A tool of remembrance: the shofar in modern music, literature and art
van Hage, K.R.A.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
As a trombone player, I have always been fascinated by one of the ancestors of my instrument, the shofar. What has interested me is not only the difference between the primitive ram’s horn and the sophisticated modern brass instrument, but also that between the religious shofar blower and the secular brass player. The shofar blower fulfills a commandment, whereas the professional brass player fulfills a contract; the former is the representative of his congregation in their prayer to God and therefore, he should be a person of high moral standard, whereas the latter can indulge himself in everything forbidden, as long as he blows the right notes during the concert. The brass player creates a work of art, whereas the shofar blower does not, although the shofar blasts in the synagogue service have more than one quality in common with art. They represent, to vary a well-known phrase, “noble simplicity and not-so-quiet grandeur.”

After my early retirement as a musician, I studied musicology at the University of Amsterdam. For my first paper I chose the shofar as a subject, expecting to find a lot of information, because the ram’s horn has always been a central symbol in Jewish religion. However, all I found in the libraries of the University, the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, and elsewhere were a few articles and chapters in handbooks and encyclopedias. A number of books had been written about other important Jewish symbols, like the menorah and the Star of David, but there was no single scholarly monograph on the shofar. After long hesitation, I decided to write such a book myself. In the meantime, I had become aware of the shofar’s artistic turn by the end of the 19th century, and the transfer of the shofar concept to the arts—or the replication of shofar verses, prayers and blasts as memes in the arts—seemed an appropriate subject for a dissertation.

In hindsight, I realize that A Tool of Remembrance has become a kind of religious, non-fictional counterpart to my Dutch novel Verstreken jaren (“Passed Years” or “Bowed Years”) of 1992. This novel is about a violin, that changes owner every generation in the one-and-a-half centuries between 1840 and 1990; this violin, which is also an instrument imbued with tradition, remains the same wooden box with four strings and a bow, while it is seen, heard, and interpreted differently by each new generation.

Writing the dissertation was a somewhat less solitary activity than writing this novel, because I could discuss many things with others and approach a lot of people for information. I visited many congregations of different denominations in the Netherlands and in Israel to attend their High Holy Day, Independence Day or shabbat services. All the artists or their representatives whom I approached for information were cooperative and generous. To mention a few: the composers Ofer Ben-Amots, Giulio Castagnoli, Alvin Curran, Jeff Hamburg, Stefan Heucke, Babette Koblenz, Shulamit Ran, Judith Shatin and Robert Stern; Talia Pecker, the wife of the composer Luciano Berio; the artist Avraham Loewenthal; the architect Manuel Herz; the Zohar expert Daniel Matt; the Celan translator John Felstiner; Louis Wald, son of the sculptor Herman Wald; and Sita Milchev, daughter of the artist Lucienne Bloch and granddaughter of the composer Ernest Bloch. The staffs of the general library and the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana at the University of Amsterdam, the library of the Jewish Historical Museum, the Amsterdam Municipal
Library and the large Dutch Broadcasting Corporation music library—which was closed by our government recently—were very helpful. The music publishers Schott Music and Theodore Presser put the bulky opera scores by Stefan Heucke and Shulamit Ran at my disposal for free. As for publishers and copyright owners, I did not succeed in contacting all of them; anyone claiming copyright should contact me via e-mail at kvhage@xs4all.nl. Writing a book in a foreign language is like building a house with a toolbox from the toy store but, fortunately, I found native speaker Jane Harvey willing to correct my grammatical errors and nonidiomatic phrases. I enjoyed the discussions about my work-in-progress with my son Willem van Hage, a PhD in Computer Science; with the Jewish music researcher Niels Falch; and with members of the Dutch Society for Jewish Studies. I am grateful to many people at the University of Amsterdam: to Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine, Shlomo Berger, Victor Kal, and Gemma Kwantes for their lectures on Judaism; to Jan Willem van Henten, Professor of Religious Studies, for his useful advice; to Rokus de Groot, Professor of Musicology, and Sabine Lichtenstein, Lecturer Emerita of Musicology, for their listening ears; and, in particular, to Wim van der Meer, Associate Professor of Musicology, who introduced me to the field of Cultural Musicology and supervised my master’s thesis about the shofar and the Temple Mount in the arts. I am most indebted to Irene Zwiep, Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies and my lively, inspiring and critical supervisor and professor of biblical Hebrew; and to my wife, fellow musician and daily, indispensable discussion partner Thea van der Putten.