Temple Emanu El Festival Depicts ‘Bible In The Arts’

By LARRY FERSTENFELD

The first in a series of four programs depicting the influence of the Bible in Art was presented last Saturday night at Temple Emanu El in connection with the current Festival of the Bible in the Arts.

The Speak-4 Trio, presented by Paul Baker, rendered a series of eight excerpts from the Bible in choral readings. With such clarity and force were these readings performed that the conveyed mood pervading a most receptive audience was one of profound warmth and significance.

Among the more noteworthy of the selections, owing to the ingenuity and originality displayed in their dramatization and the excellence with which they were enacted, were: the reading of Psalm I, a strong rhythm study, in which the passage was repeated three times, the last repetition being sung in a major triad, with the last line whispered into silence; excerpts from the book of Joshua, performed as an epic study in dramatic movement and sound, in which the tonal quality of harmonically combined voices at times assumed a trumpet—or shophar-like sound at appropriate points in the text; excerpts from the book of Jonah, in which the visual action and turbulent atmosphere of crisis and indecision were conveyed through abstract sounds and changes of pitch, pace, and projection. In all, the vivid expression, the controlled but firm projection of the voices, and the complementary effects, both dramatic and tonal, combined to produce a very excellent and supremely masterly performance.

In addition, Marion Davies Bottler, accompanied by Albert Hirsh, graced the program by playing Ernest Bloch’s cello rhapsody, “Schelomo.” Instead of using any descriptive material or following the lines of a story, “Schelomo” (the Hebrew equivalent of Solomon) uses as principle melodic subjects religious and talmudic chants of varying character and mood. Though at times the harmony seems discordant, it is the expressive strength of this material with its quick changes through various emotional moods of sorrow, affirmation, and bitterness that give the work its value as a milestone in Jewish music and its place as a staple of the symphonic repertory.

A very competent and stirring rendition of the composition was offered, the artist answering its expressive demands with deftness.