.\textsuperscript{273} Zur explains that

\begin{quote}
I recognized a contrast between the way (the \textit{Akeidah}) is “performed” in the synagogue with the regular biblical cantillation of the tropes, cantillation that injects an objective, impersonal manner of retelling the story in spite of the drama that the characters undergo.
\end{quote}

Zur sets Genesis 22 in the same dispassionate, removed manner found in Biblical cantillation: by imposing musical structures on the text rather than having the narrative structure of the text guide motivic development. For Zur, this detachment is “chilling” and thus more dramatic.\textsuperscript{274}

\section*{Conclusion}

In many ways, Zur seems to engage the Binding of Isaac story at an abstract level. While \textit{Akedat Ytzchak} has form, the form is not audible. While the piece has structure, the structure does not reconcile with the narrative design of the text. While the composition has symmetry,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{270} Zur, interview by the author, May 7, 2014. \\
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{274} Zur, interview by the author, May 7, 2014. \\
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
this symmetry does not relate to the drama. And yet, Zur believes that this separation between the music and the semantic meaning of the text further emphasizes or “triggers” the inherent drama of the story.\textsuperscript{276} The \textit{Akeidah} is one of the most perplexing stories in the Old Testament. Rather than trying to express the text or underscore an exegetical interpretation, perhaps Zur aims to reflect this exegetical confusion. In many ways the music mirrors the experience of trying to make sense of Genesis 22, an experience of religious schizophrenia where inconsistency, contradiction, and fragmentation dominate.

\textsuperscript{276} Zur, interview by the author, e-mail, May 7, 2014.
Chapter Five:

The Binding of Isaac as a Political Drama:
Steve Reich’s The Cave

Biographical Information

In 1948, when Israel declared itself an independent country, the composer Steve Michael Reich (b. 1936) was a Jewish boy in New York preparing for his bar mitzvah.277 Although he was raised in a household that practiced Judaism, religion was not central to Reich’s identity and he quips that he lip-synched his way through his coming of age ceremony.278 After completing his undergraduate studies in philosophy at Cornell University (1953–7), Reich turned his attention to composition, receiving a Masters from Juiliard School of Music (1958–61), where he studied with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti, and then continued study at Mills College, California with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud (1962–3).279 During his education,

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Reich worked as a drummer to support himself.280

When Reich finished his formal education he turned down a career in academia in favor of working as a freelance composer. He experimented with recording and editing techniques at the San Francisco Tape Music Center (1964–5).281 In 1966 he returned to New York City to establish his own electronic studio and to form an ensemble to play his compositions: Steve Reich and Musicians.

During the 1960s Reich experimented with electronic minimalist techniques. He sought a mechanical process that would allow for impersonal presentation of subject matter as well as what Reich called the “psycho-acoustical by-products” of shifting patterns of sound.282 Reich began experimenting with a technique that would be called “phasing” whereby the composer cut, rearranged, and repeated sequences of recorded material. Although the phasing technique was meant to obliterate the linguistic and semantic content of the source material, Reich consistently chose speeches with powerful cultural and political resonance.283 It’s Gonna Rain (1965) is a sermon by Brother Walter, an African-American Pentecostal preacher, who warns of imminent apocalypse.284 Come Out (1966) features the voice of Daniel Hamm, one of the “Harlem Six” who were victims of an infamous act of police brutality.285 In these early works, Reich aimed for a compositional technique where “once the process is set up and loaded it runs by itself.”286 As a result, the process transforms the culturally charged source material into autonomous musical structures.287 In these early works there is no direct or necessary link between the linguistic and


283 Prieto, “Speech Melody, 24; Griffiths, "Reich, Steve (Michael)."*


286 Ibid.

semantic content of the words and the formal procedures of the music.

Ten years later, Reich returned to electronic music. My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait (1980) draws upon the compositional ideas of Come Out (1966) and It’s Gonna Rain (1965) in that it is based on pre-recorded speech. While these earlier pieces transform found material, however, in My Name Is Reich generates the source material himself. Reich recorded the names of his ensemble members and then edited, and created phase relationships between the different names. Compared to Come Out and It’s Gonna Rain, the phasing process in My Name Is is far more fluid and succinct. What took several minutes to become audible in the early pieces is now heard in mere seconds. The flux of patterns, drones, and chord combinations create a coloristic effect less focused on the phrasing process itself than on the resulting timbres.

During the 1960s and 1970s, as Reich was exploring these electronic compositional techniques, he also became interested in the religions and ethnic cultures of Buddhism, Mexican mysticism, and Bali. In 1974, he felt a desire to learn more about his own ethnic and religious background and began courses in Hebrew and Torah reading at the Lincoln Square synagogue in New York City. This led to study of Biblical cantillation at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1976-1977. In an article he later wrote, Reich explains that the Hebrew Bible uses a form of cantillation accents, or “te’amim,” that have three functions. First, they indicate the syllable...

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289 Ibid. pg 260-261
292 Ibid.
on which the phonetic accent falls. Secondly, they serve as a punctuation system, marking the syntactical structure of the text, the ending of a complete verse and of its parts, and the distribution of pauses for oral delivery.\textsuperscript{295} Finally, the te’amim acts as the musical notation of the cantillation. Each sign or group of signs represents a musical motive with a distinct rhythmic and/or melodic gesture. In addition to this system of accents and articulation, Reich was especially interested in the motivic structure of cantillation. Long melodic phrases are built by adding motives with a distinctive melodic and rhythmic profile, each associated with an individual ta’amim. This concept of taking pre-existent melodic patterns and stringing them together to form a longer melody in the service of a text was a technique Reich had not encountered before.\textsuperscript{296}

In the summer of 1977, Reich and his wife Beryl Korot traveled to Israel to visit the National Archives of Recorded Sound in Jerusalem and to continue his cantillation studies.\textsuperscript{297} This experience led him to compose \textit{Tehillim} (1981), a setting of Hebrew Psalms written for four amplified women’s voices with large instrumental ensemble.\textsuperscript{298} In this work Reich has three goals. For the first time in his career, he wanted to set text in what he deemed to be a traditional way.\textsuperscript{299} Reich felt that when composers set to music the works of American poets they often distorted the poetry’s essential speech rhythms.\textsuperscript{300} When Reich selected specific Hebrew psalms as his subject matter, he feared that his normal compositional process of identifying fragments and repeating them to create patterns would violate the integrity of the text. So in \textit{Tehillim}, Reich starts from the essential rhythmic and melodic patterns of the Hebrew words and uses them to

\textsuperscript{295} Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 540.
\textsuperscript{297} Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 538.
\textsuperscript{298} \textit{Tehillim} is a setting of Psalms 19:2-5, 34:13-15 and 18:26-27 (18:25-26 in Christian translations) and 150:4-6. It was commissioned jointly by West German Radio (Cologne), South German Radio (Stuttgart) and the Rothko Chapel (Houston). Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 538.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
create fully-formed, independent melodies (Example 5.1).³⁰¹

**Example 5.1: Reich—Tehillim, Part IV, voices 2 and 3, mm. 1-7³⁰²**

![Musical notation]

In reading the text of the psalms Reich perceives a metric succession of units of two and three beats. This series of twos and threes becomes the basis for the rhythmic structure of his vocal lines. To allow for the precise declamation of the Hebrew, the meter of *Tehillim* changes practically every measure. The string and percussion ensemble further enhances the text’s syntax by using accents, imitative entrances, timber changes, and instrumental echoes. While *Tehillim* was conceived emphasizing the linear frame, Reich then creates harmonic cycles that enrich the structural plan of the composition.³⁰³

This process allowed Reich to achieve his second goal, to accommodate the verbal structures of the original Hebrew text to his own compositional idiom without simply writing a “Jewish sounding piece.”³⁰⁴ The Hebrew words provided Reich with the predetermined patterns of accent, rhythm, meter and occasionally melodic contour. However, Reich did not simply transcribe the traditional melodies.³⁰⁵ In *Tehillim* he constructed his own thematic and melodic motives but, for the first time, the source material governed the large-scale and smaller structural details of the music.

This procedure allowed Reich to fulfill his third goal, the creation of a process that reconciles the semantic content of the text with the musical structures. As he explains:

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³⁰¹ Because there is no surviving Western scriptural cantillation tradition for the Psalms, as there is for the Torah and the Book of Prophets, Reich could engage the Psalms purely as words without having to reconcile the cantillation melodies; Schwartz, “Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process: Part II,” 263.


[Before Tehillim] I had limited myself to set in music individual words independently, in a way, of their meaning, but now I had to confront myself with texts in which meaning was fundamental, and for this kind of operation I did not have any method….For the first time, the music had to serve the purpose of the meaning of the words. (Tehillim liner notes)\[306\]

*Tehillim* represented a dramatic change for Reich. It was not just that the text was no longer subservient to the music, but that an inversion had occurred where the music now “had to serve” the “purpose” or semantic meaning of the text.\[307\]

*Tehillim* represents a turning point in Reich’s compositional output in four ways. First, in the works after *Tehillim* a human voice singing text played an increasingly important role in Reich's music.\[308\] Second, as Antonella Puca points out, it is in *Tehillim* that Reich begins for the first time to show a pronounced interest in preserving the semantic integrity of the text rather than sacrificing it to imposed aesthetic ideas.\[309\] Thirdly, after *Tehillim* harmony played a more central role.\[310\] Finally, *Tehillim* demonstrated Reich’s new found interest in his religious and ethnic roots.

Starting in the 1980s, Reich’s works returned to historical, Jewish themes, this time historical ones. In *Different Trains* (1988), commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, Reich contrasts childhood train rides between divorced parents in California and New York with those made by Jewish children in Nazi-occupied Europe. Aesthetically, Reich was interested in how recorded speech could be used as a source of melody.\[311\] He collected sounds of trains, stories from his

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306 Steve Reich and Musicians, *Tehillim the Desert Music*, Performed by Alarm will Sound and Ossia, Conducted by Alan Pierson, Cantaloupe Records CA21009.

307 This is much like Monteverdi’s work.


governess, and interviews with Holocaust survivors, then turned excerpts from these into melodic and rhythmic motifs played both by live and recorded string quartets. The resulting historic-political, multimedia composition written for string quartet and tape won the 1990 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

Reich set out to utilize live instruments in combination with the electronic sounds to complete the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic patterns that were merely implied in his earlier electronic works. He saw this speech-music technique as a way to present more complicated political topics in an objective manner. In Different Trains Reich selected small speech samples that had a marked melodic and rhythmic contours and wrote them down as accurately as possible in musical notation (Example 5.2). The strings then literally imitate the speech melody, taking into account the pitch, timbre, dynamics, articulation and inherent rhythm.

Example 5.2: Reich - Different Trains

Using this method, tonality is established without regard to functional harmony; the new key is simply juxtaposed alongside the previous one. The intonation and pitch level of the recorded speech fragment determines the harmonic framework for the composition. For Reich, this process of transcribing speech melodies of people speaking allowed the music to be “as close to the documentary reality as possible.” By remaining faithful to the documentary material, Reich believes that his presentation gains objectivity, emotional distance and thus is a “truthful” rendering.

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Reich’s ‘Different Trains,’” Perspectives of New Music 35, no. 1 (1997), 129–52; Griffiths, "Reich, Steve (Michael)."

312 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
317 Ibid.
In 1987, as Reich was composing *Different Trains* and exploring this new compositional technique, the first Palestinian uprising (Intifada) erupted.\footnote{Greenwood Encyclopedia of International Relations. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002. s.v. “Intifada,” http://www.library.illinois.edu/proxy/go.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/abcintri8l/intifada (accessed October 2, 2011).} Over the next six years, hundreds of Palestinians were killed by the Israeli Army and scores of Israelis died at the hands of the Palestinians.\footnote{Ibid.} These volatile political events encouraged Reich to use the same speech-music technique he had created in *Different Trains* to explore the Israeli-Arab conflict. Unlike *Different Trains*, this work would involve live as well as recorded voices and would investigate a subject matter that is explicitly controversial.

For this topic, Reich collaborated with the video artists, and his wife, Beryl Korot to develop an expanded technique where the documentary material not only provided speech-music but also images.\footnote{Griffiths, "Reich, Steve (Michael);" Steve Reich and Korot, Beryl, *The Cave*, (London: Hendon Music, 1993).} The resulting documentary-drama, *The Cave* (1990-3), premiered in Vienna in 1993 and was subsequently recorded by the original artists, the Steve Reich Ensemble with Paul Hillier conducting.\footnote{Steve Reich Ensemble and Paul Hillier, *The Cave*. Nonesuch Records 79327, 1994.}

The Cave (1993)

the final resting place for his wife, Sarah, himself, and his family. Because Abraham is a patriarch in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, this site serves as a symbol of the religious and political connections between these three faiths. It is one of the few places on earth where Jews and Muslims both worship, though at separately designated times. Reich and Korot chose this site and story as a shared space in an attempt to meditate on the history of relations between Jews and Muslims.

It is also possible to see the title The Cave as a reference to Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” from The Republic. In this parable, a community inside a cave is chained to the ground and forced to face a blank wall onto which images from an unknown source are projected. These shadow images are the only way this society can understand the world. Similarly, when Reich and Korot project images onto four screens in The Cave they create a visual reality for their audience. Allusion to Plato’s allegory provides a subtext for a broader European and non-political, non-religious perspective. In connecting these religious, political, cultural, and philosophical associations in their title, Reich and Korot echo some of the essential questions of the Akeidah: What creates faith? What can I know without doubt? What do I trust as true and why?

Reich and Korot’s interest is not in the sacrifice narrative itself, nor even in the characters of the story: Abraham, his wives Sarah and Hagar, and the sons by each: Isaac/Ishak (Sarah) and Ishmael/Ishmail (Hagar). Rather, what appealed to Reich and Korot was that these peoples and their stories are common property to the three major monotheistic religions. This coincidence allows Reich and Korot to use their stories as a foil to investigate the role of culture and religion in contemporary life in Israel, the West Bank, and America (specifically New York City, Dallas,

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323 Ibid.
324 The other place of worship frequented by Jews, Muslims and Christians is called the Temple Mount (Har Habayit) by Jews and Noble Sanctuary (Al-Haram ash-Sharif) by Muslims; Smith, “Steve Reich Talking about ‘The Cave,’” 16.
and Austin, Texas).\textsuperscript{327} The Cave is divided into three acts and in the score Reich and Korot label each act by the place and date where the interviews occurred. Act I is “West Jerusalem/Hebron, May/June 1989” and includes fragments of interviews with Jews living in Israel.\textsuperscript{328} Act Two is “East Jerusalem/Hebron, June 1989 and June 1991” and shares comments from Palestinians living in the West Bank. Act Three is “New York City/Austin, April/May 1992” and uses interviews with people living in the United States.

While the lives of Abraham and his family are the backstory of The Cave, Reich and Korot’s real interest is in how people project themselves and their compatriots onto the biblical story.\textsuperscript{329} In each of the three acts, Reich asks the same five questions:

Who for you is Abraham?
Who for you is Sarah?
Who for you is Hagar?
Who for you is Ishmael?
Who for you is Isaac? \textsuperscript{330}

By asking identical questions of every interviewee, Reich and Korot use these questions as a documentary control. In this way, they attempt to be neutral, objective investigators of the different cultures.


\textsuperscript{328} Steve Reich, The Cave, New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1993; Reich and Korot, The Cave.

\textsuperscript{329} Smith, “Steve Reich Talking about ‘The Cave,’”17.

historically Judeo-Christian culture, Reich and Korot again use text from Genesis and the *Midrash Rabbah*. In each act, the religious material is either chanted or sung by a vocal quartet or by a recording of an *Imam*.331

It is important to note that Reich and Korot are not attempting to create a collage of cultures; rather, they present each culture independently with a view to distinguish the various points of view. The order of the material was Reich and Korot’s choice. They avoid a structural dialogue between the religions, and yet a natural interplay between the cultures arises through comments from the interviewees.

Reich used the same compositional technique he developed for *Tehillim* and *Different Trains* in *The Cave*, mainly the recording and editing process of what he calls “speech-melody.” But in the context of Reich’s documentary works, *The Cave* is unique in three ways. First, its scale is unprecedented. Running over two-and-a-half hours, *The Cave* is similar in length to an opera but Reich views it instead as “documentary music theatre” where there is a “converse [sic] between the concert hall and the street.”333

The second element that makes *The Cave* distinctive is that the documentary sources provide not only audio material but also visual content. On five different channels and five screens, *The Cave* shows portraits of the interviewees, as well as abstract close-ups of their clothing, hair, and the background.

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331 A person who leads prayers in a mosque.
332 Cott, “Jonathon Cott interviews Beryl Korot and Steve Reich on *The Cave,*”11.
It was Reich and Korot’s goal that “Everything (and this is the ethos of the piece) comes out of the documentary material.”335 In their creative process, Reich and Korot initially examined the documentary material together.336 They then worked section by section in which Korot created photographic tableaus while Reich wrote a few minutes of music. Korot then edited the video to

334 Photo by Andrew Pothecary.
335 Ibid.
336 Julia Wolfe, Steve Reich, Beryl Korot. “Steve Reich and Beryl Korot.” BOMB, No. 81 (Fall, 2002), 66.
sync with the score. In the final presentation, two of the video channels portray the interviewees as “talking heads” while the other channels are Korot’s invention.337

The third factor that makes The Cave unique in Reich’s output is that there is little dependence or even focus on the hypnotically repetitive rhythms, phasing effects, and gradual process with which his music is usually identified.338 As the Reich scholar Eric Prieto reflects, despite the unconventional use of speech and digital technology, the documentary tone, and the discursive rather than dramatic structure of the piece, The Cave actually comes closer to the mainstream tradition of cultivated music than any of Reich’s other music.339 The Cave is the first time in Reich’s career where the emphasis is not on the rhythm or process, but rather on melody and semantic interests.

Composition Overview

The following section of this chapter does not attempt a thorough analysis of The Cave. This dissertation centers on musical settings of the Sacrifice Story in the late 20th century, thus our analysis here will be focused on the sections where Reich presents Genesis 22, Koran–Surah 37, and the interviewees’ reflections on these stories. This paper also does not explore Reich’s speech-melody compositional process in itself, as this is ground well covered by Eric Prieto, David Schwarz, K. Robert Schwartz, and Naomi Cuming.340 Instead, this paper examines how

339 Ibid.
the Sacrifice Story is informed by Reich’s manipulation of speech-melody and the inclusion of multiple religious and cultural viewpoints.

But first, let us attain a general sense of the structure, format and style for the entire work, as Reich’s compositional process is the same throughout *The Cave*. *The Cave* is grander in scope than most of Reich’s previous works both in its length and the size of ensemble required to perform it. *The Cave* is scored for seventeen musicians: two woodwind players doubling flutes, oboe, English horn, clarinet and bass clarinet; four percussionists playing vibraphones, bass drums, kick drums, claves and clapping; three keyboard players playing pianos, sampler and computer keyboards; a string quartet, and a vocal quartet comprised of two lyric sopranos, a tenor and a baritone. All the instruments are amplified except the bass drums and claves.

**Figure 5.1: Reich—The Cave, Instrumentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act I</th>
<th>Act II</th>
<th>Act III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>Two flutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Horn</td>
<td>English Horn</td>
<td>Oboe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibraphone</td>
<td>Vibraphone</td>
<td>English Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampler</td>
<td>Sampler</td>
<td>Two Vibraphones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>Sampler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
<td>Two Pianos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Bass Drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto</td>
<td>Alto</td>
<td>Soprano – Rhythm mimicked by typing sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Alto - Rhythm mimicked by typing sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>String quartet</td>
<td>String quartet</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>String quartet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, in Act III Reich expands the instrumentation heard in the first two acts by adding flutes, a second piano, and typing sounds to accompany the singers.

Reich uses the speech-melody technique to guide his compositional process throughout *The Cave.* Reich listens to each interview and transcribes it as a musical dictation. He uses the recordings not only to find pitch, rhythmic patterns and tempo, but also time signatures and melodic shape. From these musical dictations Reich extracts sentences or phrases that become

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341 Cott, “Jonathon Cott interviews Beryl Korot and Steve Reich on *The Cave,*”11
342 Ibid.
the basis for larger melodic or rhythmic motifs.\textsuperscript{343} Reich uses this same compositional procedure in all three acts.

There is very little music that is only instrumental; almost all the music is accompanied by words and multimedia images. The music is an abstraction and the discrepancies in the interviewee’s opinions are represented textually, not musically. Indeed, Reich uses the speech-melody technique as a compositional control or artistic sterilizing mechanism to create some distance and objectivity from the content of the words. Although the music is generated by the text, it is not reflective of it.

In some respects, Reich’s process of extracting musical materials from recorded interviews is reminiscent of the transcriptions of folk songs made by Ralph Vaughn Williams, Leos Janácek, and Béla Bartók.\textsuperscript{344} In all cases, the composer collects the raw material that becomes contemporary music; in the case of Bartók and Vaugh Williams, these materials were already in musical form, whereas Reich transcribes speech into musical gestures. As New York Times music reviewer Anthony Tommasini comments, “Mr. Reich’s score represents a feat of mimicry” as much as it does an act of composition.\textsuperscript{345}

Source material also influences the tonality of \textit{The Cave}. Reich claims A minor became the obvious choice for the tonal center of the work because of its documentary significance. As Reich explains,

When we finally got down to the Cave of Machpelah…I heard a sound which turned out to be an A minor hum. It was due to the voice and the structure of the room, and I took that as a given that was going to go there at the end of both acts.\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{343} For a detailed analysis of the speech-melody compositional technique see Eric Prieto, David Schwarz, K. Robert Schwartz and Naomi Cumming.


\textsuperscript{346} Smith, “Steve Reich Talking about ‘The Cave,’” 17.
The first two acts begin and end in A minor. Act III does not have as clear a tonal center.

As mentioned earlier, Reich and Korot ask the same five questions in all three acts. These questions and the accompanying religious source material create the structure for the work. When Reich asks his questions he changes the names of the characters based on the nomenclature for that culture. For example, Abraham and Ibrahim are the same person and Hagar and Hajar are the same. The basic question does not change, however.

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347 Ibid. The Cave not only begins in A minor, but the first two pitches of the piece are A and C natural.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Religious Source Material</th>
<th>Interview Question and Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act I</td>
<td>Genesis XVI: 1-12, 27</td>
<td>Who is Abraham?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Midrash Rabbah</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 12: 1, 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 13: 14-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 15: 1-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 16: 1</td>
<td>Who is Sarah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 16: 2-4</td>
<td>Who is Hagar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 16: 5-12</td>
<td>Who is Ishmael?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 18: 1-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 21: 1-14</td>
<td>Isaac?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 21: 8-20</td>
<td>Commentary on Genesis 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 23</td>
<td>Machpelah Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II</td>
<td>The Koran - Surah 3: 65-68 (Chanted in Arabic from the Koran by Sheikh Dahoud Atalah, Muqri of Al-Akusa Mosque)</td>
<td>Who is Ibrahim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al-Tabari: “The History of the Prophets and Kings.&quot; (Read in Arabic by Imam Talal Eid, Imam of Boston)</td>
<td>Who is Hajar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Koran – Surah 37: 99-113 (Read in Arabic by Imam Talal Eid, Imam of Boston)</strong></td>
<td>Commentary on Surah 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>El Khalil commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Khalil commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III</td>
<td>Genesis 12: 5, 10-15, 17-18, 20</td>
<td>Who is Abraham?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary on Genesis 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hagar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ishmael</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Acts I and II each question or religious source material is offset by a change in time signature, key signature, or texture, or by the insertion of “ambient sound – no music” between sections.\textsuperscript{348} While these separations are not always audible to the audience, they are made clear in the score through scene headings. In Act III, however, the questions, source material and interviewee commentary are intertwined, often sentence-by-sentence. Reich projects both the questions and the religious texts onto five video screens. The questions are shown in handwriting while sacred texts are projected as if they were being typed on three typewriters. Because the piece premiered in Vienna, a German speaking but international city, Reich and Korot choose to translate the religious material into multiple languages - English, German, French, and as well as the original Hebrew or Arabic. One language is shown on each screen. A typing sound accompanies this visual.

As you can see, Act I deals with the events before and after our focus narrative: Genesis 22. The opening section, Genesis 16, explains Sarah’s barrenness and how Hagar became Abraham’s wife. Genesis 12 through 16 describes God’s promise to Abraham that he will have an “heir,” despite the fact that “Sarai, Abram’s wife, bore him no children.”\textsuperscript{349} 

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Genesis 22 : 1-3, 7-12, 15, 17-18} & \textbf{Commentary on Genesis 22} \\
\hline
The Cave of Macpelah & \\
\hline
Genesis 18: 1-4, 6-7 & Commentary on Genesis 18 \\
\hline
Midrash “Chapters of R. Eliezer,” 36 & Commentary on midrash \\
\hline
Genesis 18: 8 & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{349} Steve Reich, \textit{The Cave}. (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1993), 32-33; Genesis 16: 1
\textsuperscript{350} Steve Reich, \textit{The Cave}. (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1993), 33; Genesis 15: 5.
This description of Abraham’s offspring as being as numerous as “the stars of heaven” is the same trope we find in Genesis 22. In Act I Reich also introduces the characters of Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac and the tensions among them. As you may remember from chapter one, when Sarah did not conceive, Hagar bore Abraham Ishmael. Shortly after, Sarah became pregnant with Isaac. Reich and Korot explore these familial tensions through interviewees as well as excerpts from Genesis 16 and 18. In Genesis 21, the portion just before our focus narrative, Sarah tells Abraham to “cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with my son Isaac.”  

351 Act one concludes with Genesis 23, the story of Sarah’s death, Abraham’s purchase of “the cave of the field of Machpelah” and Sarah’s burial there. Notice that in Act I, which is dedicated to the telling of the story from the point of view of the Bible and modern day Israelis, Reich and Korot give the preamble and postscript to the Binding story, but skip the text and narrative from Genesis 22 itself. This is introduced in Act two.

In Act two, “East Jerusalem/Hebron,” Reich presents the Islamic telling of the sacrifice story. He begins with a recording of Koran-Surah 37 chanted in Arabic by Sheikah Dahoud Atalah of the Muqri of Al Aksa Mosque while the text is projected in Arabic, English, German and French. As noted in chapter one, Islamic law prohibits the Koran from being set to music so this recorded chant is how Reich and Korot contribute the Islamic religious source material. This text claims Abraham for the Islamic faith

Abraham was not a Jew
Nor yet a Christian;
But he was true in Faith
And bowed his will
to Allah’s (which is Islam),
And he joined
not gods with Allah.  

352 The interviewees go on to explain Abraham’s role in Islam as well as the Breaking of the Idols story. Through a reading of the Al-Tabari, the “History of the Prophets and Kings,” Reich and Korot tell the story of the Zamzam well as the Hajj. The section ends with interviewees commenting on the character of Hajar.

352 Ibid, 40; The Koran – Surah 3:67.
In the next section, the audience hears their first telling of the sacrifice story, as Imam Talal Eid chants in Arabic the Koran-Surah 37: 99-113. Again, the text is displayed on the video screens in Arabic, English, German and French. Palestinian interviewees then comment on the sacrifice story. Reich shows his purpose in this section by stating:

There’s a little discrepancy between the Old Testament account of that and the Koranic account.
In the Torah it is Isaac. In the Koran it is Ismail.

The rest of the interviews explore the similarities and differences between Ishak and Ismail. I will discuss this in greater detail later in this chapter. Act II, like Act I, ends with a focus on the cave in Hebron, which is called El Khalil in Arabic. Here Reich highlights interview responses that express not only the holiness of the cave site but also the connection between the place and Abraham. Interviewees explain that Abraham is called “Khalilulah” (friend of God); a name which clearly refers to El Khalil.

Whereas Act I focuses on Israelis and the Hebrew Bible, and Act II turns to Palestinians and the Koran, in Act III Reich interviews people from his own country and culture: America. Because the United States is predominantly composed of Judeo-Christians, Reich uses the Old Testament as his sacred text. Although Reich elects to include this religious material, he often chooses comments by interviewees that suggest that America is a more secular culture with less ties to its religious heritage and more ties to its cultural heritage.

Act III begins with interviewees discussing what the name Abraham means to them. Reich weaves in portions of Genesis 12, the story of Abraham and Sarai in the land of Egypt, which transitions into a discussion of the characters of Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael. At this point, half way through Act III, Reich presents the Biblical interpretation of the sacrifice story, interlaced with commentary by the American interviewees. “The Binding of Isaac” story occupies a large segment of Act III, 237 measures out of 1753 measures, or approximately four and a half-minutes. 353 Act III, like the two acts before it, ends with the story of the cave of Machpelah, told both through the words of the interviewees, Genesis 28 and the midrash “Chapters of R. Eliezer,” 36.

353 The Akedah story is measures 1063 to 1300 out of 1753 measures of Act III.
The following two sub-chapters present an analysis of the sections of *The Cave* that engage the sacrifice story: Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak and Act III mm. 1064 to 1300. Again, this paper is not focused on the intricacies of the speech-melody compositional process nor on motives and musical themes throughout *The Cave*. Instead, I explore how Reich and Korot employ the sacrifice narrative as a mechanism to discuss historical and political drama in the Middle East.

*Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak*

Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak is divided into two parts: 1) the chanting of the Koran – Surah 37: 99-113, read in Arabic by Imam Talal Eid, and 2) commentary on and a retelling of Surah 37 by Palestinians interviewees. These two sections are conjoined.

The chant of Surah 37 is approximately 6 minutes. This recording has no musical accompaniment, in accordance with the requirements of Islamic law. The audience listens to a tape of the chant while following translations of the text in Arabic, English, German and French displayed on the video screens. For the English translation, Reich chose a version by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1952), an Indian Islamic scholar whose translation of the Koran is widely known and used in the English-speaking world.354

**Figure 5.3: Reich - *The Cave*, The Koran-Surah 37: Verses 99-113**

99. He said: “I will go
   To my lord! He
   Will surely guide me!

100. “O my Lord!
   Grant me
   A righteous (son)!”

101. So We gave him
   The good news

Figure 5.3 (cont.)

Of a boy ready
To suffer and forbear.

102. Then when (the son)
Reached (the age of)
(Serious) work with him,
He said: “Oh my son!
I see in a vision
That I offer thee in a sacrifice:
Now see what is thy view!”
(The son) said:
“Oh my father! Do
As though art commanded:
Thou will find me,
If Allah so will one
Practicing patience and
Constancy!”

103. So when they
Had both
Submitted their will
(to Allah),
And he had laid him
Prostrate on his forehead
(For sacrifice),

104. We called out
to him,
“O Abraham!

105. “Thou hast already fulfilled
The vision!” – thus indeed
Do We reward
Those who do right.

106. For this was
obviously
A trial

107. And We
Ransomed him
With a momentous
sacrifice:
Figure 5.3 (cont.)

108. And We left (this blessing) for Him among generations (To come) In later times:

109. “Peace and salutation To Abraham!”

110. Thus indeed do We reward Those who do right

111. For he was Of Our Believing Servants.

112. And We gave him The good news Of Isaac – a prophet - One of the Righteous.

113. We blessed him and Isaac: But of their progeny Are (some) that do right And (some) that Obviously do wrong, To their own souls.355

Reich uses the full version of Ali’s translation.

This passage has two distinct parts: verses 99-105, which tells of the sacrifice drama, and verses 106-113, which is an interpretation of Abraham and Isaac’s character. The Surah version does not include some details found in the Torah, specifically the accompanying manservants, the description of the three-day journey to Mt. Moriah, or the preparation of the altar site. Most noteworthy is that the son intended for sacrifice is not named. Nowhere in the story does the

355 Reich and Korot, *The Cave*, 42-43; Ali, *The Qur’an: Translation*. In Reich versions of the text he consistently replaces the modern form of you with the antiquated form thee, thy or thou.
Koran mention Ismail or Isaac; the character is always referred to merely as “the son.”  In the tribute to Abraham, the Surah explains that Abraham is blessed for passing what was “obviously a trial” and that his actions have impacted his ancestors: “And We left/ (this blessing) for/ Him among/ generations/ (to come)/ In later times.”  The last five verses, 109-113, are praise of Abraham and Isaac as prophets.

Although a recording of Koran-Surah 37 was in the original production, and is included in the liner notes and score material, it is not included in Reich’s 1994 recording of The Cave. Reich includes other sections of the Surah elsewhere in this act, but this portion is missing. This is notable because in other sections of The Cave Reich goes to great lengths to be even handed between the two cultures and how he treats their religious sources.

We will now turn our attention to the second telling of the Sacrifice Story in Act II: Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak. In many ways this scene is less an examination of the Islamic telling of the sacrifice story than an exploration of how Palestinians feel about religion and their neighbors in Israel. This second half is also Reich and Korot’s artistic creation or artificial construction. They collected 150 hours of interview material for this project and chose only portions that reflected their purpose. While the words are those of Palestinians, Reich edited, arranged, and curated the presentation, and composed the accompanying musical material.

This dissertation focuses on how Reich engages the Sacrifice Story, not in the speech-melody technique itself. As such, we will take at face value Reich’s own explanation of his compositional method i.e. that some elements are dictated to him through the interview material – tempo, time-signature, rhythm, key signature, and melodic form. Despite these compositional controls, there are three major ways that Reich influences the score: by choosing the text and editing the libretto, by repeating phrases, and by inserting instrumental motives between quotes. In this chapter we will trace each of these artistic maneuvers separately.

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356 Reich and Korot, The Cave, 42.
357 Ibid, 43.
358 Ibid.
Before we continue, let us note that there are two compositional devices which would be a logical method for creating form and developing a sense of drama which Reich does not engage: instrumentation and harmony. The instrumentation for this scene remains the same: oboe, English horn, vibraphone, sampler, piano, bass drum, and strings. Further, Reich uses the same vocalists throughout the scene; a combination of 1-3 singers are found throughout, but their participation is minimal, only 2-6 measures per episode. Instrumentation would have been an obvious way for Reich to create divisions between his sections.

The other compositional technique that Reich does not engage is harmony. Reich believes that the speech samples not only have a marked melodic and rhythmic contour but also an inherent pitch level, harmony and key center.\(^\text{360}\) As a result, when Reich introduces a new speech fragment he simply changes key signatures and tonal centers without any transitional chords.\(^\text{361}\)

In *The Cave*, Reich uses pitches implied by the speech-melody to create chordal accompaniment built from parallel fourths, and ninth and eleventh chords played by the vibraphone, sampler, and piano (Example 5.3).

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\(^{361}\) Ibid.
Example 5.3: Reich - *The Cave*, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Harmony, mm. 42-49

The left hand of the piano and sampler provides a pedal tone of one pitch, in two octaves, played in the lowest possible register, while the right hand of the piano and the vibraphone provide the chord. Both the chord and the key signature change every time the speaker changes.
As you can see from figure 5.4, there is no harmonic pattern; Reich uses a variety of chords that seem to have no relationship to one another.

**Figure 5.4: Reich - The Cave, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Harmony**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mms.</th>
<th>Pedal Chord</th>
<th>Pedal Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-13</td>
<td>G-minor-11</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-22</td>
<td>C-minor-11</td>
<td>E-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-31</td>
<td>G-minor-11</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-43</td>
<td>E-minor-11</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-55</td>
<td>G-sharp-minor-11</td>
<td>G-sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-63</td>
<td>G-sharp-minor-11</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-70</td>
<td>B-minor-11</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-79</td>
<td>F-sharp-minor-11</td>
<td>F-sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-88</td>
<td>G-flat-major-11</td>
<td>G-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-94</td>
<td>A-major-11</td>
<td>C-sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95-107</td>
<td>G-sharp-minor-11</td>
<td>G-sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108-116</td>
<td>B-flat-minor-11</td>
<td>B-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117-129</td>
<td>B-flat-minor-11</td>
<td>B-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130-149</td>
<td>G-minor-11</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150-158</td>
<td>G-flat-major-11</td>
<td>G-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159-175</td>
<td>D-flat-major-11</td>
<td>D-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176-190</td>
<td>C-minor-11</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191-197</td>
<td>B-flat-major-11</td>
<td>A-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198-208</td>
<td>D-minor-11</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209-213</td>
<td>B-minor-9</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214-223</td>
<td>B-minor-9</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>224-239</td>
<td>B-major-9</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-major-11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240-246</td>
<td>C-sharp-major-9</td>
<td>C-sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247-260</td>
<td>B-flat-minor-11</td>
<td>B-flat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These chords are not related to each other functionally, nor is there any pattern. The only constant is the prominence of parallel fourths and eleventh and ninth chords, but even this has little substantive impact because the more notes a composer adds to the tonic triad, the harder it is to hear a collection of pitches as having a root. The pedal note is the most important pitch because it is the lowest pitch, it is alone, and it stays the same when other things change. Often the pedal note is not the root of the chord, but is perceived as such because of these qualities. And yet, there is no relationship between the pedal notes. They are often a major or minor third apart, but there is not enough consistency to discern a pattern. The pedal and chord changes
eventually becoming numbing and irrelevant because 1) one chord is held for long periods of time, and 2) this chord is not related in a tonal way to the chords before or after it.

Despite the controls that the speech-melody technique imposes - tempo, time-signature, rhythm, key signature, harmony, and melodic form - Reich organizes the score in three ways. The first and most important is his choice and presentation of the text. In the second half of Scene 4, Reich edits, and arranges the textual materials to create a form and narrative that serves his purpose. He chooses twenty quotes and, divides them into six sections:

   a. Commentary on the Torah version of the sacrifice story vs. the Koran version
   b. Retelling of the Sacrifice Story
   c. Commentary on Ismail
   d. Commentary on Ishak
   e. Commentary on Ismail
   f. Commentary on the relationship between the brothers

Reich then uses this division of the text as the basis for creating a narrative form that is through-composed.

**Figure 5.5: Reich - The Cave, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Macro Form and Transcript of Comments by Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Mms.</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Commentary on the Torah version of the sacrifice story vs. the Koran version</td>
<td>1-43 (44)</td>
<td>K. Suleiman: There’s a little discrepancy between the Old Testament account of that and the Koranic account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A. Bargouth: In the Torah it is Isaac. In the Koran it is Ismail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J. Tormeh: Ismail is the first born of Ibrahim.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 5.5 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page Range</th>
<th>J. Tormeh</th>
<th>M. Tambah</th>
<th>K. Suleiman</th>
<th>R. Orthman</th>
<th>K. Suleiman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B) Retelling of the Sacrifice Story</td>
<td>44-94 (51)</td>
<td>His father told him, “I had a dream.”</td>
<td>I saw in my dream that I am sacrificing you.</td>
<td>The son said, “Do as you are commanded.”</td>
<td>The moment he put the knife on his neck.</td>
<td>The Archangel Gabriel saved the son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Commentary on Ismail</td>
<td>95-158 (64)</td>
<td>I. Ziad</td>
<td>He was ready to sacrifice his life for his father.</td>
<td>J. Tormeh</td>
<td>An obedient son.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Mari</td>
<td>He was not the revolutionary type, he accepted things –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A. Khalili</td>
<td>Ismail he’s the father of Arabs – a Prophet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Natour</td>
<td>He’s our father, the father of Muhammed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Commentary on Ishak</td>
<td>159-223 (65)</td>
<td>J. Tormeh</td>
<td>Ishak is the second born of Ibrahim.</td>
<td>A. Khalili</td>
<td>Ishak is one of the – Jewish Prophets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K. Suleiman</td>
<td>Isaac was the ancestor of the Kings of Israel and the Prophets and Jesus Christ as well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Mari</td>
<td>A challenger and also spoiled and snobbish and arrogant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Commentary on Ismail</td>
<td>224-239 (16)</td>
<td>M. Mari</td>
<td>Ishmael is the oldest and he’s the inheritant [sic] and we are the descendant and that’s that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) Commentary on the relationship</td>
<td>249-260 (12)</td>
<td>J. Tormeh</td>
<td>Half brothers from different mothers.</td>
<td>M. Natour</td>
<td>They are all the time connected – one by the other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between the brothers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we include the chant of Koran – Surah 37: 99-113 then the overarching structure of Act II, Scene 4 is a four-part structure of narration (Surah), commentary, narration, and commentary. In each section, Reich spends significant time on each subject. (The mean number of measures in
each section is 42). In Act II, Reich’s focus is on a detailed exploration of what Palestinians think about the characters of Ismail and Ishak. This is significant because, as I will demonstrate, in Act III Reich switches subjects more rapidly.

Through quotes from the interviewees, Reich portrays Ismail as “the father of Arabs,” “a prophet,” and “the father of Muhammed.” Ishak, in turn, is described as “the second born of Ibrahim,” a “Jewish Prophet,” and “the ancestor of the Kings of Israel and the Prophets and Jesus Christ as well.” Up until this point in the scene, Reich has portrayed each son in a balanced and even manner that is undisputed between the two religions. He chooses quotes from interviewees that engage descriptions upheld in both the Islamic and Biblical texts. From measures 209 to 239, however, Reich introduces biased, accusatory descriptions of Ishak by a Palestinian interviewee: “A challenger and also spoiled and snobbish and arrogant.” In addition to criticizing Ishak’s character, this subject anoints Ishmael and aligns herself with him: “Ishmael is the oldest and he’s the inheritant [sic] and we are the descendants and that’s that.” Reich uses this interviewee as the dissident voice to show tension between the two cultures. In the last 19 measures of Scene 4, however, Reich returns to the commonalities between the brothers and the two religions by concluding with the quote “half brothers from different mothers…They are all the time connected-one by the other” (m. 240-260).

In addition to selecting and editing the text, Reich repeats choice words, phrases and sentences as a way of highlighting or emphasizing specific ideas. These words are not repeated in the actual interviews. Rather, Reich is acting on the text; offering an exegetical view and giving his work a precise compositional intent. Text repetition occurs in four ways:

1) Reich chooses a clause or word from earlier in the sentence as a repetitive motive; he states the original sentence, a word or two is repeated, and then the main clause is repeated again so that the most important word is heard three times.

2) Reich repeats immediately, and it in its entirety, the proceeding sentence.

3) Reich breaks a sentence into two parts and repeats each fragment.

4) Reich uses a word or clause from earlier in the sentence as a repeated motive.
The most common form of text repetition is the first (Example 5.4). This technique is notable not only because Reich uses it twelve times in Act II, Scene 4, but also because it is the procedure where Reich alters the original text the most.

**Example 5.4: Reich - The Cave, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Repetition 1 mm. 1-13**
It is through this form of repetition that Reich most clearly demonstrates his exegetical intent for Reich takes a word or clause that the interviewee stated once, perhaps in passing, and highlights it by repeating it three times.

The other most common form of text repetition is the second, where Reich repeats an entire sentence (Example 5.5).

**Example 5.5: Reich—**The Cave, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Repetition 2 mm. 32-43
This form of text emphasis occurs five times but only at the beginning and end of Scene 4. Reich uses this technique to highlight some essential texts in the retelling of the sacrifice story. This includes “The son said, ‘Do as you are commanded’” (mm. 71-79) and Reich’s interpretation of the cultural divide, for example “Ishmael is the oldest and he’s the inheritor [sic] and we are the descendant and that’s that” (mm. 224-239).

There is only one sentence in Act II, Scene 4 where Reich does not manipulate the text in some manner: “The Archangel Gabriel saved the son” (mm. 89-94). It is strange that Reich chose not to emphasize this sentence, as it is the apex of the drama. This suggests that Reich’s real focus is not on the sacrifice story itself but in using the story as a foil for observing differing attitudes and belief systems between Israelis and Palestinians.

The choice and manner of repetition is one of Reich’s most subjective compositional moves. In this maneuver we see Reich’s artistic point of view, for the repeated texts are not musically generated by the speech-melody technique but chosen by Reich only for rhetorical emphasis. More often than not, Reich chooses words or phrases that emphasize drama over narrative, opinion over fact. This will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

The last way that Reich influences the score outside of the documentary speech-melody technique is by inserting short, instrumental motives between quotes (Example 5.6). Reich derives the rhythms and melodic contour of these instrumental motives from the correlating speech-melody, but often elongates the rhythms, minimizes the repetition of pitches, or changes the register to create a new musical gesture. He then uses these new instrumental motives to imitate or echo the speech-melody or to highlight it through the change of timbre and register.

In this example, the sampler and vibraphones creates a c-minor 11th pedal chord in measure 14 as the interviewee states “In the Torah it’s Isaac.” Reich transcribes this speech-melody and has the viola and cello double the speaker in measures 14 and 15. In measures 15.5-17 this motive is presented as a permutation in the strings. The change of timber from voice to string instrument, as well as the modulation of register to the high strings, draws attention to the preceding text. In measures 18 to 20, Reich expands on the initial melodic gesture in the violin I while the lower strings support using pitches from the c-minor 11th plus the added pitch of A.
It seems that Reich uses musical interludes to serve two of the functions that *te’amim* do in traditional Biblical cantillation: to delineate textual fragments and to connect themes. In Reich’s article on Hebrew cantillation, he explains that *te’amim*, the accent markings in Hebrew scripture, indicate the syntactical structure of the text, the distribution of pauses, and the ending of a complete verse and of its parts. In *The Cave* the short instrumental motives serve a similar function; rather than indicating the end of a phrase, they mark moments where Reich includes text repetitions. For example, in the interview transcript, it reads “In the Torah it is Isaac. In the Koran it is Ismail.” Reich acts upon this text by repeating first, “In the Torah” and then “In the Torah its Isaac.” These textual echoes are highlighted by the instrumental frame.

In addition to marking textual repetition, the musical interludes create a bridge connecting thematic and musical ideas. In cantillation, “The divisions marked by the *te’amim* might follow musical and poetic criteria that are in contrast with those regulating the logical and grammatical division of the text.” Often, especially in the poetical books of the Torah, the placement of the *te’amim* leads to an irregular division of the text to establish, for instance, parallels among subsections or to place emphasis on a particular word. In *The Cave*, Reich uses instrumental interludes in much the same way, to create a thematic or musical repetition that is in contrast with the natural division of the text (Example 5.7).

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364 William Wickes, *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the So-Called Poetical Books...Psalms, Proverbs, and Job*, (New York: KTAV, 1970), 4: “We find, when we come to examine the text for ourselves, words united, which ought from the sense or construction, to be separated, and separated, where we should have expected them united.” According to Wickes, most of these irregularities can be explained by moments when a “purely musical character will make itself felt.”
365 One example of word emphasis occurs in Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God creates/ the heavens and the earth.” A *ta’amim* separates “God created” from the rest of the verse; Puca, “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” 554.
Example 5.7: Reich—*The Cave*, Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, Instrumental motives mm. 1-13.
Example 5.7 (cont.)

In the transcript of the interview, it reads “There’s a little discrepancy between the Old Testament account of that and the Koranic account.” Reich uses instrumental interludes like *te’amim*, to create thematic repetition that emphasizes particular words. In this example, he breaks this quote into two parts:

1) “There’s a little discrepancy”

2) “between the Old Testament account of that and the Koranic account.”

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366 Reich, *The Cave*, 44.
A musical interlude creates focus on each part of the sentence. Reich then turns the initial clause - “There’s a little discrepancy” - into an imitative motive “a little discrepancy” (mm. 10-11) and “discrepancy” (m. 13). Each imitation is separated by a brief instrumental interlude which places emphasis on the preceding phrase. Throughout The Cave, Reich uses instrumental interludes to create a thematic or musical repetition that is often in contrast with the natural division of the text.

By choosing the text and editing the libretto, repeating phrases, and inserting short, instrumental motives between quotes, Reich advances his interpretation of the Sacrifice Story. A simple reading of the transcript might lead one to believe that the difference between the Biblical and Koranic descriptions of the Sacrifice Story is minimal and narrative. Reich uses his tools as a librettist and composer to underscore the religious implications of the differences. He emphasizes the tension between Muslims and Jews by highlighting the following phrases:

“a little discrepancy” (mm. 1-13)

“In the Torah it is Isaac” (mm. 14-22) and “In the Koran it is Ismail” (mm. 23-31)

“Ismail he’s the father of Arabs – a Prophet.” (mm. 130 – 148) and “Ishak is one of the – Jewish Prophets.” (mm. 176-190)

“A challenger and also spoiled and snobbish and arrogant.” (209-223)

The reiteration of these phrases naturally draws attention to them, but they are further highlighted by the instrumental motives that frame them.

The same tools that Reich uses to create narrative drama are also used to suggest a way towards religious acceptance. At the end of this movement, Reich highlights the statement “Half brothers from different mothers” (mm. 240-242) by repeating “half brothers” two additional times. To further underline this sense of connectedness, Reich states and repeats in its entirety “they are all the time connected – one by the other” (mm. 247-255). Clearly Reich advocates that the similarities and shared history between Ishmael and Isaac, Muslims and Jews, should be valued greater than their differences.
Act III, The Binding of Isaac

Whereas Act I of The Cave focuses on Israelis and the Hebrew Bible, and Act II turns to Palestinians and the Koran, in Act III: New York/Austin Reich interviews people from his own country and culture. In this act he uses the Old Testament as his original text. Although Reich elects to include this religious source, he often chooses comments by interviewees that suggest that America is a more secular culture with less ties to its religious heritage and more ties to its cultural heritage. Reich presents the American voice as being critical of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael and God.

Structurally Act III is quite different from Act I and II. In the first two acts, the religious source material and interviews are separated from one another; in Act III they are intertwined. Act I and II is divided into multiple movements lasting one to five minute; Act III is 32 minutes long. Again, this dissertation will focus on the section devoted to the Sacrifice Story, measures 1064 to 1299. In these 237 measures, (approximately four and a half-minutes) there is no marker in the score to signal a change between the previous section and Genesis 22.367

As in Act II’s telling of the Sacrifice Story, in Act III Reich’s most fundamental compositional maneuver is his choice and presentation of the documentary material. Reich and Korot collected hours of interviews and selected, edited, extracted, and arranged the text to create a narrative that served their aim. Ultimately, they chose eleven quotes from interviewees and twelve of the twenty-four verses of Genesis 22 (Figure 5.6).

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367 The Akeidah story is measures 1063 to 1300 out of 1753 measures of Act III.
### Figure 5.6: Reich—*The Cave, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Text*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1. And it came to pass, after these things, that God put Abraham to the test and He said to him “Abraham” and he said “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>Sort of testing, testing a metal for strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>2. And He said: “Take now your son, your favored one, whom you love, Isaac. And go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>Until you push yourself right to the edge, you don’t actually know if you’ve got it in you or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>3. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, saddled his donkey and took two servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place of which God had spoken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>Very difficult for modern people to conceive of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>7. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, “My father,” and he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said “Behold, the flint and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Usher</td>
<td>The kid knows that something is about to happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>8. And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>I wonder why he wouldn’t fight his father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>9. And they came to the place of which God had spoken, And Abraham built an altar there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Rosenberg</td>
<td>Isaac asks, says look father, I’m a young man, when I see that knife, I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>9. He laid out the wood, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. 10. And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11. And an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven saying, “Abraham, Abraham” and he said “Here I am.” 12. And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, for now I know you fear God Since you have not withheld your son, your favored one from me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Prager</td>
<td>Isaac was never sacrificed – that’s the whole point of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Lytton</td>
<td>There were people around that did that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>15. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven saying, 17. “I will bless you exceedingly and I will greatly multiply your seed like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the shore of the sea.” 18. And by your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have listened to my voice.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.6 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F. DeBose</th>
<th>Isaac was God’s promise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Smith</td>
<td>He’s almost a connector for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>Very difficult for modern people to conceive of.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noteworthy that in this section Reich not only curates the interviewee’s responses, but also the Biblical text. Reich leaves out the following verses:

4. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

5. Then Abraham said to his servants, “You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go there; we will worship and we will return to you.”

6. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

13. When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

14. And Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”

16. and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,

These exclusions are significant not only for how they disrupt the narrative continuity, but also the role that these specific verses play in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The omission of verse six creates problems for both Jewish and Christian interpretations of the story. In Judaism, the midrash uses Isaac’s active participation in the sacrifice -- carrying the firewood and instructing Abraham how to perform the rite -- as proof that Isaac was an accomplice and not a victim.\textsuperscript{368} This detail changes the theological implications of the story.

With verse six, Isaac is a willing participant, sacrificing himself as an act of homage to God. Without verse six, Abraham is an aggressor, coercing Isaac to his death.

Central to the Christian interpretation of the Akeidah is the idea that the sacrifice of Isaac became a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ. To support this point, Christian theologians note similarities that link the two stories. Abraham and Isaac walked three days to Mount Moriah, and there is an equivalent three-day period between Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection. Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice just as Jesus carried his own cross. The ram caught in a thicket that became Isaac’s proxy was viewed by the Christian author Tertullian as analogous to the crown of thorns made from the brambles of a bush. The ram (or lamb) sacrificed in Isaac’s stead is echoed by Jesus’ appellation as “The Lamb of God” (John 1:29 and Peter 1:19-20). By eliminating verses four, six and thirteen, Reich diminishes the idea that Isaac prefigures Jesus and minimizes the connection Genesis 22 plays in connecting the Old and New Testament.

The ram, which Reich omits in his retelling by excluding verse thirteen, plays a central role both in Judaism and Islam. On Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year), and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) a ram’s horn, or shofar, is blown at the peak of the service to commemorate the animal sacrificed in Isaac’s stead. In Islam, the culmination of the Hajj, the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, is the sacrifice of an animal to commemorate that God offered a ram in place of Ibrahim’s son. By omitting verse thirteen Reich excludes these connections.

Finally, while Reich includes verse seventeen, God’s blessing, he leaves out the final clause “and thy shall possess the gate of his enemies.” As The Cave was written while Israeli occupation of the West Bank persisted, it is understandable why Reich might chose to leave out this politically sensitive clause.

370 Delaney, Abraham On Trial, 138
371 John 19:17; Kugel, How to Read the Bible, 17.
372 Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, 13:251
373 Green, “Abraham, Isaac and the Jewish Tradition”, 16.
374 Kynsh, Islam in Historical Perspective 312; Firestone, Journeys in Holy Lands, 135
Based on observations of the text and score, Reich divides the texts into four sections; in each section he alternates quickly between Biblical verses and interviewee commentary:

a. Bible: The unity of time, place and action in verses 1-3
   Interviewee Commentary: Reflections on verses 1-3

b. Bible: The dramatic narrative of the event (vss. 4-12)
   Interviewee Commentary: Explanation of vs. 4-12

c. Bible: The synoptic closure provided by the final four verses.
   Interviewee Commentary: Explanation of final four verses

d. Coda: Interviewee Commentary

Reich then uses this division of the text as the basis for creating a narrative form (Figure 5.7).

**Figure 5.7: Reich—The Cave, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Macro and Micro Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro Form</th>
<th>Micro Form and Source</th>
<th>Mms. (#mms)</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) The unity of time, place and action in verses 1-3</td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1064-1076 (13)</td>
<td>1. And it came to pass, after these things, that God put Abraham to the test and He said to him “Abraham” and he said “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>1077-1084 (8)</td>
<td>Sort of testing, testing a metal for strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1085-1097 (13)</td>
<td>2. And He said: “Take now your son, your favored one, whom you love, Isaac. And go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>1098-1112 (15)</td>
<td>Until you push yourself right to the edge, you don’t actually know if you’ve got it in you or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1113-1131 (19)</td>
<td>3. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, saddled his donkey and took two servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place of which God had spoken.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 5.7 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B) The dramatic narrative of the event (vss. 4-12)</th>
<th>V. Steele</th>
<th>1132-1139 (8)</th>
<th>Very difficult for modern people to conceive of...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1140-1154 (15)</td>
<td>7. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, “My father,” and he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said “Behold, the flint and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Usher</td>
<td>1155-1159 (5)</td>
<td>The kid knows that something is about to happen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1160-1170 (11)</td>
<td>8. And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>1171-1181 (11)</td>
<td>I wonder why he wouldn’t fight his father.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1182-1188 (7)</td>
<td>9. And they came to the place of which God had spoken, And Abraham built an altar there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Rosenberg</td>
<td>1189-1198 (10)</td>
<td>Isaac asks, says look father, I’m a young man, when I see that knife, I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1199-1232 (34)</td>
<td>9. He laid out the wood, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. 10. And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11. And an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven saying, “Abraham, Abraham” and he said “Here I am.” 12. And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, for now I know you fear God Since you have not withheld your son, your favored one from me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C) The synoptic closure provided by the final four verses</th>
<th>D. Prager</th>
<th>1233-1242 (10)</th>
<th>Isaac was never sacrificed – that’s the whole point of the story.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L. Lytton</td>
<td>1243-1248 (6)</td>
<td>There were people around that did that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1249-1280 (32)</td>
<td>15. And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven saying, 17. “I will bless you exceedingly and I will greatly multiply your seed like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the shore of the sea.” 18. And by your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have listened to my voice.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Binding of Isaac in Act III is primarily through-composed. Reich frames the dramatic narrative, however, by placing one comment “Very difficult for modern people to conceive of” at the beginning of the drama (mm. 1132-1139) and at the end of the section (mm. 1289-1299). It seems that Reich chose this phrase to serve as both the theme for Act III and conclusion to “The Sacrifice Story.” While Reich switches frequently between text from Genesis 22 and comments from interviewees, during the apex of the drama, verses 9-12 and 15, 17-18, he maintains focus on the Biblical narrative, 34 and 32 measures respectively. The mean of the other Biblical passages is 13 measures. By sustaining focus on the narrative, Reich creates a natural intensification to the musical arc.

As in Act II, Reich uses short instrumental motives to separate the two forms of text. These instrumental interludes are always a continuation of some previously established, albeit often hidden, rhythm (Example 5.8).
Example 5.8: *The Cave*, Act III, the Binding of Isaac, Instrumental motives mm. 1155-1162
In this example, the pattern of two eighth-note triplets and a rest comes from the rhythm of the last word “happen” in measure 1158. In this instance, although not in all, the instrumental interlude provides an echoing of the final statement.

Reich uses these instrumental interludes as a form of punctuation or *te’anim* in three ways:

1) They divide the narrative and commentary sections of the text
2) They serve as a period when there are two sentences within a verse
3) They reinforce Reich’s repetition by separating reiterations

The most common use of instrumental interludes is the first. Every time Reich switches from Genesis 22 to interviewee commentary or back again he inserts at least one measure of instrumental music (see example 5.8: mm. 1155-1158 are commentary; at mm. 1160 narrative begins.)

In many of the Biblical verses there are more than one sentence within a verse. In many, although not all, of these situations Reich uses an instrumental interlude to separate the two sentences (Example 5.9). This use of instrumental music occurs three times.
Example 5.9: *The Cave*, Act III, the Binding of Isaac, Instrumental motives mm. 1120-1125
Reich is not consistent with this use of instrumental interludes, however. More often than not Reich continues from one sentence to the next without a musical pause.

In Act III, the macro form is experienced through narrative content, while Reich creates the micro form through changes of instrumentation, texture and tempo. A major difference between Act II and Act III is Reich’s use of instrumentation to create form and build drama. In Act III, Reich uses the full panoply of instruments - oboe and English horn, two vibraphones, a bass drum, two pianos, a sampler, a vocal quartet and a string quartet – as well as the sound of a typewriter. Reich delineates between the sacred text and the interview recordings through a change in instrumentation (Figure 5.8). Genesis 22 is sung by the vocal quartet and accompanied by the typewriter sounds and all the instruments while the Biblical text is projected onto a video screen. The combination of fifteen sounding tambours simultaneously, as well as the percussive sound of the typewriter, results in a dense and cacophonous sound.

**Figure 5.8: Reich—Act II, The Binding of Isaac, Instrumentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments accompanying Genesis 22 text</th>
<th>Instruments accompanying Interview Recordings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>English Horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Horn</td>
<td>Two Vibraphones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Vibraphones</td>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Drum</td>
<td>Two Pianos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Pianos</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampler</td>
<td>Alto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soprano – Rhythm mimicked by typing sounds</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alto - Rhythm mimicked by typing sounds</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>String quartet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>String quartet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the instrumentation accompanying the interviewee’s comments feels sparse: just an English horn, the vibraphones, bass drum, two pianos and strings. The difference in instrumentation helps to separate the two kinds of text.

Reich reinforces this contrast through change in texture. He sets the text for Genesis 22: 1-18 as if it were a found speech-melody, that is to say with a narrow melodic contour and rapid meter changes to emphasize text stress (Example 5.10).
Example 5.10: Reich—*The Cave*, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, mm. 1113-1119

Whereas the actual speech-melodies are short fragments of two or three measures, when Reich sets the text Genesis 22 he intensifies this sense of jaggedness by punctuating nearly every chord with an eighth note rest. In this way, the orchestra and voices seem to accompanying the typewriter sound, rather than the reverse. In comparison, the actual speech melodies unfold in sustained legato. Reich reinforces this contrast by having the recorded materials accompanied by sustained major-thirteenth chords in the vibraphones and pianos. Only short speech melodies in the oboe, English horn and string quartet punctuate the calm (Example 5.11).
Example 5.11: Reich—*The Cave*, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, mm. 1105-1112
This simple orchestration and thin texture allow the audience to hear the content and tone of the recorded material more clearly than that of the Biblical text. This suggests that Reich is prioritizing the interviewee’s commentary on the Binding of Isaac story over the sacred text itself.

To reinforce these changes in texture, Reich uses contrasting tempos to create musical form (Figure 5.9). You will remember from the beginning of this chapter that when creating speech-melodies Reich adopts the natural tempo of whatever recorded speech he is transcribing. In this section of Act III, the Sacrifice Story, the commentary by American interviewees is slower than the music Reich composes for the text of Genesis 22.

**Figure 5.9: Reich—The Cave, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Micro Form and Tempos**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro Form</th>
<th>Micro Form and Source</th>
<th>Mms. (#mms)</th>
<th>Tempo Q</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) The unity of time, place and action in verses 1-3</td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1064-1076 (13)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>1. And it came to pass, after these things, that God put Abraham to the test and He said to him “Abraham” and he said “Here I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>1077-1084 (8)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Sort of testing, testing a metal for strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1085-1097 (13)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2. And He said: “Take now your son, your favored one, whom you love, Isaac. And go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Hewitt</td>
<td>1098-1112 (15)</td>
<td>97/127</td>
<td>Until you push yourself right to the edge, you don’t actually know if you’ve got it in you or not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1113-1131 (19)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, saddled his donkey and took two servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering and set out for the place of which God had spoken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>1132-1139 (8)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Very difficult for modern people to conceive of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) The dramatic narrative of the event (vss. 4-12)</td>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1140-1154 (15)</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>7. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, “My father,” and he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said “Behold, the flint and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Usher</td>
<td>1155-1159 (5)</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>The kid knows that something is about to happen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1160-1170 (11)</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>8. And Abraham said, “God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them walked on together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Steele</td>
<td>1171-1181 (11)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>I wonder why he wouldn’t fight his father.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1182-1188 (7)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>9. And they came to the place of which God had spoken, And Abraham built an altar there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Rosenberg</td>
<td>1189-1198 (10)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Isaac asks, says look father, I’m a young man, when I see that knife, I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 22</td>
<td>1199-1232 (34)</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9. He laid out the wood, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. 10. And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11. And an angel of the Lord called to him from heaven saying, “Abraham, Abraham” and he said “Here I am.” 12. And he said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy, for now I know you fear God Since you have not withheld your son, your favored one from me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Prager</td>
<td>1233-1242 (10)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Isaac was never sacrificed – that’s the whole point of the story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Lytton</td>
<td>1243-1248 (6)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>There were people around that did that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviewees speak at a moderate speed with the quarter note articulations between 86 and 135, whereas Genesis 22 is told at a rapid pace with quarter note movement between 127 and 156. It is useful to speculate on the musical grounds for these contrast in tempo. First, the variation creates a sense of intensity or even anxiety during the Biblical passages, and a feeling of quiet and reflection during the commentary. Second, by setting the text of the Akeidah to fast tempos, Reich may be prioritizing the interviewee’s comments over the sacred text. Third, the Biblical text may be presented more quickly because Reich assumes his audience is familiar with the story.

Reich uses tempo changes not only to create a musical form but also a narrative arc. At the beginning of the story, Genesis 22:1-3, Reich uses a moderate tempo of quarter note equals 127 to 129 and chooses speech-melodies with tempos of quarter notes equaling 86 to 94. When the drama begins, as Isaac asks “Behold, the flint and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?” (mm. 1140-1154) Reich sets the text to quarter note equals 141 and maintains a faster speed for verses 4 through 12, the apex of the drama. Likewise, Reich chooses quotes that also have a faster tempo, between 104-116. After the Angel calls to Abraham and Isaac is saved,
Reich returns to setting the Biblical text to quarter note equals 129 and choose quotes that are 95 or 94 beats per minute. Both as a composer and a curator of documentary material, Reich manipulates tempo to achieve a narrative and emotional objective.

Where as in Acts I and II, Reich used repetition as one of his primary expressive strategies, in Act III it is used more as a compositional technique. Reich sets all of the verses of Genesis 22 in imitation where the soprano and bass lead and the alto and tenor follow a quarter note or two behind. The first violin and cello double the soprano and bass, while the violin two and viola doubles the alto and tenor (Example 5.12).

**Example 5.12: Reich—The Cave, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Biblical Text in Imitation, mm. 1064-1070**

In this technique, Reich splits each verse of the Biblical text into clauses and sets each clause as an imitative motive.

And it came to pass, after these things, that God put Abraham to the test / and He said to him “Abraham” and he said “Here I am.”

The imitation makes it difficult to understand the text, although the last few words are emphasized by the echo effect. Reich sets all the verses of Genesis 22 in this manner.
In the sections of interviewee commentary, there are three repetition techniques Reich used in Act II, Scene 4 that he also uses in Act III, The Binding of Isaac:

1) Reich uses a word or clause from earlier in the sentence as a repeated motive.

2) Reich breaks a sentence into two parts and repeats each fragment.

3) Reich chooses a clause or word from earlier in the sentence as a repetitive motive; he states the original sentence, a word or two is repeated, and then the main clause is repeated again so that the most important word is heard three times total.

The most common form of text repetition is the first (Example 5.13).

**Example 5.13: Reich—*The Cave*, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Repetition 1 mm. 1289-1295**

![Musical notation](image)

This technique is crucial not only because Reich uses it five times, but also because it allows Reich to manipulate the speaker’s words to serve his own purpose.

The second most common form of text repetition is the second, where Reich breaks a sentence into two parts and repeats each fragment (Example 5.14).
Example 5.14: Reich—*The Cave*, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Repetition 2 mm. 1243-1248

This form of text emphasis occurs twice and only towards the end of the scene. In this technique Reich stresses that both parts of the quote are equally important.

The final repetition technique is only found once, at the beginning of the scene during the first interviewee commentary (Example 5.15).
Example 5.15: Reich—*The Cave*, Act III, The Binding of Isaac, Repetition 3 mm. 1077-1084

Here Reich chooses “testing” as a repetitive motive. He states the original sentence, “Sort of testing a metal for strength,” repeats “testing” twice and then restates the main clause “testing a metal” so that “testing” is heard five times total. This was the most common form of repetition in Act II, Scene 4: Sacrifice – Ismail and Ishak, and is also the form of repetition through which Reich most clearly demonstrates exegetical viewpoint.

Unlike in the Act II telling, in this version of the Sacrifice Story there are four comments where Reich does not act upon the text at all:

“The kid knows that ah something is about to happen” (mm. 1155-1158)

“Isaac asks says look father. I’m a young man when I see that knife, I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me? (mm.1189-1198)

“Isaac was God’s promise.” (1281-1284)

“He’s almost a connector for me” (1285-1287)

In a work that is a delicate dance between documentation and manipulation, it is notable that in these four quotes Reich does not influence or emphasize the text in any way. Perhaps Reich felt
that these statements were strong enough to stand on their own, or that the absence of imitation
drew attention to them.

In Act III, Reich relies on three compositional tools: choice and presentation of the
documentary material to create a narrative form, emphasis of this form through changes in
instrumentation, texture and tempo, and repetition to highlight specific text. The first maneuver
is where we hear Reich’s voice the clearest. He and Korot collected 150 hours of interview
material for this project and chose only portions that appealed to them or reflected their purpose.
The presentation of the documentary material is not the only artificial creation, however. Reich
and Korot omitted sections of the Old Testament to draw attention only to the sections that
served their artistic vision. The orchestration, contrasting tempos, and use of texture support this
goal. Reich molded these elements so that it is easier to hear the recorded material than the
Biblical text. For Reich, the Binding of Isaac story is simply a way to explore the religious
differences between Israelis, Palestinians and Americans.

Before we conclude our analysis of Genesis 22, a few observations on other sections of
Act III that do not directly pertain to the “Binding of Isaac” story but are nonetheless pertinent to
our exploration of Reich’s portrayal of the main characters. In the opening 333 measures of Act
III, approximately five minutes and thirty-seconds, interviewees respond to the question “Who is
Abraham?” In this section of Act III, Reich paints a portrait not only of these Biblical characters
but also of American society. He chooses comments that show American interviewees as diverse
in background and varied in their understanding of and relationship to religion. When asked
“Who is Abraham” they respond “Abraham Lincoln?” (mm. 1-12) and “Abraham Lincoln High
School” (mm. 13-41) and not one calls him the patriarch of monotheism.

Similarly, the American subjects tend to identify Ishmael with literature or pop culture
images. He is “the James Dean of the old testament” (mm. 887-896) or “From Moby Dick – call
me Ishmael!” (mm. 897-908). Several interviewees envision Ishmael as the “outsider…
stranger” (mm. 922-931) figure often portrayed in Hollywood Westerns. He is described as “The
loner, he’s the first cowboy. The guy who walks off into the sunset, all by himself” (m. 942-959).
In this “loner” figure, Reich’s interviewees see “the person we all identify with” as (mm.
932-940), “a kind of everyman” (mm. 1030-1039). According to one person, Americans identify
strongly with Ishmael because “American mythic thinking values the man alone” (mm. 967-972).

According to Reich, Americans not only identify with Ishmael, but also Hagar. One interviewee explains “I understood Hagar because of my mother…She was a German immigrant who was never accepted in the Irish clan” (m. 674-690.) Another confides “When I think of Hagar, as a black female, I really think of myself” (mm. 799-807). Even interviewees who do not make a personal connection to Hagar recognize her as a modern character: “The first single mother” (mm. 832-838).

On the whole, the American interviewees identify the Biblical figures as characters in a story rather than as religious figures. Only a few subjects mention that “Jesus is traced back to Abraham” (mm.279-297), that Abraham is the “father of faith” (mm. 300-333) and believe that “when you read the Bible it’s God speaking to you and you speak back to God in prayer” (m. 144-187). More interviewees allude to Americans’ strained relationship with organized religion, admitting that they have never read the Bible and that it is “history” (mm. 244-259). Some go further, “Irrelevant. Introduced and forgotten. In the drawer in the hotel” (mm. 105-143).

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter is to examine how Reich’s use of the speech-melody technique and inclusion of multiple religious and cultural viewpoints informs our understanding of the Sacrifice Story. Reich’s presentation is not the unfolding of a dramatic plot but rather a triptych. He presents the audience with various material and asks us to be objective observers. Reich and Korot avoid suggesting conclusions, although that is nearly impossible.

In many ways, The Cave is the most extreme version of Reich’s speech-melody technique. The sort of compact ensemble of percussion with voices and sustaining instruments that had been characteristic of Reich music through the decades from to Tehillim (1981), to Different Trains (1988), is brought to its logical extension in The Cave (1993). But The Cave is
also unique in four meaningful ways. First, its scale is unprecedented. Running nearly
two-and-a-half hours, The Cave explores whether the speech-melody technique can function as
the fundamental structure for an opera-length work. Second, in The Cave the documentary
sources provide both audio and visual content. This visual element brings to the forefront
Reich’s emphasis on the tension between documentation and the creation of art. Third, The Cave
is unique in Reich’s output because there is little dependence or even focus on the hypnotically
repetitive rhythms, phasing effects, and gradual process with which his music is usually
identified. The Cave is the first time in Reich career where the emphasis is not on the rhythm or
process, but rather on melody and semantic interests.375 Finally, in many ways, Reich comes full
circle with The Cave in that sampled materials provide Reich a form of necessity. Unlike his
early works on magnetic tape, the digital sampling and sequencing technology used in The Cave
allows Reich to work with words without turning them into autonomous sounds. Now, the
guiding principle for the composition comes from the verbal material itself and there is a fusion
between the musical and semantic meaning.

The Cave is artistically successful in many ways. Perhaps its greatest contribution is
providing insight into the Sacrifice Story that is not found in other artwork. Few other works of
art, and no other pieces of music, explore the different versions of the story as interpreted by
Jews, Christians and Muslims. Few other musical composition engage the Sacrifice Story as a
means to highlight political and cultural tensions.

This piece does not function, however, as a neutral and dispassionate presentation of
documentary material, for that is an impossible task. Reich and Korot have screened the material.
They selected which religious stories, verses, and translation to use and which to exclude. They
collected 150 hours of interviews and chose only a fraction for use in the final product.376

Despite attempting to be balanced and unbiased, Reich and Korot’s fingerprints are all
over The Cave, and giving the impression of impartiality weakens the power of the work. This
weakness is most obvious by the inclusion of Act III. It appears that Reich and Korot included
Act III for two reasons. First, it is an attempt to synthesize what they knew would be two

376 Ibid., 22, 40.
dialectically opposed first two acts. But Act III does not mediate this opposition, it simply demonstrates that America is a largely secular society. Second, I hypothesize that Reich and Korot included Act III to enhance legitimacy; they felt that, since they are neither Israeli nor Palestinian, to have the right to discuss this material they must insert their own culture. But this maneuver is not structurally, aesthetically, or rhetorically effective; rather it clouds the power of the first two acts.

There is no need for Reich and Korot to pretend they have not influenced the work. There is no “truth” in an absolute sense; everything we know has been filtered through several cultural sieves, much like the images inside Plato’s Cave. Reich and Korot’s proposal that it is possible to make art in an objective manner that does not take a position is dubious. Although there is a pretense of objectivity and balance, The Cave largely becomes about Reich and Korot’s attempt to seem impartial and inclusive. This is impossible, for the subject is politics and religion, the most divisive of conversations.

The Cave is remarkable, however in providing a unique authenticity. The speech-melody technique connects the ancient sacred texts with individuals living in the 20th century. It revives the stories, making them personal and relevant. As Antonella Puca explains

The speech melody of each person becomes a kind of musical portrait of the person and works as a guide to the character’s personality. Reich notes that when the ear concentrates on the music inherent to the words, one might become aware of the additional layer of meaning, one that reflects the inner voice of the person speaking. For Reich, the composer can bring the speech melody to the fore and make the “other” subconscious meaning surface. 377

Through the speech-melody technique Reich demonstrates how the characters, their stories, and their emotions are meaningful 2,000 years after the story was written. Through the speech-melody technique we can hear anger, fear, sadness and regret. But in Reich’s other speech-melody works, some of the precise nuance of the meaning is lost when Reich transcribes spoken word to notes on a staff. This problem is largely solved by the addition of the videos where we can see the speaker’s facial expressions in addition to hearing their words. In The Cave, “the music and the person talking are together.” 378 Over the course of two-and-a-half

hours, these individuals paint a portrait of three different communities. Ten years after its premier, the music reviewer for the New York Times Anthony Tommasini wrote, “The Cave was painfully relevant to recent events in the Middle East. Sadly, it remains as relevant today.”

Another decade has past and the strain between Jews, Palestinians and Americans continues. The Cave provides meaningful insight into how an ancient story has fostered religious and cultural tensions in contemporary society.

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Chapter Six:

Comparative Musical Perspectives on Conflict and Faith in Modern Times

At the core of the *Akeidah* are questions about the nature of the relationship between God and humans. Is there a master architect or do we have free will? Is God benevolent or cruel? Is this narrative a model of faith or a cautionary tale? At the beginning of this dissertation, I explored the central role the Sacrifice Story plays in the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. I examined the religious, cultural, and political significance of this narrative within, and between these faiths. In the second chapter, I investigated how artists--visual, literary and musical--have reflected these theological questions in their creations. Do they view Genesis 22 as an illustration of unquestioning obedience to the divine command or as a baffling story where God’s logic, indeed his very essence, is not self-evident? I then analyzed three compositions from the late twentieth century that employ the Binding of Isaac narrative as a means of discussing religious, political, cultural, and/or artistic issues: Harlap and Zur’s *Akedat Yitzchak* and Reich’s *The Cave*. There I analyzed how these compositions use musical and extramusical devices to build a dramatic or theological narrative.

In this chapter, I compare how Harlap, Zur, and Reich have engaged the text and organized the music to center or deconstruct the rationalization put forth in the binding of Isaac narrative. In other words, what themes do they highlight, and which do they suppress? How do they render Isaac, Abraham, and God? Although this music is comparably modern and personal, each composer has built on the layers of artistic interpretation laid down by their predecessors, so I compare these works not only to each other, but also to the *Akeidah* art of writers, painters, sculptors, and composers before them. I will argue that Aharon Harlap’s music shows an awareness of historical models that portray the sacrifice as a human event, shorn of its liturgical significance. Menachem Zur echoes Stravinsky’s abstract compositional language and contrasts the drama of the text with that of the music. Like Rembrandt, Reich probes the inner psyches of Abraham, Isaac and Sarah; ultimately approaching Abraham with empathy and compassion, as

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he tries to understand the patriarch’s destructive behavior, suffering and pain. And like Britten and Segal, Reich’s *The Cave* embraces the story from a multitude of political perspectives. Harlap, Zur and Reich all compose with an awareness that the past is very much present and that, as T.S. Elliot said “the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” in each of their works.\footnote{Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 1.}

**Text Setting**

Harlap, Zur, and Reich set the text of Genesis 22 in three ways, each prioritizing and omitting different parts of the story. Harlap’s libretto uses the text in a conservative manner, Reich manipulates the story by editing, repeating, and adding text, while Zur regards the narrative almost as an abstraction. While these styles are disparate, I argue that they reflect established trends in the artistic and religious tradition of Genesis 22 (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1: Text Setting**

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<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional + Add Text</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Edward Levy explains that “Quantitatively most 20th century music is traditional in idiom and in ways of incorporating texts into musical works.”\footnote{Edward Levy, “Text setting and usage,” in John Vinth (ed.), *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Music*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, 735.} He argues that when we use the
word traditional we mean that a composer sets the text with minimal editing or restructuring of
the language, although the composer may repeat words or phrases to further enhance the reading.
Both denotation and connotation engage a subtle interaction with form, rhythm, and inflection.\textsuperscript{383}
The relationship between text and music intends either to highlight a specific idea or attitude, or
to project the general expressive qualities of the entire text.\textsuperscript{384}

Harlap and Britten in \textit{Canticle II} (1952) set two different texts, Genesis 22 and the
\textit{Chester Mystery Play} respectively, but both do so in a traditional manner, without restructuring
the language. In fact, the only alteration Harlap makes to the Biblical text is reordering the
sentences in verses ten and eleven (mm. 160-163). Here Harlap changes the word order so that
the cry, “Avraham, Avraham” comes after, rather than before, the setting of the scene itself:
“And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” While this slight
manipulation heightens the drama, it does not fundamentally change the essence of the narrative.
In \textit{Canticle II}, Britten omits sentences to make the story more succinct. For example, in the
\textit{Chester Mystery Play}, when God calls “Abraham, my servante Abraham!” Abraham responds
“Loe, lord, alreadye here I am [sic].”\textsuperscript{385} The absence of this sentence, and others like it, in
\textit{Canticle II} does not change the essential meaning of the story.

Carissimi, Reich, and Britten in the \textit{War Requiem} (1961) take this conservative model of
text setting a step further. They highlight or enrich the meaning of the Sacrifice Story by
including additional text. Carissimi set the precedent for this method in the mid-17th century
when in \textit{Historia di Abraham et Isaac} he used not only Genesis 22: 1-18 but also \textit{Laudate
Dominum} (Psalm 117) as a coda.

1. \textit{Alleluja. Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes; laudate eum, omnes populi.}
2. \textit{Quoniam confirmata est super nos misericordia ejus, et veritas Domini manet}
1. Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.
2. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.\textsuperscript{386}

\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{385} Hermann Deimling ed., \textit{The Chester Plays}. (London: EETS, 1892), 56.
\textsuperscript{386} The Holy Bible: Containing The Old And New Testaments With The
The addition of this Psalm underscores the moral that God is benevolent. This is the first time in musical history that a composer has exercised an exegetical choice on the significance of the Sacrifice Story by including additional text.

In 1961 when writing the libretto for the War Requiem, op. 65, Britten expanded on this concept. Rather than adding a separate text at the end of his composition, however, Britten intertwined the liturgical text of the Latin Requiem Mass with poetry by Wilfred Owen, an anti-war poet. The format of the libretto is a collage that alternates between the Latin Mass and the poetry to create striking contrasts of artistic thought in the face of the horrors of war. This method of setting text allows Britten to engage Owen’s ironic take on the Akeidah where Abraham ignores the angel’s plea and“ the old man would not so, but slew his son.” And yet, the individual texts are still set in a straightforward manner, without any editing or re-structuring.

Reich extends this model yet further. Like Britten, Reich alternates between two forms of text; in The Cave these are excerpts from the interviewee’s responses and the sacred texts: Genesis, the Midrash Rabbah (Traditional Biblical commentary in the Jewish religion), the Koran, and the al-Tabari or “History of the Prophets and Kings.” But where Britten uses each text as it was originally conceived, Reich reshapes the interviewees’ comments by editing and repeating choice words, phrases, and sentences. These words are not repeated in the actual interviews. Rather, Reich manipulates the libretto; offering an interpretive perspective and giving The Cave a precisely calculated compositional design.

In all of the settings mentioned above, the text is set with a focus on semantics. By contrast, Stravinsky and Zur’s setting of Genesis 22 minimizes the semantic content and uses the text primarily as a way to organize their composition. In Abraham and Isaac: A Sacred Ballad for Baritone and Orchestra (1963), Stravinsky creates a twelve-tone series that “gain a signature rather as neumes in plainsong do.” The result is a vocal melody that is syllabic with little

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387 Benjamin Britten, War Requiem, op. 66, text from Missa pro defunctis and original text from the poems of Wilfred Owen, (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1985).
388 Benjamin Britten, “Offertorium” War Requiem, 130- 139.
variation or decoration, and which ignores the changing semantics of the text.\textsuperscript{390} In other words, the music unfolds in an organic manner independent from the narrative.

Zur used Stravinsky’s technique as a model.\textsuperscript{391} In \textit{Akedat Ytzchak} the music does not represent or express the text, but rather is set in “contrast” to the text.\textsuperscript{392} A clear example of this approach can be seen in large sections of musical material where the text seems disconnected from the musical gesture. Zur uses the same musical material both to describe a fairly mundane moment, Abraham and Isaac preparing for the ascent of the mountain, as well as for the peak of the drama, the angel’s intervention. Like Stravinsky, Zur contrasts the narrative flow against the stasis of the music to “create a counterpoint of drama and musical tension.”\textsuperscript{393}

Both Stravinsky and Zur were inspired by Biblical cantillation, the method of chanting used in Jewish services, as a strategy for juxtaposing text and music.\textsuperscript{394} Stravinsky scholars explain that the model for \textit{Abraham and Isaac} was hearing Isaiah Berlin read biblical Hebrew. Stravinsky’s composition mimics the style of this chanting: “The repetitive elements in the vocal line, the little melismas, the ululations and the iterated notes all evoke religious chant, and in particular Jewish chant.”\textsuperscript{395} The ancient practice of chanting text, and its focus on accentuation and timbre over semantic meaning, became Stravinsky’s model for \textit{Abraham and Isaac}.\textsuperscript{396}

Like Stravinsky, Zur was interested in cantillation not just as a compositional prototype but also an aesthetic model where the text and music are in tension with one another. Zur explains that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{390} Levy, “Text setting and usage,” 738.
\item \textsuperscript{391} Menachem Zur, interview by the author, January 27, 2012; Schleifer, "Zur, Menachem," 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{392} Zur, interview by the author, e-mail, May 7, 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{393} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{396} Igor Stravinsky, \textit{Abraham and Isaac}. Sony Classical, SONY-BMG 88697 103112, 1959-1966, Disc 22, compact disc.
\end{itemize}
I recognized a contrast between the way (the Akeidah) is “performed” in the synagogue with the regular biblical cantillation of the tropes, cantillation that injects an objective, impersonal manner of retelling the story in spite of the drama that the characters undergo [sic].

For Zur, cantillation is a technique where musical structures are imposed on the text rather than having the text guide motivic development. This method allows for the music to be set in a dispassionate, removed, impersonal manner that Zur finds “chilling” and thus more dramatic.

Stravinsky and Zur were inspired by cantillation as a compositional control on the micro level: melody and rhythm. In The Cave, Reich uses the speech-melody technique in the same way: as an artistic sterilizing mechanism to create distance and objectivity relative to the content of the words. Although in Reich’s case the music is generated by the text, it is not reflective of it. The interviewee’s “text” or speech provides the melodic and rhythmic contour as well as the pitch, timbre, dynamics, articulation, and inherent rhythm. In The Cave, the extramusical components – the text and and images projected on the screens – are more representative and expressive than the music and hence more evocative of the text.

Reich and Korot sought a neutralizing method for their art-making not just on the micro level but also on the macro level. They used five questions as a compositional control over structure and content. Reich and Korot asked all the interviewees - Israelis, Palestinians and Americans - the same five questions:

Who for you is Abraham?
Who for you is Sarah?
Who for you is Hagar?
Who for you is Ishmael?
Who for you is Isaac?

These questions act as constraint that Reich and Korot hope will lead to an impartial, objective investigation of these different cultures. In an interview Reich explained:

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398 Ibid.
Every time Beryl and I would think, ‘Maybe we should ask the Arabs what they think about having a Jewish state,’ or ‘What about the Holocaust?’ we just said: ‘No. Stop! Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac. That’s it.’

By only asking these questions, and by featuring the documentary material, Reich and Korot believe that their presentation gains objectivity and an emotional distance that results in a “truthful” rendering.

It seems consequential that three composers from the twentieth century chose not to project the expressive qualities of the text, but rather to disengage from the denotation and connotation of Genesis 22 and sought an external mechanism to control their artistic presentation. As the previous five chapters have shown, the Sacrifice Story has neither a clear moral nor even a concrete message. Indeed, the Biblical text leaves some narrative details in dispute. In many ways, Genesis 22 prompts more questions than it offers answers. Perhaps Stravinsky, Zur, and Reich chose compositional techniques that disengaged from the text as a way to let these questions rise to the surface. If they had created a relationship between text and music that intended to highlight a particular idea or attitude, then they would have cultivated or reinforced a specific reading of the story. By distancing themselves from the text, Stravinsky, Zur, and Reich either enable multiple semantic resonances or feature doubt, uncertainty, and unanswered questions.

It is important to note not just how a composer sets the text of Genesis 22, but also what verses or words they exclude (Figure 6.2).

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## Figure 6.2: Narrative Focus: Comparison of Text Used

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<td>Pre-Sacrifice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Genesis 22: 6-12 Surah 37: 103-105</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Sacrifice</td>
<td>Genesis 22: 13-14 Surah 37: 106-107</td>
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<td>Blessing</td>
<td>Genesis 22: 15-19 Surah 37: 108-113</td>
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<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Genesis 20-24</td>
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Nearly all the settings begin with verse 1, except for Britten’s *War Requiem*, which omits the first five verses. In his version, Britten begins the story when Abraham first signals his intentions by putting the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac. While Britten uses text from the *Chester Mystery Play*, and Carissimi and Harlap use Genesis 22, they all conclude their story at the moment when Abraham substitutes the ram for Isaac and names the site for God.

None of these settings includes the angel’s second address to Abraham:

The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,/ and said, “By Myself I swear, the Lord declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one,/I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes./And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

Many theologians interpret the angel’s speech as the moral of Genesis 22: because Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, his family will become numerous and favored. This blessing focuses on legacy: the long line of Abraham’s descendants, the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the growth of the Jewish people. Zur, Stravinsky and Reich set nineteen out of the twenty-four verses of Genesis 22, five more than Carissimi, Britten and Harlap, but still omit the
enumeration of the next generation: the children of Abraham’s brother Nahor. By ignoring the last verses, Carissimi, Stravinsky, Britten, Harlap and Zur focus the narrative on the relationship between a father and his son, rather than on the hundreds of future generations that result from his act of faith.

Reich curates the Biblical text by omitting verses from the middle of the chapter: verses 4-6, 13-14, and 16. Of the sections he excludes, the most significant to our discussion are the following:

6. Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together.

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13. When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.

These exclusions are significant because of the role these verses play in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Central to the Christian interpretation of the Akeidah is the idea that the sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. To support this point, Christian theologians note similarities that link Isaac and Jesus: Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice just as Jesus carried his own cross, and the ram caught in the thicket is analogous to the crown of thorns that Jesus wears. By eliminating verses four, six and thirteen, Reich minimizes the role Genesis 22 serves for Christians in connecting the Old and New Testament.

Reich’s exclusion of the ram is especially noteworthy, for this animal plays a central role in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In Christianity, the ram sacrificed in place of Isaac in Genesis 22 is echoed by Jesus’ appellation as “The Lamb of God” in John 1:29 and Peter 1:19-20. Furthermore, on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) a ram’s horn, or shofar, is blown at the apex of the service to commemorate that Isaac was saved. In Islam, the culmination of the Hajj, the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, is the

sacrifice of an animal to commemorate that God offered a ram in place of Ibrahim’s son.  

By leaving out verse thirteen Reich excludes these connections.

Musical and Extramusical Devices

Omitting verses is one method composers use to manipulate the narrative focus of Genesis 22. Composers use additional musical and extramusical devices to highlight a portion of the story or to build dramatic or theological tension.

Like the visual art of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), and Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt (1606-1669), and the prose of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Harlap’s interest with Genesis 22 is less as an allegory of faith than as a drama that depicts Abraham’s hardship and suffering. As he explains “There is no doubt that this is a human and not a religious drama per se.” Harlap uses multiple musical devices to focus his composition on the dramatic qualities of Genesis 22. The presence of theme I, which focuses on two ascending fourths, at both the beginning and end of the composition creates a musical frame. In turn, the absence of this theme in the middle of the composition (mm. 44-169) accentuates this section of the story. In his setting of verses four through eleven, Harlap introduces a new theme (theme II) almost like an ostinato, that is then repeated throughout the section. Harlap further emphasizes verses four and five, the text describing Abraham and Isaac’s journey to Mt. Moriah and the moments preceding the sacrifice, by devoting 90 of the composition’s 202 measures to these verses. The concentration on this text builds considerable suspense.

Harlap’s focus on the Akeidah as theatrical drama is further emphasized through his use of silence and unison singing. Twice Harlap uses a musical pause to create dramatic tension, both during God’s command to Abraham (mm. 10-30). The first pause (m. 17) separates the

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406 Kynsh, *Islam in Historical Perspective* 312; Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, 135
407 Harlap, interview by the author, e-mail, October 26, 2013.
descriptor “whom thou lovest” from its object, *Yitzchak*, while the second separates *velech lecha el erets hamoriya…* (“go to the land of Moriah…”) from *vehaalehu sham leola* (“…and sacrifice him as a burnt offering”). These moments of silence heighten the sense of anticipation. During Isaac’s questioning of his father, Harlap uses melodic and harmonic stasis to create theatrical suspense. When Isaac asks *Hine haesh vehaetsim veaye hase leola* (“Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”) (mm. 147-149) and Abraham replies *Elohim yire lo hase leola beni* (“God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son”) (mm. 151-156), Harlap has the choir narrate “*vayelch shneihem yachdav*” (And the two of them walked on together) in unison octaves. After over a hundred measures of imitative and contrapuntal writing, this unison octave is startling. This texture change paints the image of Abraham and Isaac leaving their servants and going to the mountain alone. For Harlap, it is “at this point that Isaac realizes that he is to be the sacrifice.”

Like the visual artist George Segal (1924-2000), Britten and Reich use the Sacrifice Story to address contemporary politics. In *War Requiem* (1962), Britten uses Wilfred Owen’s poetry not just as a sardonic retelling of the Sacrifice Story but as a political one in which Abraham and Isaac are used as symbols for the “old men” throughout history who have callously sent young men to die in war. In this version of the sacrifice, Abraham ignores the angel’s plea:

> But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
> And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Britten, through Owen’s poetry, transform the traditional religious focus of Genesis 22 into a critique of political conflict and mankind’s capacity for violence.

Reich’s focus is also political, but of a different sort. Reich and Beryl Korot are interested in the coexistence of the Sacrifice Story in the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This allows Reich and Korot to use their stories as a foil to investigate the role of culture and religion in contemporary life in Israel, the West Bank, and America. Reich and

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408 Ibid.
409 Ibid.
410 Benjamin Britten, “Offertorium,” *War Requiem*, 130-139
Korot bring this interest to the forefront through their use of repetition. A simple reading of the Genesis 22 and Surah-37 might suggest that the variations in the two stories are minimal and narrative. Reich uses repetition to highlight the incongruities:

“a little discrepancy mm” (mm. 1-13)

“In the Torah it is Isaac” (mm. 14-22)

“In the Koran it is Ismail” (mm. 23-31)

More often than not, Reich repeats words or phrases that accent the religious and political implications of these differences and emphasizes political or social drama over narrative, and opinion over fact. For example, Reich repeats “A challenger and also spoiled and snobbish and arrogant” (mm. 209-223) and “Ishmael is the oldest and he’s the inheritant [sic] and we are the descendant and that’s that” (mm. 233-239). These phrases spotlight the varying perspective between Jews and Muslims and the strain between Israelis and Palestinians. There is only one sentence in Act II, Scene 4 where Reich does not manipulate the text in some manner: “The Archangel Gabriel saved the son” (mm. 89-94). By not engaging the apex of the drama, Reich further underscores his interest in the sacrifice story not as a theatrical narrative or theological parable but as a political and social drama.

It is useful to note that The Cave uses the stories of Hagar and Sarah to mirror the perspectives of modern day Jews and Muslims, for centuries earlier the Christian Gospels utilized the same parallel as a way of marking the difference between Jews and Christians. According to an early sermon by Augustine, Saint Paul said, “Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are the two Testaments.”\(^\text{412}\) Here Paul characterizes the Jews as the “children of the flesh” through Hagar, and the Christians as the “children of promise” through Sarah.\(^\text{413}\) Many Jewish scholars have interpreted Paul’s analysis as a ploy by Christians to steal their birthright.\(^\text{414}\) In The Cave,
Reich demonstrates how the same aspect of the Sacrifice Story serves not only to distinguish Muslims (the children of Hagar) from Jews (the children of Sarah), but modern day Palestinians (the children of Hagar) from modern day Israelis (the children of Sarah).

Ultimately, Reich and Korot are most interested in how contemporary people project themselves and their compatriots onto the Sacrifice Story.\footnote{Smith, “Steve Reich Talking about ‘The Cave,’”17.} In this way, The Cave echoes the etchings by Harmenszoon van Rijn Rembrandt (1606-1669). Over two decades, Rembrandt rendered the Akeidah numerous times, each time adding visual nuance to his understanding of the patriarch. Similarly, over the three acts of The Cave, Reich and Korot add layers of complexity to the religious interpretations and political impact of the Sacrifice Story.

As explained earlier, Zur and Stravinsky engage the text at an abstract level.\footnote{Igor Stravinsky, Abraham and Isaac. Sony Classical, SONY-BMG 88697 103112, 1959-1966, Disc 22, compact disc.} And yet, both Zur and Stravinsky believe that this separation between the music and the semantic meaning of the text further emphasizes the inherent drama of the story. Zur explains that the contrast between the music and the text “triggers drama in the music.”\footnote{Zur, interview by the author, e-mail, May 7, 2014.} The Akeidah is one of the most bewildering stories in the Old Testament. Rather than trying to express the text or underscore an exegetical interpretation, perhaps Zur and Stravinsky aim to mirror this exegetical confusion by setting the music and odds with one another. Perhaps, for Zur and Stravinsky, the drama is not in the story itself, but rather in the moral and theological questioning that the Binding of Isaac story prompts.

\textit{Musical Portraiture}

How do Zur, Harlap, Reich, Stravinsky, and Britten represent the characters of Abraham, Isaac, and God? Do they portray Abraham as a heroic patriarch, a fanatical extremist, or a comic figure? Is Isaac a naive, young boy, or an informed, mature adult? Is God benevolent and
trustworthy, angry but just, or volatile and malign? To observe how these composers create a musical portrait we will examine how they utilize orchestration, tone painting, and musical characterizations to emphasize specific theological and dramatic interpretations.

At first glance, it would seem that the Akeidah should be scored in a straightforward manner: five voices, one each for Abraham, Isaac, God, the Angel and the narrator. Few composers explored here, however, choose this course. How a composer scores the characters of the Sacrifice Story suggests certain assumptions about the narrative (Figure 6.3).
### Figure 6.3: Scoring

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<tr>
<td>Isaac = High voice</td>
<td>Isaac = Soprano</td>
<td>Isaac = Male alto</td>
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<td>Isaac = Tenor</td>
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<td>Abraham = Baritone</td>
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<td>God = Bass</td>
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<tr>
<td>God = Group of Voices</td>
<td>Tenor + Male Alto</td>
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<td>Angel = Group of Voices</td>
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<td>Angel = Alto</td>
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<td>Narrator/All</td>
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In *Historia di Abraham et Isaac*, Carissimi chose five solo voices - soprano (Isaac), alto (angel), two tenors (*historicus* and Abraham), and bass (God).⁴¹⁸ The choice of Isaac as a soprano, which mimics the unchanged voice of a boy, reflects Genesis 22:5 where Isaac is referred to as a *na’ar* (a lad). This interpretation suggests that Isaac was young and presumably unaware of his father’s intentions. Britten similarly chooses a high voice for Isaac; in *Canticle II*, Isaac is sung by a male alto. Had Carissimi or Britten chosen a tenor or bass soloist to represent Isaac then they would have suggested that Isaac was a fully grown adult, conscious of

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⁴¹⁸ Historians do not have an exact date for either of these works. *Jepthe* was written sometime before 16 June 1648.
his father’s plan.

In two works Isaac is represented with the mature, tenor voice: Britten’s *War Requiem* (1962) and Harlap’s *Akedat Ytzchak* (1979) (Figure 6.4).

**Figure 6.4: Scoring of Isaac**

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<tr>
<td>Isaac = High voice</td>
<td>Isaac = Soprano</td>
<td>Isaac = Male alto</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaac = Tenor</td>
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This orchestration reflects an exegesis found in the Midrash: *Genesis Rabbah* 56:4-8 that Isaac was thirty-seven-years old at the time of the sacrifice. This scoring suggests that Isaac was an adult who was neither coerced nor bound without his consent, but rather an active participant and willing servant.⁴¹⁹ It is notable that Britten sets Isaac in *War Requiem* as a tenor, since his previous setting of the sacrifice story in *Canticle II* had Isaac as a male alto. Alongside Owen’s pacifist poetry, Isaac as a tenor suggests he was a young adult, the age of male soldiers.⁴²⁰

All the composers who give the characters of Genesis 22 a specific scoring chose Abraham as a mature male voice: either a tenor or a baritone (Figure 6.5).

**Figure 6.5: Scoring of Abraham**

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<tr>
<td>Abraham = Tenor</td>
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<td>Abraham = Baritone</td>
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The use of a changed, male voice reflects a reading of the Bible that Abraham was an old man at the time of the near-sacrifice. The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of

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⁴¹⁹ *Genesis Rabbah* 56:8.

Conservative Judaism notes that Abraham was seventy-five when God spoke to him for the first time: “The Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).\textsuperscript{421} It was then several decades before Genesis 22.\textsuperscript{422} While interpretations about Isaac’s age vary, all artists render Abraham as a male with a lower-voice.

Perhaps that most difficult character to render is God, described in different passages of the Bible as “beyond our reach” (Job 37:23) and “the Maker of all things” (Isaiah 44:24). Three composers represent God’s voice not with a soloist but with a group of singers (Figure 6.6).

\textbf{Figure 6.6: Scoring of God}

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<tr>
<td>God = Group of Voices</td>
<td>Male Alto + Tenor</td>
<td>Tutti Basses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angel = Group of Voices</td>
<td>Male Alto + Tenor</td>
<td>Tenor + Baritone</td>
<td>Alto soloist + Tutti Basses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angel = Alto</td>
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In \textit{Canticle II}, Britten uses the two soloists - tenor and male alto - together in a homophonic texture. Britten’s scoring of God’s voice may have influenced Harlap for in \textit{Akedat Yizchak} the entire bass section personifies the voice of God. This scoring suggests an interpretation found in Deuteronomy 6:4, known in Judaism as the \textit{shema}, “The Lord is one,” or Job 12:10 “In His hand is every living soul and the breath of all mankind;” in other words, God is both greater than any single human and also within each human.

As an emissary of God, many composers set the Angel’s voice in the same way as God’s voice. In Britten’s \textit{Canticle II} the libretto states “God speaks” where the angel is found in

\textsuperscript{421} Lieber, ed. \textit{Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{422} When God tells Abraham that he will have a son by Sarah, “Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women.” (Genesis 18:11)
Genesis 22. Harlap uses the same motive for the angel as he does for God, although now it is transposed up a minor second scored as a duet between an alto soloist and tutti basses (mm. 170-186).

Unlike Carissimi, Britten, and Harlap, neither Stravinsky, Zur nor Reich score the characters’ voices as being separate from the narration. Stravinsky, who engages the text of Genesis 22 as an abstraction, orchestrates the entire story as a solo for baritone and orchestra. Zur does not give each person a specific instrumentation, motive or harmony. Instead, the voices of the characters are sung by a mixture of unison, duet, trio and full-voice textures from the choir. Reich alters the scoring throughout The Cave but not as a way of representing the different characters. Instead, Reich’s change in orchestration provides a change in texture between the sections that use sacred text and those featuring recordings from the interviewees.

Some composers use not only orchestration, but also tone-painting and musical characterizations to highlight specific theological interpretations, to enhance the narrative drama, or to call attention to the troubling questions found in the Akeidah. The interpretation of Isaac as a young, naive boy is supported by both Carissimi and Britten in Canticle II. Both use major tonality and step-wise movement every time Isaac’ speaks.423 In War Requiem, Britten quotes from Canticle II, but Abraham and Isaac’s dialogue is gradually covered by the repetition of “quam olim Abrahae” upward and downward in scalar phrases and increasingly louder.424 Britten’s new interpretation of Genesis 22 is made clear not only by the insertion of Owen’s poetry, “But the old man would not so, but slew his on,/ and half the seed of Europe, one by one;” but also by the repetition of this last phrase “half the seed of Europe, one by one.”

Reich uses the characters of Isaac and Ishmael as a way to explore the differing religious and political attitudes of Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans. Although Reich asks “Who is Abraham?” and “who is Hagar?” in all three acts, and “Who is Sarah” and “Who is Ismael?” in Acts II and III, only once, in Act I, does Reich ask “Who is Isaac?” The responses from the Israelis offer little insight: “I don’t really know,” “Almost a pale figure,” “More contemplative,”

“His name means, ‘He will laugh,’” “the obedient son” and “continuity.”425 The last description is repeated three times. Although Reich does not ask Palestinians or Americans “Who is Isaac?,” they describe him when reflecting on the sacrifice story in Acts II and III. In Act II, Ishak (Isaac) is described as “the second born of Ibrahim,” a “Jewish Prophet,” and “the ancestor of the Kings of Israel and the Prophets and Jesus Christ as well.”426 In Act III, Reich curates the interviewees’ comments to suggest the midrashic interpretation that Isaac was a knowing, willing and brave participant. Reich includes the comment “Isaac asks, says look father, I’m a young man, when I see that knife, I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me.”427 By including this remark, Reich suggests three images. First, that Isaac is physically strong enough to perhaps hurt his father, thus suggesting the Isaac is not a little boy but an adolescent or grown man. Secondly, that Isaac is not only a willing participant, but that he desires to be an unblemished offering. Finally, in including “I don’t know what I’ll do. Why don’t you bind me” Reich portrays Isaac as mindful of both the spiritual desire to obey God and the proclivity for self-preservation. In choosing these comments, Reich aligns his interpretation of Isaac with that of the midrash.

The only musical portrait of Ishmael/Ismail is found in Reich’s The Cave.428 In Act II, Reich chooses comments that reinforce the Koran’s interpretation of Ishmael: as a dutiful son and devout servant to God. Palestinian interviewees call Ismail “the father of Arabs,” “the father of Muhammed” and “a prophet.”429 They describe Ismail as an “obedient son” who was “ready to sacrifice his life for his father” and who, in the face of murder, declares “Do as you are commanded.”430 Some Palestinians align themselves with Ishmael in opposition to Isaac: “Ishmael is the oldest and he’s the inheritant [sic] and we are the descendants and that’s that.”431 Reich uses this quote as the dissident voice to show tension between the two cultures. In Act III,

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425 Reich and Korot, The Cave, 35.
426 Ibid, 44.
427 Ibid.
428 The Old Testament, and thus Jews and Christians spell the name "Ishmael" while the Koran and Muslims spell it "Ismail." I will be following the conventional spelling for each religion.
429 Ibid.
430 Ibid.
431 Ibid.
Reich chooses comments from Americans that show a more nuanced and multifaceted concept of Ishmael. Although Americans identify Ishmael as “a wild man,” “an outsider, a stranger” (m. 922-931), and “a loner” (m. 942-959), Reich chooses other phrases that show him as an American heroes: “a cowboy” (m. 942-959) and “the James Dean of the old testament,” (m. 887-896).

The midrash: *Genesis Rabbah* 55:1 and *Numbers Rabbah* 17:2 argue that Genesis 22 attempts to draw special attention to Abraham. In these sources, God explains “It was my wish that the world should become acquainted with thee, and should know that it is not without good reason that I have chosen thee from all the nations.”

The test highlighted Abraham’s qualifications as the patriarch of monotheism for all time. Harlap similarly uses musical devices to make Abraham the center of the drama and to characterize him not as a unidimensional paragon, but as a man with conflicting emotions and multiple interests. Harlap explains that

There is no doubt that Abraham (along with Isaac and Yaakov), were great religious patriarchs whose love and obedience for God was unlimited, but they were great human beings as well…with emotions and empathy.

Whenever Abraham speaks Harlap uses one of the following two motives for his music (6.1a-b):

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433 Ibid.

a. Motive III, mm. 87-100

The first motive contains multiple descending minor seconds and a descending tritone. Harlap has commented that these intervals are “symbolic dissonances of the great drama which is about to unfold.” 434 In other words, the chromatic movement in Abraham’s speech parallels the character’s distress. The second motive uses an ascending perfect fourth, descending perfect fifth and diatonic return to the starting note. We may in turn read the perfect intervals of this motive as reflecting Abraham’s loyalty to God.

This interpretation is furthered by the intervals Harlap uses during descriptions of Abraham. Harlap expresses Abraham’s suffering through use of the minor second and tritone (Example 6.2a-b). 435 These intervals appear in the first half of the composition whenever

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434 Ibid.
435 Ibid.
Abraham is mentioned (tritone: mm. 57-58, 92-93, 121-124 and 159; minor seconds: mm. 55-57, 88-91 and 159.)

a. mm. 121-124
In verse five, Abraham tells his servants to stay at the base of the mountain while Isaac and he proceed with the sacrifice preparations. Here Harlap creates melodies that contain tritones. Similarly, when Abraham builds the sacrificial altar, Harlap describes the passage with Avraham descending from c’ to b’ (mm.159).

After the sacrifice, Harlap’s representation of Abraham is no longer predictable. Now, the intervals and chords used to represent Abraham’s speech and action are varied. By creating a consistent motivic pattern for Abraham’s speech in the first part of the composition and then ignoring this scheme at the drama’s end, Harlap supports an interpretation suggested by some
theologians and by Søren Kierkegaard that while the near sacrifice may have proved Abraham’s loyalty to God, it also destroyed Abraham’s trust in God and his relationship with Isaac.  

Reich uses Abraham to paint a dynamic and multi-faceted portrait of the three societies he is examining. When asked “Who is Abraham?,” Israeli’s respond “Abraham, for me is my ancestor – my own personal ancestor,” “a legendary figure,” “the father of the prophets” and even “My father.” Like the Israelis, Palestinians view Abraham as both an intimate character in their daily lives as well as a religious leader: “I mention his name sixteen times a day when I pray” and “Ibrahim is our father – peace upon him!”  

Reich also uses quotes from the interviewees to underscore Abraham’s role as both the link and a point of tension between the three major monotheistic religions. Some Palestinians make a point to lay claim to Abraham as their own, “Ibrahim was neither Jew nor Christian, but a Muslim.” Others, however, offer a more ecumenical interpretation: “Ibrahim or Abraham is this bridge between the two cultures,” “He is our common ancestor – see?” While both Israelis and Palestinians view Abraham as a religious patriarch, Reich primarily chooses comments from Americans that connect him to their national or personal narrative. To these interviewees the word “Abraham” signifies “Abraham Lincoln – our 16\textsuperscript{th} president,” “Abraham Lincoln High School.” Only a few Americans identify “Abraham” as a religious figure: “Jesus is traced back to Abraham,” “The father of the faithful,” “The father of faith.” Ultimately, Reich is less interested in painting a portrait of these Biblical characters and more interested how these figures reflect a complex, diverse, modern world.

Perhaps most interesting in our exploration of musical portraiture is how composers handle the character of God. As mentioned above, in \textit{Canticle II}, Britten uses the two soloists - tenor and male alto - to represent the voice of God. For God’s voice, Britten writes a

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437 Reich and Korot, \textit{The Cave}, 30.

438 Reich and Korot, \textit{The Cave}, 40.

439 Ibid.

440 Ibid.

441 Ibid, 46.

442 Ibid.
homophonic texture that uses, octaves and open fourths and fifths and is reminiscent of Medieval organum (Example 6.3).
Example 6.3: Britten - *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, Musical Characterization of God, mm. 1-4

Britten’s scoring of God’s voice may have influenced Harlap for in *Akedat Yitzchak* the entire bass section personifies the voice of God. But where as Abraham and Isaac’s speech is set in simple meter and at a moderate tempo, Harlap composes God’s voice using polymetric music performed at a rapid tempo (*allegro ritmico*, quarter note equals 150) (mm. 10-29). Had Harlap chosen to represent God using diatonic melody and tertian harmony moving at an even, consistent pace, that would have conveyed a traditional image of the deity as compassionate and steadfast. I argue that Harlap’s use of irregular meter and non-diatonic scalar passages evokes an
image of God that is more mysterious and temperamental, perhaps even unjust. This rendering reflects an image of God like that found in Exodus 20:5 “an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children” or Deuteronomy 4:36 where God’s anger “may blaze forth against them and… destroy them, and make of you a great nation.”

Reich almost eliminates God from his version of the Sacrifice Story. The word “God” only occurs in the religious source material, never in the commentary Reich chooses. In presenting Genesis 22 in Act III, Reich also omits verse sixteen, one of the few occasions in the Akeidah that gives God personal attributes: “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou has done this thing, has not withheld thy son, thine only son” (Genesis 22:16). This verse shows God as a reflective, logical and disciplined figure: because you did not withhold your son I will give you these blessings. Verse sixteen also shows that in the same way God challenges Abraham’s dedication and discipline, God has a moral code to which he holds himself: “By myself have I sworn.” In omitting verse sixteen, as well as excluding references to God throughout The Cave, Reich minimizes the role, and perhaps power, of God in the Sacrifice Story.

Conclusions

The Akedah is among the most ideologically evasive stories in the Bible. It prompts questions about the disposition of God, the morals of Abraham, and the nature of faith. Was God’s intervention inevitable or an extempore act of benevolence? Is Abraham an icon of faith or an abusive father? If faith is based in belief and blind trust, how do we respond when we are deceived by the object of that trust? Finally, does faith, particularly the sort of zealous devotion shown by Abraham, have a place in modernity?

Over two-thousand years, the Akeidah has been transformed from a parable of faith into a model for suffering in the face of political oppression, from a clear example of religious devotion into a questionable episode in the foremost patriarch’s past, and from violence in the name of the
Almighty into violence in service of the state.\textsuperscript{443} It is this evolving complex of ideas that has influenced how Harlap, Zur and Reich create their musical settings. Each composer has wrestled not only the theological implications of the story, but also its artistic history. Ultimately, Harlap, Zur, and Reich reflect three ways of engaging with the \textit{Akeidah}. Harlap explores the religious icons as if they were real human beings with conflicting emotions and loyalties. Zur’s composition suppresses the narrative itself and mirrors the experience of religious doubt. Reich uses the story as an object to explore the role of religion in the twenty-first century. While Harlap, Zur, and Reich’s renderings echo visual art from the past, their choice of music allows for new implications for the story and, in turn, for the meaning of faith. Music is uniquely able to present seemingly polarized concepts and emotions as a unified musical statement. Music juxtaposes previously unconnected signs—melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, and form, among others—to produce new codes of meaning. Any one element tells a story; all the features resonating simultaneously give a portrait that allows room for contradiction to be held together. This is the kind of thinking required to engage with the Sacrifice Story.

\textsuperscript{443}Glenda Abramson, “Reinterpretation of the Akedah in Modern Hebrew Poetry,” \textit{(Journal of Jewish Studies} 41(1), 1990),114.
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