

FALL 2010  
VOLUME 35

JOURNAL

OF

SYNAGOGUE

MUSIC

yiddish | song

ISSN 0049-5128

# Journal of Synagogue Music

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The *Journal of Synagogue Music* is published annually by the Cantors Assembly. It offers articles and music of broad interest to the hazzan and other Jewish professionals. Submissions of any length from 1,000 to 10,000 words will be considered.

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**Footnotes** are used rather than endnotes, and should conform to the following style:

- A - Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy* (New York: Henry Holt), 1932: 244.
- B - Samuel Rosenbaum, "Congregational Singing"; *Proceedings of the Cantors Assembly Convention* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary), February 22, 1949: 9-11.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

### The Issue of Yiddish Song: A Trade-Off for the Decline of Spoken Yiddish?

Despite the fact that everyday *spoken* Yiddish may be facing an uphill battle in the United States, Yiddish *song* “has provided the musical sound track for the construction of a new progressive, secular, Yiddishist youth culture,” writes Alicia Svigals,<sup>1</sup> noted klezmer violinist and teacher. Elements of Yiddish folk, theater, and art song have been extensively appropriated by Klezmer, the musical expression of today’s hip Jewish youth. The starting point for that genre was the style of Yiddish folk song, posits trumpeter Frank London,<sup>2</sup> founding member of several klezmer ensembles. That borrowing put PAID to an old debt, for Yiddish song had initially found its musical origins in the modes of Hebrew prayer.

In **THE MANY FACES OF YIDDISH SONG** Max Wohlberg examines the symbiotic relationship between songs of the synagogue and Yiddish folk songs, and Bret Werb shows how composer Joseph Rumshinsky’s early Yiddish theatre hits set the pattern for American Yiddish pop music. Joseph Levine documents the improvisation of music and lyrics in Yiddish dance songs’ early days, while Philip Bohlman and Otto Holzapfel find common cultural elements in the folk songs of Eastern and Western Ashkenazic Jewry. Janet Leuchter focuses on a surviving prototype of Yiddish religious song, and Joel Colman explains why the recordings of bass-baritone Sidor Belarsky remain popular among American Jewish audiences. Asya Vaisman unveils the hidden song repertoire of modern Hasidic women, and Gershon Freidlin praises the raucous Yiddish-English mixture that was Mickey Katz’s trademark.

**NUTS AND BOLTS** presents essays by two authorities in their respective fields: veteran voice teacher Michael Trimble writes on the breath-based bio-mechanics of great singing; and musician/scholar Joshua Jacobson surveys the never-ending battle for supremacy between words and music.

**MAIL BOX** recalls longtime JTS Professor of Ethnomusicology Johanna L. Spector, and pinpoints a growing trend in congregations to employ cantors

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1 Alicia Svigals, “Why Do We Do This Anyway?” *American Klezmer—Its Roots and Offshoots*, Mark Slobin, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2002: 213.

2 Frank London, “An Insider’s View,” *American Klezmer*, op. cit., p. 207.





# The Many Faces of Yiddish Song<sup>1</sup>

## The Music of the Synagogue as a Source of Yiddish Folk Song<sup>1</sup>

By Max Wohlberg

In assessing the music of the Eastern European Jews one can say that the features distinguishing sacred from secular song are not always well defined. For example, Eastern European Jews have an abundance of z'miros (table songs), Hasidic and liturgical tunes which may properly be assigned to both categories. One can say, too, that it is equally difficult to ascribe primordial status to either one or the other category or to derive ultimate conclusions concerning melodic influence and cross-fertilization. Therefore, in addressing myself to this distinction I subscribe to the popular view that liturgical music is sung mainly in the synagogue (in Hebrew) while folksongs, as a rule, are sung at social gatherings (primarily in Yiddish).

The study of Eastern European Jewish music is not strictly analogous to the study of other music cultures. Its dissimilarity becomes most apparent when examined in the context of religious history. When early Christianity with its evolving liturgy reached Europe it encountered a variety of local folk traditions. Conversely, when Yiddish folk song began to flourish in Central Europe and later in Eastern Europe, Jewish liturgical music was already established in those locales. Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1932b) drew our attention to a limited influence of the synagogue upon Yiddish folksongs. Of the 758 songs included, only thirty-two are singled out as being based on synagogue motifs.

The aim of my study is to point out the existence of an infinitely larger and more intimate melodic relationship between the songs of the synagogue and Yiddish folk songs. Even without thorough analysis of the entire folksong

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1 Because the material here is essentially of Eastern European Jewish origin I have transliterated Hebrew words according to Ashkenazic pronunciation utilizing a system adopted by the Library of Congress. For Yiddish orthography and transliteration I have followed a standardized system devised by the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO), New York. Translations from Hebrew are reprinted with permission from the *Daily Prayer Book* (© 1947, 1977) and the *High Holiday Prayer Book* (© 1951) by Philip Birnbaum. Translations marked "A.W." are by friend and colleague, Albert Weisser; all other translations are my own.



literature, there exists sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the influence of the synagogue on Yiddish folksongs was not confined to occasional stray motifs, but that entire melodies are traceable to the synagogue service. In addition to the Thirty-odd songs in which Idelsohn found traces of synagogue influence, I have discovered in his Volume IX (1932b) almost sixty additional songs that were in part borrowed from synagogue traditions. Furthermore, I have found literally hundreds of other songs that incorporated similar musical motifs.

In comparing folk songs to synagogue melodies one must bear in mind two fundamental differences: 1) while the former are for the most part metrical and rhythmical, the latter are generally without meter, displaying an improvisational and rhythmically free character; 2) while the folksong texts have for the most part been associated with a definite tune, a synagogue motif may be applied to numerous texts, freely used by the hazzan-improviser wherever and whenever it is deemed appropriate.

Thus, whenever we cite a given motif for a particular text, numerous other texts could be substituted for it. Even though experienced hazzanim may vary their improvisations from week to week by employing different modes for the same texts, this does not diminish nor invalidate the liturgical authenticity of the modes employed.

Essentially, the Yiddish folksongs that I've chosen are based upon biblical cantillation, synagogue prayer modes, and so-called *Mi-Sinai* tunes.<sup>2</sup> All Sources used in this investigation are listed at the end under References Cited. Unattributed liturgical examples denote the oral tradition of chants that are the common tradition of Eastern European hazzanut.

### **Cantillation motifs**

To begin, we clearly hear Ashkenazic High Holiday Pentateuch cantillation motifs (**Ex. 1a.**) in the following Hebrew-Polish folk song (**Ex 1b.**).

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2 *Mi-Sinai* tunes (literally "from Mount Sinai"), a term affixed to a group of sacralized melodic phrases that originated along the Rhineland of Southwestern Germany (specifically the towns of Worms, Mayence and Speyer) during the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, rabbis have attributed Sinaitic origin to these snatches of melody in order to emphasize their importance. See J. Wistinetzky, ed., *Sefer Hasidim* (Berlin, 1891) No. 817, and Jakob Freimann's second edition (Frankfurt, 1924). For historical and stylistic analysis of the *Mi-Sinai* tunes see A.Z. Idelsohn (1933: xxiv-xxxvi) and Eric Werner (1976: 26-45).

Zo- kef\_ ko- ton\_ Mer-kho tip- kho\_ Sof po-suk:

**Example 1a.** *Idelsohn 1951: 494-495.*

“Ya - a - mod Reb Ye - hu - de” “Ya nye pu - de”  
 “Dia - tshe - go ti nye pu - dzesh?” “Bo Ya - nye\_ um - yem.”  
 “Dia - tshe - go ti nye um - yesh?” “Bo oy tshots mnye nye u - tshil.”  
 “Dia - tshe - go tshi nye u - tsil?” “Bo - on sam - krenk um - yal.”\_

Arise to the Torah, Reb Yehudah! / I will not go. / And why will you not go? / Because I don't know how / / And why do you not know how? / My father never taught me. / And why did he not teach you? / He was as ignorant as I. <sup>3</sup>

**Example 1b.** *Cahan 1912: II, 149-150, No. 73; Cahan 1957: 426, No. 505; Idelsohn 1932b: 10, No. 23.*

Motifs from the Ashkenazic High Holiday Torah cantillation (**Ex. 2a.**) appear in a charming song (**Ex. 2b.**) concerning Rabbi Meir ben Isaac (11<sup>th</sup> century), legendary author of the mystical poem *Akdomus* (“Before”), written in Aramaic and chanted on the first day of Shavuot *before* the Torah reading.

Po - zer\_ Dar - goh\_

**Example 2a.** *Idelsohn 1941: 496-497*

3 The text refers to the rite of *Aliyot*, practiced during public reading from the Torah on Sabbaths, holidays and certain weekdays. Honored individuals are called to the reading desk to pronounce benedictions before and after a portion is read from the scroll.

3 Es iz ge-ven a Re-be Me-ir kha-zn Hot er ge-volt zo-gn a shvakh tzu Got  
 hot er moy-re ge-hat di mal-o - khim zo-ln im nisht me-ka - ne zayn  
 5 Hot er ge-zogt dem loyb oyf Tar-gum lo-shn Vaylmal-o-khim far-shtey-n nisht keyn Tar-gum lo-shn  
 7 un un-ter ge-khas-met hot er zikh: Re - be Me - ir b'-Re-be Yitz-khok  
 9 yag-dil Toy - re v' - ya - dir kha - zak, kha - zak v' - e - matz.

There once lived a precentor, Rabbi Meir, who was inspired to chant a song of praise to God, but he feared that the angels would envy him. So he chanted his song in Aramaic, a language that angels do not understand, and fixed his signature thusly: “Rabbi Meir, son of Rabbi Isaac, may he grow in Torah and in good deeds / and be strong and of good courage”<sup>4</sup> (A.W.)

**Example 2b. Shtern: 1948: 58.**

The fall of Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855; **Ex. 3a.**) finds appropriate expression in cantillation motifs from the Book of Lamentations (**Ex. 3b.**).

4 S'yo-mert Pe-ter-burg, s'troy-ert Mosk - ve troy - rig zin-gen zey bo-zhe Tzar  
 6 ya Ka - tza - pen zogt Ki - nos oyf ay - e - re  
 zind - der Tzar is oyf tso - res s'blu-tigt der hint.

There is lamentation in St. Petersburg / There is mourning in Moscow / Sadly they sing, “God save the Tsar.” / You peasants sing lamentations for your sins, / That dog, the Tsar, is bloodied. /

**Example 3a. Idelsohn 1932b: 11, No. 31.**

4 The final section is derived from acrostic lines in the poem’s latter section. See Birnbaum *Daily Prayer Book* (1949: 647-654).

Ma-pakh Pash-to... T'lishoh g'do loh... Mer-kho tip- kho... sof po-suk:—

**Example 3b.** *Idelsohn 1951: 501.*

### *MiSinai* tunes

The traditional Ashkenazic tune for chanting the aforementioned *Akdomus* poem (Ex. 4a.) is undisguised in the following two examples, the first, a humorous alphabet song.

Ak - do - mus mil - lin V'sho-ro - us shu - so.

av - lo sho - kel - no har - mon ur' - shu - so.

Before reciting the Ten Commandments, / I first ask permission and approval ... /

**Example 4a.** *Idelsohn 1925: 156.*

A - lef in - di - kes est der no - gid

Beys, beyn - de - lakh gri - zhet der o - re - man

A) The rich man eats turkey, / B) the poor man nibbles on little bones ... / (A.W.)

**Example 4b.** *Kipnis 1925: 119, No. 55.*

Ven fun a - le tay - khn volt ge - vo - rn eyn taykh

un fun a - le boy - mer volt ge - vo - rn eyn boym

If all rivers were to become one river / And all trees were to become one tree ... / (A.W.)

**Example 4c.** *Idelsohn 1932a: 5, No.12.*

Characteristic musical motifs of the Ashkenazic version (**Ex. 5a.**) of *Kol Nidre* (“All Vows”)<sup>5</sup> also appear in a humorous Hebrew-Ukrainian song (**Ex. 5b.**).

D' - in - dar - no \_\_\_\_\_ u - d' ish - ta - ba - - - no

ha - bo \_\_\_\_\_ o - le - nu l' - to - vo

u - sh' - vu - o - so - no \_\_\_\_\_ lo sh' - vu - os

...wherewith we have vowed, sworn ... / ... may it come to us for good ... / ... and our oaths shall not be oaths ... / (A.W.)

**Example 5a.** *Idelsohn 1932a: 52-53, No. 172.*

D' - in - dar - no ot kroime-nye dul-ru i - bo me-nye ho - ril-ku tre - ba a -

ya te - bye\_ pri-ne-su na pras-nik be-lo- ho\_ per-ti- cha\_ nã - pras-nik

Do please open the door. / I've no more whiskey / Not a drop, no more. / And for the holy day I promise, in lieu, / A beautiful white rooster / To bring to you. /

**Example 5b.** *Kipnis 1925: 156-157, No. 73.*

The autumn prayer for rain *Geshem*<sup>6</sup> (**Ex. 6a.**), signaling as it does the arrival of cold weather in Eastern Europe, aptly serves for the lament of one ill-prepared for the approaching winter's rigors. Its motifs are also found in a folk song (**Ex. 6b.**).

5 *Kol Nidre*, an Aramaic formula for the annulment of inadvertent vows to God, chanted to open the Yom Kippur Eve service, is considered a treasure-trove of *Mi-Sinai* Tunes; for further information see A.Z. Idelsohn (1931-32: 493-509), Johanna L. Spector (1950: 3-4), Max Wohlberg (1971: 99-112), and Eric Werner (1976: 35-38).

6 Chanted on the eighth day of *Sukkos* (“Festival of Booths”) when normal rainfall begins in the Near East; see P. Birnbaum (1949: 697-702).

1  
 4 A - to - gi-bor l'-o-lom, A-do - noi, m' kha - ye me- sim  
 a - to rav l'-ho shi - a

Lord, You are mighty forever; You revive the dead; Your powers to save are immense ...

**Example 6a.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

1  
 3 Af b'-ri s'iz ni - to vos tsu ge - bn e - sn di kuh der  
 zu-mer geyt a - vek un der vin-ter kumt tsu - rik un kayn gelt iz ni-to

Oh Angel of Rain, / There is no fodder for the cow, / The summer has passed, / Winter will soon be upon us, / And of money—there is none. /

**Example 6b.** *Cahan 1912: II, 269-270, No. 14; Cahan 1957: 432-433, No. 511; Idelsohn 1932b: 6, No. 14; Beregovsky-Fefer 1938: 12.*

It should come as no surprise to any student of Jewish history that there exists an abundance of tragic Yiddish songs and ballads. With little effort one can find in the following moving example (**Ex. 7a.**) the melodic outline of *Eli tsiyon*<sup>7</sup> (“Lament, O Zion” from the Tishah B’Av liturgy; **Ex. 7b**).

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7 The text of *Eli Tsiyon* is by the great Spanish Jewish poet, philosopher and physician Judah Halevi of the late-11<sup>th</sup> and early-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Tishah B’Av* (“Fast of the Ninth of Av”) commemorates the destruction of both Temples and other historic national calamities. On the *Eli Tsiyon* tune, see A.Z. Idelsohn (1929: 171) and Eric Werner (1976: 93-95).

1

7 Tsvelf a zey-ger bay der nakht ven a - le ment-shn shlo-fn tir un toy-er tsu ge-makht nor a

12 fents-te - rl iz o - fen a fay - e - rl zikh brent a kran-ker ligt in

bet dort zi - tsn tsvey al - te layt un bre - khn zikh di hent.

Twelve o'clock midnight—all are asleep, / All is shut tight. / Somewhere a small window is open, / A dim fire burns. / An invalid lies on a bed, / As two old people sit by, / And ring their hands / (A.W.)

**Example 7a.** *Cahan 1912: I, 234-235; Cahan 1957: 30-31, No. 16.*

1

9 E - li tzi - yon v'o - re - ho k'mo - i - sho b'tsi - re - ho.

v'khiv - su - lo kha - gu - ras sak al ba - al n'u - re - ho.

Lament, O Zion and its cities, / As a woman in childbirth, / As a young maiden in sackcloth / That mourns the husband of her youth / (A.W.).

**Example 7b.** *Baer 1930: 64, No. 213.*

## Prayer modes

The *Lern shtayger* (“Study mode”) in major, as it appears in the traditional Haggadah chant *Mah Nishtanah*,<sup>8</sup> is well known. In addition, the Study mode in minor appears frequently in the Jewish liturgy as witnessed in the following examples (Exs. 8a, 8b and 8c).<sup>9</sup>

Sho - khen ad mo - rom v' - ko - dosh sh' - mo

You Who abide eternity, exalted and holy is Your name ...

**Example 8a.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

8 See Abraham Baer (1930: 171, No. 764).

9 Examine also the excellent recitative *Eilu D'vorim* by Hazzan/composer Jacob Rapoport (1890-1943) and the impressive art song *Tanhum* (1921) by Solomon Golub (1887-1952).



A-do - noy oz l'-a-mo yi-ten A-do-noy y'-vo-rekhes a - mo va-sho-lom.

The Lord will give strength to His people, / The Lord will bless His people with peace ... /

**Example 8b.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*



Ha - yom shi-sho yo - mim lo - o - mer

This is the sixth day of the Omer Counting.

**Example 8c.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

Now observe how these motifs are applied to a naively idyllic folksong (Ex. 9.).



Un - ter a kleyn bey - me - le zi - tsn ying - lekh tsvey zey  
re - dn fun a mey - de - le keyn zakh kim - mert zey

Under a little tree, / Sit two young men. / They talk of a young maid. / Nothing else concerns them / (A.W.).

**Example 9.** *Kipnis 1925: 100, No. 46; Idelsohn 1932b: 39, No. 144; Beregovski-Fefer 1938: 169.*

Motifs of this mode, which would normally accompany the study of the Talmudic disputations of Abbaye and Rava and the arguments of Rav and Shmuel,<sup>10</sup> also served such liturgical texts as *Omar rabi el'ozor*, *Ba-meh madlikin* and *Eilu d'vorim* (Ex. 10a.). They were also deemed suitable for describing the tribulations of a maiden seeking a proper marriage partner (Ex. 10b.).

---

10 Abbaye (c. 278-338 C.E.) was head of the academy in Pumbedita. He and his colleague Rava (Abba bar Yosef bar Homa, c. 299-352) engaged in halakhic discussions which are of major importance in the Babylonian Talmud. The same may be said of Rav (Abba Arikha, c. 175-247), founder of the academy in Sura, and Shmuel (c. 180-250), head of the academy in Nehardea.



E - lu d' - vo - rim she - en lo - hem shi - ur ha - pe - oh v' - ha - bi - ku - rim  
 v' - ho - r' - a - yon ug - mi - lus - kha - so - dim v' - sal - mud to - rah k' - ne - ged ku - lom

These are the things for which no limit is prescribed: the corner of the field, the first fruits, the pilgrimage offerings, the practice of kindness; and the study of Torah excels them all.

**Example 10a. Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).**

Vos-zhe vilst du, vos-zhe vilst du a shnay-der far a man, a shnay-der far a man  
 vil ikh nit a shnay-ders tokh-ter bin ikh nit zitz ikh oy - fn shteyn  
 shti-ler-heynt un veyn a - le mey-de-lakh ho - bn kha-se-ne nor ikh blayb a - leyn.

What will you have, what will you have? / A tailor for a husband? / I will not have a tailor for a husband. / I am not a tailor's daughter. / All young girls are easily married. / Only I remain alone ... / (A.W.)

**Example 10b. Cahan 1957: 252-254, No. 268.**

Distantly related to the Study mode though possessing a distinct quality of its own, including characteristic modulatory tendencies, is the so-called *S'liḥah* mode in which much of the High Holiday service is chanted.<sup>11</sup> Frequent pauses on the third and fourth degrees as well as an occasional transitory excursion to the relative major are typical. Lowering of the penultimate

11 There now exists quite a sizable and valuable literature on the synagogue prayer modes which reflects both accord and differences of opinion among scholars as to the structure and nomenclature of these modes. See A.Z. Idelsohn (1929: 72-89); Idem (1932a: xi-xvii); Baruch J. Cohon (1950: 17-32); Leib Glantz (1952: 16-25); Max Wohlberg (1954: 36-43); Joseph Yasser (1956: 33-35); Hanoach Avenary (1971: 11-21); and Eric Werner (1976: 46-61).

second from a whole to a half-tone interval was a device frequently favored by Eastern European hazzanim.

The melodic line of the following folksong (**Ex. 11a.**), depicting the harsh and joyless life of the Yeshivah student, is practically identical with that used to chant the Amidah of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy (**Ex. 11b.**).<sup>12</sup>

1  
 Vos-zhe klog tu bay der gemo-re kloyz-nik bla-ser kloyz-nik lib-er Dayn...  
 5  
 vey-nen-dig-er nig-n in mayn hartz-n geyt a-ri-ber Dayn oyg iz  
 9  
 faykht ge-vo-rn mit a te-rets dos far-lo-fi  
 12  
 kloyz-nit bla-ser kloyz-nik lib-er zog vos hot mit dir ge-tro-fi.

Why do you lament so at your Talmudic studies / Oh pale and dear theological student?  
 / Your tragic song rends my heart. / There is a reason for your moist eye. / Tell me pale  
 and dear theological student, / What has befallen you? / (A.W.)

**Example 11a. Idelsohn 1932b: 139, No. 489.**

1  
 U- v' khen ten ko-vod A-do-noi l' a-me-kho t' hi - lo li-re-e-kho v' sik-vo l' dor she-kho u-fis  
 3  
 hon- peh La- m' -ya - ha - lim lokh sim - ho l' - ar - tze - kho  
 4  
 v' - so - son l' - i - re - kho utz - mi - has ke - ren l' - do - vid av - de -  
 5  
 kho va - a - ri - khas ner l' - ven yi - shai m' shi - khe - kho bim - he - ro v' - yo - me - nu.

Now, oh Lord, give honor to Your people, glory to those who revere You, hope to those who seek You, free speech to those who yearn for You, joy to Your land and gladness to Your city, rising strength to David Your servant, a shining light to the son of Jesse, Your chosen one, speedily in our days.

**Example 11b. Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).**

12 *Amidah* is the Standing Devotion, central feature of every service.

With only a slight adjustment, the following folksong (**Ex. 12a.**) shares its musical setting with a chant heard customarily during the Sabbath Morning service (**Ex. 12b.**).

E - li - yo - hu ha - no - vi zitzt oy - bn on in gold un in zil - ber  
 on ge - ton. nemt dem be - kher in der rekh - ter hant un  
 makht a bro - khe a bro - khe i - bern gants - en land.

Elijah the Prophet / Sits at the head of the table, / Bedecked in gold and silver. / With his right hand he raises a goblet / And blesses the whole land. / (A.W.)

**Example 12a.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 39, No. 146.*

B' - fi y' sho-rim tis-ha-lol uv-div - re tza-di-kim tis-bo-rakh u vil-shon ha-si-  
 dim tis-ro - mom uv' - ke-rev k'-do - shim tis - ka - dosh

By the mouth of the upright You are praised; / By the words of the righteous You are blessed; / By the tongue of the faithful You are extolled; / And among the holy You are sanctified. /

**Example 12b.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

Another liturgically motivated folksong expresses resignation to God's will with unmistakable Sabbath *Amidah* motifs. The two sets of texts are reproduced here concurrently (**Ex. 13.**).

1  
Tsu ken men a - royf geyn in hi - ml a - rayn un  
L' - dor vo - dor na - gid god - le kho ul -

3  
fre - gn bay Gott tsi darf a - zoy zayn, Es  
ne - tzakh n'tzo - khim k'-du-shos - kho nak - dish v' -

5  
darf a - zoy zayn es muz a - zoy zayn  
shiv - ha - kho, E - lo - he - nu, mi-

7  
s' - ken oyf der velt dokh gor an - dersh nit zayn.  
pi - nu lo yo - mush l' - o - lom vo - ed.

Can one ascend unto heaven and ask God, / Do things have to be as they are? / Yes,  
things need to be as they are, / They must be as they are. / In the whole wide world / It  
cannot be otherwise. / (A.W.)

Through all generations we will declare Your greatness; to all eternity we will proclaim  
Your holiness; Your praise, our God, shall not depart from our mouth ...

**Example 13.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 164, No. 571; Cahan 1957: 411, No. 498.*

## Lullabies

Of numerous Eastern European Jewish lullabies I have selected two in an attempt to indicate their obvious affinity with melodies of the synagogue. Once again the two sets of texts are reproduced concurrently in the first example (Exs. 14a.-14b.-and-14c.).

1  
 Ay le lyu le shlof mayn li - bes kind makh-zhe tsu di ey-ge-lekh  
 7  
 Ti - kan-to shab - bos ro - tzi-so kor-b'-no - se - ho tzi - vi - so pe - ru she - ho im  
 un shtey oyf ge - zint makh zey tsu un makh zey  
 12  
 si - du - re n' - so - khe - ho m'an-ge - ho l'o - lom ko - vod yin -  
 o - fi ge - zun - tin - ker - heynt zol - stu shlo - fi.  
 kho - lu to - a - me - ho khay - yim zo - khu.

Ai leh lyu leh / Sleep my dearest child, / Close your little eyes / And awaken in perfect health. / Close and open your eyes / In perfect health. / (A.W.)

You have instituted the Sabbath and favorably accepted its offerings. You have prescribed its special duties and the order of its libations. Those who observe it with joy will forever possess glory. Those who enjoy its happiness merit eternal life.

**Example 14a. Idelsohn 1932b: 149, No. 521.**

1  
 Dos kind ligt in vig - e - le mit oys - ge - veyn - te oi - gn di  
 3  
 ma - me ligt oyf di erd di fis oys-ge-tsoy - gn ni - to ni - to kayn  
 6  
 ma - me ni - to ni - to kayn ne - kho - me.

The child lies in its crib / Its eyes have no more tears. / The mother, with outstretched feet / lies prostrate on the ground. / No mother — / No solace — / (A.W.)

**Example 14b. Kipnis 1910: 123-124, No. 54; Idelsohn 1932b: 134, No. 473; Beregovsky-Fefer 1938: 290-291.**

Va - ti - ten lo - nu, A - do - noi E - lo - he - nu, b' - a - ha - vo  
 es yom ha-kip - pu-rim ha-ze lim-khi - lo v' lis-li-khoul' -kha-po-ro v' -lim -khol bo es  
 kol a - vo - no - se - nu mik - ro ko - desh ze - kher li - tzi - as mitz - ro - yim

You, Lord our God, have graciously given us this Day of Atonement wherein all our iniquities are to be pardoned and forgiven, a holy festival in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt.

**Example 14c.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

The “sheltered child,” now in the Tsar’s army, recalls with nostalgia the comforts of home. He intones the basic motifs he probably heard from an old precentor during the Yom Kippur Morning service (Ex. 15.).

<sup>1</sup>  
 Di mam - me 'tmikh ge - ho - de - vet oyf milkh\_\_ un oyf  
 L' - vo - khen l' - vo - vos\_\_\_\_\_ b' - yom\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>4</sup>  
 pu - ter un fon - iet' mir ge - ge - bn a biks\_\_ far a mu - ter.  
 din\_\_ l' - go - leh a - mu - kos\_\_ ba - - - din.\_\_\_

My mother brought me up on milk and butter but the Russian army supplied me with a gun to be my mother. (A.W.)

Who tests the heart on the Day of Judgement and brings to light profound things in judgement ...

**Example 15.** *Cahan 1938: 340.*

## Love songs

Among prayer modes in the Eastern European synagogues is one often referred to as Ukranian-Dorian (whose scalar outline is: G-A-Bb-C#-D-E-F). It is applied to such texts as *Mi shebeirakh*, *ov horahamim*, *Kevakoros* and *Havein yakir li* (“He Who Blessed,” “Father of Mercy,” “As A Shepherd,” and “My Precious Son”). Both the reluctant soldier drafted into the Tsar’s army and the love-struck maiden used this mode, recalled from synagogue chants, to express their sentiments (**Exs 16a.-16b.**).

1

Dos fer-tsen-te yor iz on-ge-ku-men oy oy oy oy oy oy oy Dos\_  
 Ha-ven-ya-kir-li-ef-ra-yim, Ha-fer-tsen-te yor iz on-ge-ku-men in za-pas hot men  
 ven-ya-kir-li-ef-ra-yim im-ye-led-mikh ge-nu-men oy vey oy oy oy oy oy in za-pas hot men  
 sha-shu-im ki mi-de-dab-ri bo zo-khor-mikh ge-nu-men oy oy oy oy oy oy  
 ez-k-re-nu od

When I turned fourteen, oy, oy, oy ... / I was taken into the reserves, / oy, oy, oy ... / (A.W.)

Is it because Ephraim is my favorite son, my beloved child? As often as I speak of him, I remember him fondly ...

**Example 16a.** *Beregovski-Fefer 1938: 122.*



Di mam-me hot mir ge-shikt koy-fn a yash-tshik hot zikh in mir far-libt a bokh-er a pri-  
 K' - va - ko - ras ro - eh\_ ed - ro ma - a - vir tzo - no\_ ta - khas\_

8  
 kash-tshik oy iz dos a bokh - e - rl a sheyns\_ un a fayns\_  
 shiv - to, ken\_ ta - a - vir v' - sis - por v' - sim - ne\_

13  
 mir far zay - ne beyn - de - lakh\_ kets - e - le\_ du mayns.  
 v'sif - kod\_ ne - - fesh\_ kol\_ khai.

My mother sent me to buy a box. / Thereupon the sales clerk, a young lad, / Fell in love with me. / Oh what a fine, handsome lad is he. / Dear to me is his every little bone / Oh my little kitten. (A.W.)

As a shepherd seeks out his flock, making each sheep pass under his rod, so do You make all living souls pass before You.

**Example 16b.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 170, no. 594; Kipnis 1918: 38-39, No. 18.*

The melodic pattern of the following love song (**Ex. 17a.**) has with negligible alterations a likely source, or counterpart, in the T'fillas Shaharis ("Weekday Morning Service"), as heard in many a Hasidic *shtibl* ("prayer and study hall"; **Ex. 17b.**).



1  
 Trayb di ve - ln shnel - er taykh trayb durkh barg durkh tol

3  
 tsu mayn lib - ster gi - kher\_ kum un\_ gris ir toy - zend mol

Drive these waves, oh swift river / Past mountain and valley, / Speedily come to my beloved / And greet her a thousand times. / (A.W.)

**Example 17a.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 68, no. 253.*





known Eastern European z'miros is the traditional tune for *Kol m'kadeish sh'vi'i* (Ex. 19a.).

1  
Kol m' - ka - desh sh' - vi - i [5] ko - ro - ui lo

2  
kol sho - mer shab - bos [3] ka - dos me - kha - l' - lo [3]

3  
s' - kho - ro har - be - m' - od al pi fo - o - lo [4]

4  
ish al ma - kha - ne [5] hu v' - ish al dig - lo [3] [4] [1]

Whoever duly observes the Sabbath, / Whoever keeps the Sabbath unprofaned, / Shall be greatly rewarded for his deed, / Each in his own camp, each in his own house. /

**Example 19a.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

This tune, which is frequently sung to such Sabbath Morning prayer texts as *Ein k'erk'kho* and *Eil odon* (“None Compare to You” and “Lord, God over All”), consists of four phrases which end on modal degrees 5, 3, 4 and 1, respectively. These notes represent a cantillation motif (Lithuanian tradition) that signals the conclusion of each section of the Pentateuch read publicly (Ex. 19b).

[5] [3] [4] [1]  
mer-kho tip - kho sof po - suk

**Example 19b.** *Idelsohn 1951: 491.*

When encountering a Yiddish folksong that adheres to this pattern, one may be justified in claiming for it a kinship to synagogue chant rather than to a remote source (Ex. 19c.).

1 Ikh dayn mu - ter\_\_\_ vig dikh kind makh day - ne ey - ge - lekh tsu [5]  
 5 mu - tik kref - tig vintshikh dir a - tsind Ay - le lyu lyu\_\_\_ shi [3]  
 9 mu - tik kref - tig zols - tu shtay - gn mayn kind fun yetst\_\_\_ on [4]  
 13 has un for - akh - tung zols - tu tsay - gn tsu dem\_\_\_ vil - dn ti - ran [1]

I, your mother, rock you to sleep, / Close your little eyes. / Courage and strength I wish you now / Ai le lyu lyu shi, / For from here on, my child, / You must strive to show / Hatred and contempt for the wild tyrant. / (A.W.)

**Example 19c.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 138, No. 487.*

An examination of the *Ahavoh Rabboh* mode whose scalar form can be written as G-Ab-B-C-D-Eb-F# will reveal a tendency, particularly with longer texts, to move to the *subtonic* in the penultimate phrase. If a modulation occurs in this mode, as a rule it is to the fourth degree. Some of these intrinsic characteristics are clearly illustrated in the following example (Ex. 20a.).

1 Ver s'hot nor ge-kent mayn Yan-ke-le dem ge-vi - sn tay - er Yan - ke - le in  
 5 mi - tn he - ln tog a shli-se - le ge - ri - sn tay - er yan - ke - le oy  
 9 ver s'hot im-ge- khapt\_\_\_ hot dokh im-ge-klapt tay - er yan - ke - le  
 13 klep\_ mit di ku-la-kes hot er oys-ge-khapt tay - er yan - ke - le.

Whosoever knew my Yankele, that particularly dear Yankele, / One day he picked a lock, my dear Yankele, / Oh whosoever caught him, beat him up, dear Yankele, / They beat him with their fists, oh dear Yankele. / (A.W.)

**Example 20a.** *Idelsohn 1932: 168, No. 586.*

A popular love song finds natural affinity with *Ahavoh Rabboh* motifs frequently heard in various prayers of the Sabbath *Amidah* (Ex. 20b).

1

Tif in vel-de-le shteyt a bey-me-le un di tsvay-ge-lakh bli - en  
Ki she-shesyo-mim o - so A-do-noi es ha-sho-ma-yim v' - es ho - o - rets

5

1  
V' - se - khe - ze - no e - ne - nu b' - shuv' - kho l' - tsi -

2  
yon b' - ra - kha - mim. Bo - rukh a - to A - do noi,

3  
ha - ma - kha - zir sh' - khi - no - so l' - tzi - yon.

May our eyes behold Your return in mercy to Zion. Blessed are You, O Lord, Who restores Your divine presence to Zion.

**Example 20d.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

A motif (**Ex. 21a.**), reminiscent of the High Holiday *Musaf Kaddish*,<sup>13</sup> appears in the following song of unrequited love (**Ex. 21b.**).

Yis - ga - dal vi - yis - ka - dash sh' - me ra - bo

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name.

**Example 21a.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

Und-zer li-be iz ge-shlo-sn ge - vo - rn a - zoy vi an ay - ze-ner brik un

3  
ist mayn tay - e-rer lib - ster iz gor-nisht ge - vo - rn fun glik

Our love was as strong as an iron bridge, and now my love, nothing remains of our happiness. (A.W.)

**Example 21b.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 152, No. 530; Beregovski-Fefer 1938: 188.*

<sup>13</sup> *Musaf* ("Additional"), service following the Torah reading on Sabbaths and holy days. *Kaddish* ("Sanctification"), doxology almost entirely in Aramaic and recited with congregational responses, it has five different liturgical forms. For the variety of its traditional musical settings in the synagogue see Abraham Baer (1930: passim) and Aron Friedmann (1901: passim).

## Wedding songs

Until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the services of a *Badkhn* (or *Marshelik*) were considered indispensable at a proper Eastern European Jewish wedding.<sup>14</sup> His various tasks were not merely to entertain the guests with witticisms and humorously sentimental semi-improvised rhymes, but also to impress upon the bride the religious significance of marriage, the sanctity of a Jewish home and the marital obligations of a pious Jewish wife. At the *badekns* (“veiling of the bride before the wedding rite”) one could hear him intone the following “sermon in song” (Ex. 22a.).

1  
3 Du bist dem kho-sn ge-fe-ln vo-rn du bist a-zoy sheyn un fayn

5 Bald vet men di khu-pe shte-ln bald vet di kha-se-ne zayn oy a

7 na-ye velt ves-tu der-zen e-pes zogt men az zi iz zeyr sheyn nor ikh

veys nit tsi du darfst zikh frey-en ka-le-nyu veyn-zhe veyn.

You have pleased the bridegroom, / For you are beautiful and fine. / Soon the wedding canopy will be raised, / Soon the wedding will take place. / You will see a new world — / One hears that it is very beautiful. / Yet, it's not certain whether you ought to be happy. / So weep dear bride, oh weep. / (A.W.)

**Example 22a.** *Idelsohn 1932b: 69, No. 258; Beregovski-Fefer 1938: 254.*

Humming this simple chant, I recalled an old *ba'al t'fillah* (literally, “master of prayer,” frequently denoting an amateur or lay precentor in contrast to the more artistic professional hazzan) who prefaced the chanting of the Yom Kippur Eve prayer *Kol Nidre* in the following manner (Ex. 22b.).<sup>15</sup>

14 *Badkhn* (Hebrew *Badhan*, Yiddish: merry-maker); *Marshelik* (Yiddish: jester). For further selected literature see S. Weissenburg (1905: 59-74), Jacob Zismor (1923), Ezekiel Lifschutz (1952: 40-43) and Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1974).

15 This chant, in fact, was quite well known in both Eastern and Central European Jewish communities. The distinguished American Jewish composer Hugo Weisgal relates that his father, Hazzan Abba Yosef Weisgal, habitually chanted the *Kol Nidre* introduction *Biy'shivoh* in this manner.

Bi-y' shi - vo shel ma - lo u-vi-y' - shi - vo shel ma - to al da - as ha-mo-kom  
v' al da - as ha-ko-hol o - nu ma-ti - rin l' his-pa-lel im ho-a-var - yo - nim.

By authority of the heavenly court / And by authority of the earthly court / With the consent of the Omnipresent One / and with the consent of this congregation / We declare it lawful to pray with sinners. /

**Example 22b.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

Another *Badkhn* song addressed to the bride before the wedding proper occurs during the *bazetsns* ceremonial (“traditional seating of the bride on a chair in her home, during which her hair is braided prior to being cut”; **Ex. 22c.**). It is clearly based on a concluding motif from the Sabbath morning service (**Ex. 22d.**).

Shey - ne li - be ka - le her ikh zog dir for\_\_\_ dayn  
ma - zl zol dir shay - nen vi di zun iz\_\_\_ klor\_\_\_

Beautiful, lovely bride, / Hear now I command you. / May your good fortune / Shine as clearly as the sun. / (A.W.)

**Example 22c.** *Cahan 1912: II, 53, No. 37; Idelsohn 1932b: 156, No. 547; Cahan 1957: 271-272, No. 301.*

Bo - rukh\_\_\_ a - to A-do - noi, ha-tov shim-kho ul-kho no - e l' - ho - dos.

Blessed are You, O Lord, Beneficent One, to Whom it is fitting to give thanks.

**Example 22d.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

## Drinking song

The following humorous drinking song (the opening of a longer children's rhyming song; Ex. 23a.) reveals pentatonic-like motifs of the Weekday *Amidah* (Ex. 23b.).

1



Ei - le tol - dos noy - ekh fun bran - fn krigt men koy - ekh a

5



gle - ze - le vayn iz der i - ker fun bron - fn vert men shi - ker.

These are Noah's generations, / There is a power in strong libations. / Without measure pour each glass, / Sing "heigh-ho, *in vino veritas*." / (A.W.)

**Example 23a.** *Cahan 1912: II, 153-154, No. 78; Idelsohn 1932b: 12, No. 32, Variant 3; Cahan 1957: 355-356, No. 448.*

1



S'lakh lo - nu o - vi - nu ki kho - to - nu m'khal lo - nu mal - ke - nu ki fo - sho - nu

3



ki mo - khel v' so - le - akh o - to. Bo - rukh a - to A - do - noi, kha - nun ha - mar - be lis - lo - akh.

Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; / Pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed, / For You do pardon and forgive. / Blessed are You, O Lord, / Who are gracious and ever forgiving. /

**Example 23b.** *Oral tradition (Eastern Europe).*

## Conclusion

To sum up: Jewish liturgical music extended beyond the walls of the synagogue and entered the homes, workshops and social gatherings of young and old, male and female. As literary proof of this contention let me cite brief passages from the so-called founding fathers of Yiddish literature: Mendele Moykher-Sforim (Sh. Y. Abramovitsh, 1852-1915); Isaac Leib Peretz (1836-1917); and Sholem Aleichem (Sholom Rabinovitsh, 1859-1916).



In his novella *Dos kleine mentshele* (“The Little Man”; 1864) Mendele describes the unbridled excitement that prevailed whenever a guest khazn arrived for the Sabbath (Mendele 1928: ii).

The press of the crowd was frightful. People jostled and stepped on each other as I squeezed in toward the khazn because like all Jews I love to sing... Shabbos afternoon everyone was busy. This one screamed, others screeched. One rumbled like a bass, a second attempted to imitate a falsetto, while a third grimaced and forced his vocal chords, and a fourth one tried to sound like a flute. Then the whole gang ran up to the women’s gallery where we attempted to reconstruct the tune to which the khazn sang *Mi Shebeirakh*.

In one of his Yokhanan Melamed stories, *Di kloleh* (“The Curse”; 1897), Peretz has a poor tailor relating his life story to his rich patroness (Peretz 1947: iv).

And the tailor told her that he knew by heart practically all *khazonishe* compositions, even those of great cantors who officiated at services where admission was charged. How? He managed to sneak in through the window in order to hear the music.

Sholem Aleichem, who evinced an exceptional sympathy for music in general and Jewish music in particular, wrote in his novel *Stempenyu* (1888; Sholem Aleichem 1925: xxi-xxii).

Until her fifteenth-sixteenth year Rokhele sang like a free little bird—whether a *khazonishe Nakdishkho* or *K’vakoras*, a Hasidic niggun or all sorts of band music, Rokhele sang everything in her lovely voice that was a delight to hear.

The creators of Yiddish folk songs often imitated, borrowed or transformed the melodies of their non-Jewish neighbors. In most cases, however, especially in those songs where a mood of sadness, loneliness, pain and despair prevail, they preferred a melodic style more intimately related to their own folk spirit. Such a melodic repertoire was readily available in the synagogue. The musical material they adopted (or adapted) was not limited to stray motifs but substantially incorporated complete tunes from the liturgical repertoire.

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*Hazzan Max Wohlberg (1907-1996) helped found the Cantors Assembly of America and the Jewish Theological Seminary's Cantors Institute. He spent a lifetime researching and collecting synagogue melodies and was a beloved teacher of nusah to almost two generations of cantorial students until his death. He was a prolific composer of recitatives and settings for sections of the liturgy, as well as the author of numerous articles and a regular column—“Pirkei Hazzanut” for the Cantor's Voice Newsletter from 1951 to 1963. This article first appeared in Musica Judaica 2, 1, 1977-78, and is reprinted here with the Editor's kind permission.*

# Cantorial Elements in Rumshinsky's Early Songs (1910-1919)

*By Bret Charles Werb*

## Introduction

Joseph Moshe Rumshinsky (1881-1956) “composed more than a hundred operettas for the Yiddish theatre,”<sup>1</sup> each with a dozen or more dramaturgically relevant pop songs—not to mention overtures and interludes.

As a youngster in Lithuania, his singing was already noticed by a series of local cantors to whom he was apprenticed, followed by a brief engagement with the troupe of famed Yiddish actress Esther Rokhl Kaminski. He received formal instruction in piano and theory from a private academy in Vilna, and later studied conducting at the Warsaw Conservatory.

At 18 he founded the Hazomir (“Nightingales”) of Lodz, the world’s first Jewish choral society. Facing conscription into the Russian army, he opted to leave Poland and settle in London. There he became convinced that his future as a composer lay with the Yiddish theatre, and that the Theatre’s future lay in America. He arrived in New York City, then world center of Jewish culture, in 1904.

By the mid-teens of the 20th century he was generally acknowledged as the leading composer for the Yiddish stage. The period stretching from just before the First World War to the mid-1920s marked the creative high point of Rumshinsky’s career. By then, however, the Yiddish theatre faced a serious crisis. A new generation of theatergoers, largely composed of the native-born children of immigrants, demanded an entertainment reflecting their own ideals and aspirations. Rumshinsky responded by entering into an artistic collaboration with the American-born comedienne Molly Picon. Spotlighting Picon’s farcical, “new world” persona, a subsequent string of musical comedies set the tone for the long final phase of Yiddish-American music theatre, during which Rumshinsky maintained a steady rate of production.

During his lifetime Rumshinsky was hailed as the “creator of the modern Yiddish operetta,” and praised both for his musical artistry, which was likened to that of prominent mainstream composers Jerome Kern and Victor Herbert, and for his decisive role in creating a Yiddish light opera equal to the

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1 Macy Nulman, *Concise Encyclopedia of Jewish Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 1975: 210.

best products of the European and American schools. Significantly, from the standpoint of the evolution of the Yiddish popular song, he is credited with being the first to infuse traditional Jewish music with “American rhythms.”<sup>2</sup>

### The music of five early theatre hits

When Cole Porter wrote a brief, quasi-cantorial quasi-wail into the chorus of his 1938 show tune “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” he took for granted that the allusion—to Jewish music and to American Jews—would not be lost on the mainstream Broadway crowd. Porter, as an outsider to Yiddish popular music, seized on its most conspicuous features for his passing comment on the “Jewish” manner; his outsider’s insight makes an effective starting point for an overall description of the musical style:

#### Example 1. “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” Refrain, mm 21-24

Within the confines of this passage, “Daddy” touches upon the three most salient and stereotypical affects of Yiddish popular music: minor modality; melodic use of the augmented-second interval; and emulation of liturgical chant. Of these, minor modality is the most fundamental, as basic to Yiddish pop as use of the major mode was to contemporary mainstream popular music. In fact, Alec Wilder, whose large-scale analytic study of American popular music is a model of its kind, more than once in his commentary presumes an ethnic cast to a Jewish piece simply because it is in the minor mode.<sup>3</sup> Minor modality was less pointedly “ethnic” in the Old Country. As Beregovski<sup>4</sup> observed, the Ashkenazic Jews shared minor-mode predilections

2 Zalmen Zylbercweig, *Dos Rumshinsky-bukh*, 1931: 40.

3 Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1972: 244, 246, 251, etc.

4 Moshe Beregovsky, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, ed. & tr. Mark Slobin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1982: 294. Implied here is the subtle (even subliminal)

with their medieval Rhineland neighbors, and later and eastward, the various Slavic peoples among whom they settled.

More tellingly an unambiguously “Yiddish,” however, is Yiddish pop’s fondness for the melodic augmented second, an interval that, barring conscious exoticisms such as Porter’s three-note motif, was unknown to American popular music. In his important article “The Evolution of a Musical Symbol in Yiddish Culture” (1980), Mark Slobin traces the history of the augmented second from its likely origin in the liturgical modes *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Mi SheBeirakh* to its apotheosis as the Jewish national interval. Traditional Jewish music of two augmented-second scales: the *freygish*—also called *frigish*—because of its lowered-second degree suggested the Gregorian Phrygian mode; and the altered Dorian (also called Ukrainian-Dorian or “raised-fourth”) variety, where the augmented interval appears between the third and fourth steps of the scale. Ashkenazic cantors have historically proclaimed the “Jewishness” of the augmented second—despite the fact that, as with minor modality, the feature is clearly characteristic of several east European music cultures.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Slobin makes plain, provenance and pedigree are beside the point; the heart of the importance of the augmented second to Yiddish culture lies in its symbolic content, in the commingling of melody-type and (at least aspects of) self-identity.<sup>6</sup>

Porter’s lyric to the cited passage of “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” supplies the third stereotypic feature of Yiddish pop (also the slipperiest to isolate and detail): liturgical chant or *khazonus*. Every major composer for

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influence Yiddish theatre music may have had on Tin Pan Alley’s “Golden Age”—a separate study from the overt, acknowledged influences. Composers in both idioms were close colleagues, geographically (New York City was the creative locus), culturally (often sharing a common Yiddish-speaking immigrant background) and sometimes socially (Rumshinsky associated with Gershwin and Berlin, among others).

5 Mark Slobin, “The Evolution of a Musical Symbol in Yiddish Culture,” *Studies in Jewish Folklore*, F. Talmage, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies), 1980, p. 319.

6 The mode has longstanding Semitic connotations at either periphery of the former Islamic empire, i.e., India as well as Europe; and if, as Eric Werner (*A Voice Still Heard... The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews*, University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976: 56 -58; cited on Slobin’s “Evolution” article, p. 316) suggests, its European presence derived from multiple Asiatic infiltrations. The Ashkenazic cantors—Semites themselves for whom the mode was an item of culture borne in exile—were quite justified in claiming primacy over their neighbors, who had absorbed the style from intermediaries.

the Yiddish stage was well-versed in liturgical music, most having served apprenticeships in the choirs of renowned touring cantors. “At that time,” Rumshinsky remarked concerning the days of his own apprenticeship, the *shul* (synagogue) and the *khazn* (cantor) were, for the Jews, the opera, the operetta and the symphony.”<sup>7</sup> The composer might have added that for many Jewish musicians, the synagogue choir served as conservatory as well. *Khazonus* was embedded in the personal and collective music-consciousness of these composers, and the liturgical style, including that of semi-devotional Hasidic niggunim (textless melodies), inevitably redounded to the secular Jewish music they were to create. The “*khazonus* idea” turns up on occasion in Yiddish pop as citation or parody, but most often in an allusive manner, as a suggestion of the liturgical style; hence the present terms “*khazonus*” (in quotes) or the “*khazonus* idea” used in reference to this style. Although not so easily reduced to music tangibles as other components of Yiddish pop, the liturgical influence may be recognized in repeated-note (parlando or quasi-recitative) or melismatic passages, most often over a suspended metric pulse, and sustained or slowly changing harmonies.

Wilder disliked Porter’s “burlesque” of synagogue chant, admitting that he found “the inside humor of this song in poor taste.” In his view, the parodic trope “Da-da, da—da-da, da-da-da (-ad)” was an uncouth reference to “Daddy’s” Jewishness.<sup>8</sup> Yet the same echo of the liturgy served the world of Yiddish pop where, with its parochial and pious referents, *khazonus* offered no less obvious a clue to *yiddishkayt* than the symbol-laden augmented second.

Abraham Goldfaden, the founding father of the Yiddish theatre, had explored the symbology of *khazonus* and the augmented second while forging a popular Jewish style in his European Yiddish operettas. Yiddish pop reached its definite shape, however, only in the New World, where, estranged from its native sphere, it could be defined by what it was not. The transplanted Jewish composer, explains Slobin,

... worked in an environment in which the local folk and popular materials presented a radical disjuncture, both in language and tonal material, with the Yiddish tradition. Anglo-American song simply does not make use of the augmented second, and is not predominantly cast in the minor mode, the favorite tonality of Yiddish and much East European folksong, but rather stresses the major mode, along with the pentatonic, Dorian, and

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7 Translated from Zylbercweig by Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1982: 32.

8 Wilder, *American...*, 1972: 246.



Mixolydian modes of England and Scotland. Thus, using the augmented-second melody-types has a new meaning in the New World.<sup>9</sup>

Entering its American phase, then, the style of Yiddish popular music coalesced around those traits most distinct from the music mainstream.

While its musical components were being assessed and renewed in the light of turn-of-the-century America, Yiddish pop first became allied with the formal scheme of the Tin Pan Alley tune; the prevailing pop idiom of the mainstream. The Alley style, of course, evolved over time, and did not attain its “modern standard” aspect until the mid-to-late teens of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its second generation of composers. In form, however, it has remained stable, the basic structure being verse/refrain, with the verse serving an essentially introductory function to the refrain’s burden of the memorable music and text. A quintessential formula refrain linked eight-measure phrases (melodically dominated by the initial phrase) to yield an overall AABB, 32-measure song form.

Rumshinsky arrived on the scene at a time of transition in mainstream music, and the style he adopted reflects both the early Alley and the later, more mature pop idiom. To investigate the various factors (traditional as well as New World) affecting his music, it is best to turn to the songs themselves. In the following pages, five Rumshinsky hit songs selected from Zybercweig<sup>10</sup> will be examined from a musical-analytical point of view.

## SONG I

### “Mamenyu” (1910)

#### **E minor**

“Mamenyu,” the Triangle Fire elegy, is cast in a conventional early Yiddish pop form, with a brief instrumental introduction based on the refrain, and verse and refrain built on four-measure phrases. Charles Hamm<sup>11</sup> would have considered the piece distinctly outmoded even by contemporary mainstream standards 40 years ago. The verse carries the burden of the text, and verse and refrain bear equal melodic interest; Hamm lists both traits as characteristic of the post-Civil War-to-early Tin Pan Alley period of American song.

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9 Slobin, “Evolution...,” 1980: 324.

10 *Rumshinsky-bukh*, 1931.

11 *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: W. W. Norton), 1979: 294, 360.

Unlike their mainstream colleagues, composers for the Yiddish stage were generally expected to orchestrate the music they wrote. This aspect of the Yiddish stage composer's profession, though of secondary importance to the style overall, was not without its effect on the music. As a representative early work of Rumshinsky's, "Mamenyu" can serve as a platform for the discussion of this tributary to the Yiddish pop style.

Evidence of orchestral conception is first apparent in the outward appearance of the music. The piano accompaniment—a simplified reduction of the score for stage orchestra—is frequently unpianistic; there are, as well, occasional instrumental cues:

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is marked with a '1' and the second with a '3'. Both systems feature a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are written in Yiddish and English below the vocal line.

**System 1:**

1  
 wen es starbt dima - me - niu.  
 es seht aus blas in mied  
 s'jüdi - she Volk klugt in weint

**System 2:**

3  
 wen sis yüng \_\_\_\_\_ es \_\_\_\_\_ ken  
 wie der todt \_\_\_\_\_ Mit ge - wein  
 inbrecht die hent \_\_\_\_\_ Es brecht

Example 2. Verse, mm 5-8

Orchestral rhetoric determines the melodic (and textual) high point of the verse. There, in the final eight measures, the steady waltz rhythm suddenly dissipates as chords meant originally for sustaining instruments are artlessly converted to piano music. A two-measure unison passage follows (single line of accompaniment doubling the voice an octave lower) at the lyric:

*darf men nur dos vort yusim heren / zol men beser nit geboren veren*  
 (rather than hear the word "orphan" / it's better to have never been born)

The effect of the ensemble unison is poignant in the orchestral setting, much more so than the piano version which seems precariously thin-textured. Full block chords appear at the end of this passage, again suspending the three-quarter pulse, and over a tolling minor triad appropriate to the funeral content

of the text, the solo melody reaches to an antecedent phrase, the consequent of which will be the first line of the refrain:

1

sol men be - ser nit ge - bo - ren we - ren m'lait a shrek  
 wen es wolt kein ju - sem nit ge - we - sen wolt dus kind  
 hu - ben spring-en - dig sei - er todt ge - fi - nen der morg is fil

4

m'hot kein zwek wen de ma - me shtarbt a wek  
 a soi gesh - wind nit aus ge - strekt die hend a zind  
 men wert shir - dil wei a ma-me klugt dort in der still

Example 3. Verse, mm 19-24

Orchestral conception can be considered an important non-ethnic constituent of Rumshinsky's songs, particularly those originating in the large-scale operettas. In this regard, Rumshinsky remained steadfastly in the European tradition. Fellow emigré operetta composer Victor Herbert, for example, always wrote with the orchestra in mind; Rumshinsky's Broadway contemporaries never scored their own shows.<sup>12</sup>

Suspension of pulse, reiterative harmony, and unison melodies—qualities noted in the passage cited above—are baldly evidenced by virtue of their orchestral origin. Yet those same qualities are intrinsic features of Yiddish pop in their own right: “orientalisms,” such as the ornamental “shake” (Examples 3 and 4) that plainly controvert mainstream ideals (which dictate that the accompaniment remain on-beat, the harmony unambiguous, and the proscription of melody/accompaniment unisons). Rumshinsky trades on these qualities in “Mamenyu”; he also makes conspicuous use of the seemingly endless augmented second, playing on both its symbolic and functional aspects. In what will become a favorite device of the composer's, the augmented second is introduced in a “symbolic” context, stated obliquely, in this instance, at the Yiddish phrase *mamme shtarbt avek* (“Mother is dying”; Example 2, m 23). The symbolic bow of the augmented second at the very end of the verse

12 Even Gershwin, who eventually mastered the art, left the orchestration of his Broadway musicals to hired professionals.

(which otherwise makes no use of the motif) sets the stage for its functional, or thematic use in the refrain:

**Example 4a. Refrain, m 1-4**

Lastly, the pervasiveness of the augmented-second idea in Yiddish popular music is such that it can penetrate to the harmonic structure of a given song. Example 4b outlines the very characteristic i-V-iv harmonic “retrogression” of the first phrase of the refrain, where the harmonies trace the melodic augmented second through the bass accompaniment:

**Example 4b.**

## SONG II

### “Tsurik keyn tsiyon” (1915)

#### D Minor

Somebody once handed Rumshinsky a book of Yiddish folksongs. He wanted to ask him about, and also to tell him about, the fact that Rumshinsky’s composition “Veyiten Lekho” had been included as an authorless folk melody. This information seemed to please Rumshinsky. “I am proud,” he said. “Very few composers have the honor during their lifetimes to see a work of theirs being taken for a folksong.” And shaking the man’s hand, Rumshinsky said, “I thank you!”<sup>13</sup>

The style of Yiddish pop is best perceived by marking its deviations from mainstream practices. Granted the major points in common: functional harmony from the European classics and formal structure from Tin Pan Alley. Underlying these, however, is an aesthetic at odds with the mainstream ideal, one which comes into play is “Tsurik keyn tsiyon.” Rumshinsky, as the cited anecdote attests, measured his success in part by the degree to which his work remained faithful to the anonymous “folk style.” By way of contrast, the notion of anonymity as an artistic aim was inimical to the mainstream composer (no matter how derivative his work might actually be).

13 Mendel Osherowitz, cited in Zylbercweig, *Rumshinsky...*, 1931: 38.

Zylbercweig<sup>14</sup> noted in his chronology that “Tsurik keyn tsiyon” was adopted into the anonymous Zionist repertoire not long after publication; the piece was presumably sung at partisan gatherings throughout the United States and Canada.<sup>15</sup> Thus, before considering the relationship of Yiddish pop to Jewish folk music through the context of “Tsurik keyn tsiyon,” the folk-Zionist connection requires some explication. Aron Marko Ruthmüller has touched on this subject, when dealing with Zionist songs in connection with folk music.<sup>16</sup> He traces the folkstyle of Zionist songs to the sudden popularity of the movement at the time of the First World War. The number of partisan singing societies (important social adjuncts to Zionist politicizing) had multiplied apace, and the ensuing demand for choral music led to the rapid creation of a body of works in an assimilable style, particularly folksong arrangements and original works cast in a folk-like idiom. Perhaps the only clear-cut distinction between the two repertoires is that Zionist songs were created to be sung *en masse*, whereas, according to Beregovski,<sup>17</sup> “Jewish folk songs, in general, are solo, performed by an individual.” As a conscientious effort to remain true-to-folk in a consciously folk-rooted style, then, “Tsurik keyn tsiyon” doubly qualifies as a touchstone for the discussion of folk elements in Yiddish pop.

The folk quality of “Tsurik keyn tsiyon” is not evident in the verse, upholding Sigmund Spaeth’s Tin Pan Alley axiom<sup>18</sup> that “only the chorus really matters” in a popular song. Here, rather, the “art” aspect, particularly Rumshinsky’s sense of theatre, makes itself felt. The lyrics to the verse, a “recitative” in waltz-time, toy with, but never directly state, the subject of Zion (i.e., the Jewish national homeland, Palestine); that declaration is naturally reserved for the refrain. Yet to underpin the plangent cry *nur dort, nur dort...* (“only there, only there...”), the composer allows the music to upstage the poetry, ringing out the “home and theme” just prior to its first full verbal statement with a fragment of the Zionist anthem, “Hatikvah,” (Our Hope):

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14 *Rumshinsky-bukh*, 1931: 40.

15 The song’s American context is discussed with regard to the lyrics. The first page of the sheet music bears the superscription “*original* music by Joseph Rumshisky” (sic—my emphasis; Rumshinsky added the “n” to his native “Rumshisky,” according to his son Murray, “for ease of pronunciation”)—a formula not met with elsewhere. Slobin mentions a Zionist hymn of the same name in his discussion of the Shapiro broadsides (*Tenement Songs*, 1982: 100).

16 A. M. Rothmüller, *The Music of the Jews* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff), 1967: 137.

17 *Old Jewish...*, 1982: 292.

18 Quoted in Slobin, “Evolution...,” 1982: 121.

koi - mes  
sho - lem

nur dort  
nur dort

nur dort  
nur dort

**Example 5. Verse, mm 17-20**

Moshe Beregovski's thoughts on the interpenetration of contiguous music cultures can benefit an understanding of the hybrid style of Yiddish pop. In considering the elements of Ukrainian folk music adopted into Jewish tradition, and as important, pondering why these particular elements (rather than others) were seized upon by the Jews, Beregovski touches on matters that also apply to the case of a culture drawing on different aspects of itself:

Among the older forms of expression, those elements survive that are most suitable to the new demands and their corresponding new ideology. Parallel to those internal new means of expression are those taken from the "external sound" environment. Naturally these borrowings are not mechanical. Not everything that "resonates" in the environment is simply adopted, and remains as "foreign matter." The borrowings enter the repertoire transformed, in accordance with the ideology of the social stratum that borrows. Finally, not all strata and groups with folkloric demands borrow the same folkloric elements. Each group tends to adopt what is "consonant" with its new content.<sup>19</sup>

Within the formal confines of its Tin Pan Alley structure, "Tsurik keyn tsiyon" shares some telling points with the folk idiom. Rothmuller's general description of the Jewish folksong style, "a simple melody, with a plain harmonic foundation, not particularly rich in modulations, and clear, definite rhythm,"<sup>20</sup> comfortably delineates the Rumshinsky tune (and, not incidentally, much European and North American folk and popular music). The tune's first suggestion of folklore, then, is the "singability" of the refrain, much less evident in the soloistic, quasi-recitative verse.

Phrase structure accounts for another semblance to the Jewish and Greater European folkstyle. The melodies of Jewish folk songs, as well as textless instrumental pieces, are symmetrical, Beregovski tells us,<sup>21</sup> also stating that "in the overwhelming majority of cases, the melodies of Jewish folk songs are divided into periods consisting of two parts, each of which is subdivided

19 Beregovski, *Old Jewish...*, 1982: 25.

20 Rothmuller, *The Music...*, 1967: 130.

21 *Old Jewish...*, 1982: 293.

into two musical phrases...” Beregovski reports that the predominant phrasal scheme in Jewish folksong is an ABCB quatrain structure. The archetypal Tin Pan Alley tune is formulated in eight-bar phrases, the typical refrain scheme being AABA, yielding an overall 32-measure structure. Within its ABCD quatrain scheme and four-bar phrase structure, “Tsurik keyn tsiyon” exhibits the legacy of both its Tin Pan Alley and Yiddish folk sources.

The Beregovskian concept of adaptive consonance is important to two other, more categorically Jewish, folklike elements of Yiddish pop. Beregovski<sup>22</sup> noted both of these characteristics in the Introduction to his posthumously published collection of folk melodies. First, it is a not infrequent tendency of tunes to juxtapose an “initial minor phrase with a subsequent phrase in the relative major” (Beregovski took care to distinguish between juxtaposition of modes and modulation to another key). In this respect, the harmonic scheme of “Tsurik keyn tsiyon,” with its episode in the relative major, follows the folk convention, “juxtaposing” a phrase rather than effecting a modulation:

#### Harmonic scheme of “Tsurik keyn tsiyon”

A4   B4   C4                      D4  
 i-V   V-i   VI-V7/VI-VI-V   i-iv-V-(i)

Stemming from folkloric notions of motivic contrast, the harmonic behavior of this tune (and a great many Rumshinsky pieces) differs sharply from the often elaborate, classically-rooted modulatory schemes of mainstream standards.

Another folk element “consonant” to Yiddish pop is the tendency to invoke the augmented-second sound. Folk practice, according to Beregovsky,<sup>23</sup> typically called for the lowered-second scale degree at cadential points, or for the raised fourth for heightened emphasis. Beregovski believed (with regard to the altered Dorian mode) that “folk musical practice was well aware of the expressive qualities of melodies in this scale.”<sup>24</sup> The augmented-second idea (whether Doric or *frigish*) was patently seized upon by pop composers, and for similar ends as the folk. Rumshinsky upholds both its cadential and expressive connotations in “Tsurik keyn tsiyon,” where the augmented interval (representing the lowered II of V) is used to define the work’s major caesura;

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22    Ibid., p. 294.

23    Ibid., pp. 294, 296.

24    Ibid., p. 296.

it also does service as the expressive or “symbolic” raised fourth (reckoned by the scale of the underlying tonic harmony).<sup>25</sup>

**Example 6. Refrain, mm 14-16**

The “jargon” style of Yiddish pop, though distinct from the folk idiom, clung to its source in traditional music much closer than mainstream popular music held to the tenets of the European classics. Statements by Rumshinsky, his mentor Abraham Goldfaden and other composers, attest to a near-filial devotion to their “mother’s song,” one which paralleled their professional allegiance to the mother tongue, Yiddish. For Rumshinsky and other popular composers, the *folkstimme* was (to paraphrase Eric Werner’s phrase out of context) “the voice still heard,”<sup>26</sup> an inspiration, and a resource.

### SONG III

#### “A grus fun der heym”

##### G minor

“Until World War I,” according to the *New Grove*, “operetta at its most distinguished still verged on opera.” Grand opera rhetoric suffuses (though modestly) the present song, drawn from one of the grandest Rumshinsky-Thomashefsky<sup>27</sup> collaborations, *Di tsubrokhene fidele*. The theatrical presence is felt immediately, in fact, in the orchestral “*Intrit*” that prefaces the piece:

25 Just as the echo of “Hatikvah” was reserved for a critical transitional phrase, so the augmented second is held in theatrical reserve until the penultimate measure of the refrain’s first statement (where it is repeated).

26 After the title of Werner’s 1976 book on the sacred songs of the Ashkenazic Jews: *A Voice Still Heard*.

27 Boris Thomashefsky (1869-1939), Yiddish actor and producer, gifted with both a magnificent voice and stage presence.





Example 7. “*Intrit*”

Unlike the Introductions to mainstream and most Yiddish popular songs, the present “*Intrit*” is unrelated thematically to the rest of the piece, instead serving the larger-scaled unity of the operetta. The triplet figure is a leitmotif that appears in various guises throughout the production (numbers 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9 in the published “Music Album” of the show). As with “*Mamenu*” and other early Rumshinsky songs, orchestral conception is integral to the work as a whole; here instrumental sections anticipate and elaborate the vocal part throughout the verse (mm 9-11 and 41-46). The augmented second makes a dramatic bow as well, at the verse phrase *vus zapt blut fun uns nor aleyn* (“that sapped blood from us alone”; verse, m 10).

Still more pointedly operatic in origin is the melodramatic passage signaling the transition from the verse to the refrain, though the grandiloquence of the music does not quite equal the bombast of the text. A quasi-recitative scatters the accents of waltz-time at the words *valger’n zikh meysim iberal* (“corpses lying everywhere”), and orchestra and vocalist trade motives at *vi tog azoy nakht* (“where day is as night”). The final measures, sung to *a shreklikhe shlachht* (“a hideous slaughter”), elicit that most melodramatic of stage affects, tremolo:

Example 8. Verse, mm 43-48

The refrain, a plaintive memento mori, introduces a favorite Rumshinskian device, a melody moving in parallel octaves with added thirds or sixths. This not particularly pianistic configuration probably derived from the attempt to transfer orchestral (or choral) sonorities to the keyboard, and keenly evokes the dirge-like character of the text:

**Example 9. Chorus, mm 1-4**

A similarity of approach unites “A grus fun der heym” with the two previously discussed songs, “Mamenyu” and “Tsurik keyn tsiyon.” Each piece precedes a metrically pronounced, cut-time refrain with a quasi-recitative verse in three-quarter time. Each is constructed of four-bar phrases, the third of which moves, by way of contrast, to the relative major.<sup>28</sup> And each makes telling use of the augmented-second idea. More clearly than the earlier works, however, “A grus fun der heym” avows its provenance in “grand operetta,” in the lavish and elaborate style that typified the Yiddish theatre at the time of the song’s debut. Ambitious productions were yet to come, but the War (as the *Grove’s* author notes) signalled a new direction for light opera, as composers began abandoning “high art” notions of technique and formal coherence to embrace the forms of popular music.

## SONG IV

### “Shema yisroel”

#### D minor

“Shema yisroel,” another well-received tune from Thomashefsky’s 1918 hit show *Di khazente*, adds to and elaborates the list of “grand operetta” elements discussed so far. *Di khazente’s* Old World setting<sup>29</sup> may explain its retrospective musical style in contrast to a song like “Fifty-Fifty,” from the chronologically earlier but determinedly American *Up Town and Down Town*. Rumshinsky, at this stage of his career, evidently affected a “European” manner and an “American” manner, depending on the plot and setting of his various productions.<sup>30</sup>

28 This occurs in the verse of “Mamenyu,” in the refrain of the other two,

29 The plot of *Di Khazente* involved the temporary ascension of a *shtetl* rabbi’s wife to her late husband’s rabbinic throne. Their son (played by Thomashefsky) arrives for a visit from America, and by play’s end has persuade the entire community to emigrate back with him to New York City. *Di Khazente* was the operetta revived for Broadway in English during the mid-1930s.

30 On the sheet music cover page, *Up Town and Down Town* is specifically called

Orchestration is integral to the outward form of this piece, according to Henry Sapoznik and Pete Sokolow’s anthology,<sup>31</sup> the rhythm of the verse resembles that of the traditional Jewish Hora, “whose [3/8] rhythm is distinctive because of the lack of a second beat.” “Shema yisroel” adheres to no pop formula, instead creating its own form, in this case a seven-part structure balancing vocal and instrumental sections, as in the following example (headings for the internal divisions are editorial):

section	Intro	Invocation	Verse	Intro	Verse	Transition	Refrain	Coda
style	inst	vocal	inst	vocal	vocal/inst	vocal	vocal	vocal/inst
bars	4	4	2	16	8	8	12	8

Instrumental passages carry the burden of Shema’s thematic and symbolic substance. In the concluding Coda section, horn-calls play a particularly suggestive role, drawing on the implications of the opening Hebraic invocation, shema (“hear,” “heed,” or “listen”):

**Example 10. Coda, mm 1-3**

Also noteworthy are the Mendelssohnian<sup>32</sup> “barcarolle” device of the verse intro, and in the transition section, the dramatic unison passage in running sixteenths that set, respectively, the moods of the verse and refrain.

Two further elements come to the fore in “Shema yisroel”: *khazonus* and the musical symbolism of the augmented second. *Shema Yisrael* is the single most well-known prayer in Jewish liturgy; Rumshinsky respects the pious

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a musical comedy (as opposed to an “Operetta”), the earliest use of this genre to come to my attention.

31 *The Compleat Klezmer* (New York: Hal Leonard Corp.), 1987: 19.

32 Jewish composers of Rumshinsky’s generation (as had the Berlin synagogue composer Louis Lewandowsky, 1813-1882, before them) embraced Felix Mendelssohn as a model Jewish artist, and his influence in the present instance is quite clear-cut. Rumshinsky particularly cites the oratorios of Mendelssohn as comprising an important part of his Warsaw Conservatory repertoire, and that of his choral group, the Lodz *Hazomir*, as well; Zylbercweig, 1931: 39).

connotations of the title by incorporating certain aspects of cantorial chant into the music. Nulman,<sup>33</sup> writing on Jewish liturgical recitative, recognizes two basic styles of cantorial melisma: syllabic and ornamental. Both styles appear in “Shema yisroel.” Syllabic treatment characterizes the “Invocation,” where sustained or slowly changing harmonies support a melody that is periodically restrained (by fermatas) on important notes:

Sh'ma yis-ro-el her mich aus e-lo-him sha-dai dein welt is grois

**Example 11a. “Invocation,” mm 1-4**

The “Coda” offers the flashy complement to this soulful, deliberate style, the hyperexpressive, ornamental melisma:

Sh'ma Sh'-ma yis-ro-el

**Example 11b. Coda, mm 4-6**

A final aspect of cantorial influence is the improvisatory “break” occurring midway (m 8) through the verse. The break, in pop and jazz parlance, is a spontaneous (or pseudo-spontaneous) melodic “filler” sometimes interpolated at phrase endings. Rumshinsky’s use of the break can be traced, or at least related, to cantorial practice. According to Nulman,<sup>34</sup> spontaneous “improvisatory elaboration of the prayer modes” had long been part of the cantorial stock-in-trade, cultivated by numerous *khazonim*. Of course, major distinctions separate cantorial improvisation and the breaks of popular songs. For example, popular-song breaks characteristically maintain the ongoing pulse, while cantorial improvisations typically suspend the beat (Rumshinsky’s break employs a written ritard and fermata, making it more cantorial than most). Here as elsewhere, however, the operating principle is stylistic “consonance” rather than arrogation of styles. The framework of the

33 Nulman, *Encyclopedia...*, 1975: 168, 203-204.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

pop song, as conceived by Rumshinsky and his colleagues, allowed for the fusing of such seeming disparities.<sup>35</sup>

**Example 12. Verse, mm 7-8**

The Rumshinskian trait of reserving the symbolic sound of the augmented second for a musically ripe moment is evident in this song. As with other songs, the composer takes advantage of a transition section to introduce the pregnant interval.<sup>36</sup> In “Shema yisroel,” however, the augmented second does not appear as part of the sung melody; instead, it is introduced as an instrumental leitmotif, sounding sturdy octaves in the untexted bass. Recalling that the *Shema* would be, ideally, the pious Jew’s last earthly utterance, the interjection of the augmented interval into “Shema yisroel” was inevitable, and particularly compelling following the lyric, *Shema yisroel shrayt der yid far’n toyt* (“*Shema Yisroel,*” cries the Jew just before he dies”). This is, of course, precisely the point Rumshinsky chooses to bring in.

**Example 13. Verse, mm 15-18—Transition, mm 1-2**

35 Rumshinsky makes highly effective use of the break in some later, much more “pop”-oriented tunes, notably “Eyshes khayil” (1938).

36 This typical placement also incidentally points out the harmonic function of the augmented second in much of Yiddish pop, where it commonly facilitates the harmonic movement from the penultimate verse phrase to the dominant half-cadence traditionally preceding the refrain. In the present instance, the augmented second serves to move the harmony from the submediant, Bb, to the dominant, A.

## SONG 5

### “Ikh benk aheym”

#### E-altered *frigish*

Wilder waffles when confronting *Porgy and Bess* in the Gershwin chapter of his book on American popular song. “Because [*Porgy and Bess*] is universally accepted as, and treated as, an opera, it should be... measured against operatic criteria, a procedure that certainly lies outside the scope of this book.”<sup>37</sup> The critic’s criteria, though they have not been retained, have some pertinence to the song under present consideration, the thoroughly operatic “Ikh benk aheym.” This song stems from the acknowledged high-point of the composer’s career,<sup>38</sup> and will receive a somewhat more detailed consideration than the other pieces discussed in this study. Rumshinsky even wrote a small essay on Gershwin (cited in Zylbercweig, 1931); it offers first-hand information on the connection between the composer of “Ikh benk aheym” and the composer of *Porgy and Bess*:

...he, the Jewish-American boy, captured the sounds of Broadway and dragged them into Carnegie Hall... There were American composers writing serious music before Gershwin,... but he was the first to transform the rhythms of the American street into a symphonic form... From the very first sounding of the clarinet in his *Rhapsody in Blue*, we feel the American spirit, American tempo, and the singular harmonies which the Americans call “Blues chords”... How, basically, does one differentiate American music from the European? The difference lies in tempo, rhythm, and in the nervous vitality... Gershwin’s tempo is not merely a “street tempo”... it is a “melting pot,” the fusing together of many different peoples. Through the center flits an Oriental or a Russian cry... in the opinion of our musicians, Gershwin often shows himself to be a Jew... Take a dance of Gershwin’s [*Porgy and Bess*], play it slowly; it is transformed into a lullaby... not... because he intended it thus. No, this is, purely and simply, the cry of the Semite within... Jewish melody is in his bones.<sup>39</sup>

Rumshinsky’s “Ikh benk aheym” is a pop song in the sense that it enjoyed wide popularity for a stretch of time. In structure and compositional style, however, it more closely resembles an opera aria than a hit tune from the Yiddish theatre. Yet, the aria it hypothetically resembles is also removed from the conventional mold. In terms of its form, “Ikh benk aheym” remains *sui generis* as both classical and pop music.

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37 Wilder, *American...*, 1972: 155.

38 Zylbercweig, *Rumshinsky-bukh*, 1931, passim.

39 First published by Rumshinsky in *The Daily Forward* (Yiddish), 1927.

Its form may be termed a “modified rondo.” The composition comprises several “recitative” passages which serve to introduce and illuminate the seminal central melody, here called the “ritornello.” Each recitative presents an episode from the protagonist’s revered past, depicting beloved characters whom he impersonates in song. Although many of these passages recall the style of operatic recitative and carry such appellatives as *parlando* and *recitando*, the resemblance to cantorial chant is equally persuasive and equally significant. Other passages, though labeled “recitative” in the structural scheme below and serving a parallel function to them, are hardly *recitando* in style; most, in fact, bear orchestral leitmotifs or secondary melodic ideas. Together with the stylistic cohesion provided by the *khazonus*/recitation, this substrate of themes and motives undergirds the quasi-rondo structure of “Ikh benk aheym.”

### Structural Scheme of “Ikh benk aheym”

<b>section:</b>	<b>intro/recit I</b>	<b>segué/intro/recit/ II</b>	<b>ritorn I</b>
<b>bars:</b>	8 4 2 4 2	34	
<b>charac:</b>	<b>father mother</b>		

<b>intro/recit III</b>	<b>interlude</b>	<b>ritorn II</b>
3	10 6	17
<b>choir</b>	<b>‘unser rebbenyu’</b>	

<b>segué/intro/recit IV</b>	<b>interlude</b>	<b>ritorn III</b>
14	5 3 4	18
	<b>grandfather ‘uns reb’</b>	

Perhaps the only clear impression to be gained from this rather woolly outline is that the piece lacks formal clarity. Absent are the lucid formulations of the classic aria or rondo and the unambiguous profile of the Tin Pan Alley tune. At the core of the work lies the “ritornello,” a Yiddish pop tune in folk dance style.<sup>40</sup> The intractability of the piece as a whole is reflected by the anomalous tonality of the ritornello—*frigish* with a raised flat-second degree—a mode unknown and unnamed.<sup>41</sup> Rumshinsky is emphatic about

40 A 32-bar form, with the somewhat unusual phrasal configuration AA'AA' || BB'AA'; the ritornello is played through in its entirety the first time only; subsequent appearances are truncated.

41 It was standard practice for Rumshinsky and his Yiddish pop composer colleagues to notate *frigish* songs in A minor, with the tonal center on E. Thus the scale of a typical Rumshinsky *frigish* tune such as “Eyshes khayil” (1938) would be E-F-G#-A-B-C-D. “Ikh benk aheym” is his only work I know of to use a mode with a

this mode, however, purposefully neutering the E minor signature of the “Introduction: so as to have to affirm the F-sharp anew at every occurrence. The interjection of this “altered-*frigish*” scale—at the all-important word *heyim* (“home”)—has a “transmigratory” effect on the course of the aria. It is as if the strength of the exile’s home-longing has, for the moment, physically repatriated him.

1 *Allegro*  
 al dos guts in un-ser hois Ich beink a - heim  
*rit.*

3 *Allegro*  
 mp 3

Pno. 3

Example 14. “Recitative II,” m 4—“Ritornello,” mm 1-4

Later in the work, Rumshinsky again shifts mode to work a similar transmutation of mood. Recreating the singer’s grandfather’s Hasidic ecstasy (over the prayers for *Roysh khoydesh*), the composer adjusts the prevailing modality from minor to a rapturous Mixolydian (*Adonai Malakh*).

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raised second, major third and minor sixth. The “ethnomusicologically appropriate” notation for a *frigish* piece (without the raised second) would be a solitary G-sharp in the signature—unusual by Western standards.



**Moderato**

1

koi-desh sein k' du-she is ge-wen gor a chi-dush

**Moderato**

5 *mf* (*Mezzo Voce ad Libitum*)

Kei-voi - doi mo - lei oi - lom \_\_\_\_\_ mei - shor - sov shoi -

6 *ff*

a - lim se - lo - se a - yei mei-koim ke - voi<sup>3</sup> - doi lei -

### Example 15. Introduction and Recitative IV

Reiterative accompaniment figurations that express basic harmonies punctuate the dance character of the ritornello. Special attention might be drawn to the klezmer-like inflections (rendered as appoggiaturas) in the accompaniment to the bridge:

1

oi wie voil vi git

is tzu sein a yid

**Example 16. Ritornello I, mm 17-24**

The symbolic content of the song's second subject (labeled "interlude" in the structural scheme) was apparent to the audience in attendance. This melody is, in fact, "Unzer rebbenyu' ("Our Dear Rabbi"), a tune presented earlier in the operetta to mark the son's accession to his late father's rabbinic throne (recall that the son rashly relinquishes this throne in order to emigrate to America). Rumshinsky harks to "Unzer rebbenyu" twice in the course of "Ikh benk aheym"; first, in the orchestra over which a textured countermelody has been spun, and second, as a bare intimation of the tune—stated in open octaves—to usher in the full-voiced and plangent finale:

1

*Piena Voce (Full Voice)*

*dolce*

Ich beink a-heim noch mei-ne kroi-vim

Ich beink

**Example 17. Interlude, mm 1-4**

Rumshinsky's pervasive use of khazonus in "Ikh benk aheym" is less the result of general stylistic factors than a consequence of the song's peculiar internal requirements. In his narrative, the rabbi's son impersonates the suppliances of his father, mother, grandfather, and the synagogue choir boys. Rumshinsky does not disdain close emulation in his score. "Kol mekadeysh," the table blessing recited by the father toward the beginning of the piece, provides one such evocation of the Hebrew ritual:

1  
Kol me-ka-deish she-vi-i ko-ro - u loi Kol shoi-mer shabos ka-dos me- cha - le-loi.

3  
S'cho-roi har-be me-oid al pi - fo - o-loi ish al mach-nei-hu we-ish al dig - loi

**Example 18. Recitative I, m 1-4**

The source play for this song—*Dem rebn's nign* ("The Rabbi's Melody")—was billed as a "Hasidic Operetta," and "Ikh benk aheym" draws on elements of the Hasidic style for part of its musical and emotive substance. Niggunim were sacred to the Hasidim, who considered song to be a means of communion with the Creator. Perhaps the most distinctive quality of Hasidic song is the subordination of text; many niggunim lack lyrics and are sung to "filler syllables" such as "ya-bam-bam" or "ay-ay-ay." The Hasidic movement, flourishing since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had gone into decline by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>, and become an object of common ridicule among the so-called "European" and otherwise enlightened Jews. Nulman<sup>42</sup> states that the caricaturing of Hasidic song became extremely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among groups antagonistic to the sect, giving rise to a considerable and influential musical repertoire.

42 *Concise Encyclopedia...* 1975: 19.

“By utilizing humorous texts and devices such as change of rhythm, tempo, dynamics and other musical elements, they developed a body of folksong that became part of Yiddish folk song literature.” Many, perhaps most, Jewish comedic folk songs known today originated as parodies of the Hasidic style, though their provenance as such has been generally forgotten.<sup>43</sup>

Scenarist Gershon Bader, who would later publish a Yiddish version of *Dem rebn's niggun*, recalled voicing serious reservations at Rumshinsky's suggestion that he draw up a libretto based on “real Hasidic life”:

I told him, “A real Hasidic type will not suit your theatre—they can only treat the subject as caricature, and I will not give my name to that.” Rumshinsky said, “I will not bring caricatures of Hasidim on stage—I will depict an idealization of Hasidic life. The characters will be presented in a more elevated manner than that which is now in the public mind.”<sup>44</sup>

Rumshinsky kept his pledge to Bader; “Ikh benk aheym” successfully imparts a sense of Hasidism's mystical-ecstatic approach to song through the singer's intense, unaffected piety, and his implacable faith in the transcendent power of melody.

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43 My own conjecture is that the Hasidic connection provides the missing link between dance and comedy on the Yiddish stage.

44 *Dem rebn's niggun*, Vilna, 1931: 26.

# Yiddish Dance Songs (Tantslieder)

by Joseph A. Levine<sup>1</sup>

A Polka, a Hopke, a stately Quadrille  
Let every person dance what they will...  
For me, the Sher that my father danced  
In childhood will do...  
Or, in step with both generations,  
Even a Freylekhs or two!

(after Motl Talalyevski)<sup>2</sup>

## Dance, music, and song

“Behind all music of an instrumental nature lies the dance, and behind the symphony lies the dance suite,” wrote self-taught contemporary composer/critic, Anthony Burgess. The bodily movements that dancers engage in when performing a gigue or a gavotte or a sarabande (or—we might add—a Freylekhs, a Kazatske or a Sher), “do not directly relate to biological or utilitarian action,” he observed. Instead, they “demand from the human body sets of stylized movements.”<sup>3</sup> One result of this disconnect between dance “steps” and the way we normally move in our daily life is the difficulty we encounter in singing while dancing—and in trying to do justice to both activities at the same time. The obvious solution: “For dance, play lively. For song play in moderate tempo.” So state the publisher’s instructions under a Freylekhs that appears with song lyrics in the *Kammen International Dance Folio No.*

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1 The music examples come from the following collections:

**Bar-Ilan** University, Members of the Department of Musicology, *Variations on Chabad Themes*, Cassette B-059, 1992;

**Cahan**, Y. L., *Yiddish Folksongs with Melodies* (transcribed by Henry Russotto), edited by Max Weinreich (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), 1957;

**Beregovski**, Moshe, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, transcribed and edited by Mark Slobin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1982;

**Kammen**, J. and J. Music Company, *Kammen International Dance Folios*: No. 1, 1924; & No. 9, 1937.

**Mlotek**, Eleanor Gordon & Mlotek, Joseph, editors, *Mir Trogn A Gezang*, editor (New York: Workmen’s Circle Education Department), 1972; *Songs of Generations*, Eleanor (New York: Workmen’s Circle), 1997.

**Rubin**, Ruth, *Jewish Folk Songs* (New York: Oak Publications), 1965;

2 *Mayn Freylekhs un Mayn Sher*, Chana Mlotek, “Concerning a Convicted Soviet-Jewish Poet,” *Forverts*, Sept. 19-25, 2008, tr. JAL.

3 Anthony Burgess, *This Man and Music* (London: Hutchinson), 1982: 74.

1, 1924.<sup>4</sup> That is the first thing to keep in mind when discussing tantslieder. “When performance-oriented musicians play for dancing, it is a whole new experience for them and we have to remind them to slow down,” comments dance instructor and researcher Helen Winkler.<sup>5</sup>

The second consideration is that dance existed as a widespread human activity as early as the 9th millennium BCE. From hundreds of recently discovered scenes painted on pottery or carved on stone throughout the Balkans and Middle East, Dr. Yosef Garfinkel of Hebrew University in Jerusalem has developed an illustrated record of dancing from 9,000 to 5,000 years ago. That was when humankind gradually made the transition from hunting to farming,<sup>6</sup> and—the theory goes—had the leisure time and settled place to express itself through group dancing. This seems probable, since flutes and pipes made of little marrow-bones dating back a millennium earlier—from the Late Paleolithic Age—have turned up in caves like the Grotte des Trois-Frères at Ariège in Southern France. There, a drawing of a man was discovered, dressed as a bison and playing a kind of flute. “Where music exists, dancing is not far away,” observed the English classical scholar Cecil Maurice Bowra (1898-1971), “and scenes of it are not uncommon in the art of the time.”<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the evolution of song, musicologist Curt Sachs observed that, “no language proceeds in an absolute monotone.” He was alluding to speakers’ universal use of vocal inflection—changes of tone in the speaking voice—sometimes from bass rumble to soprano whistle and back again, and rises or falls in pitch of up to two octaves or more.

In languages such as Chinese or Yoruba [spoken in Southwestern Nigeria], “the tone is absolutely essential to identify the meaning of a syllable which might have a quite different sense according to whether it is high or low in pitch, rising or descending... Tones are more significant than syllables... as a consequence, speech can often be understood without words.”<sup>8</sup>

Sachs posited a three-phase progression between words and instrumental sounds, in which **a)** primitive song gave way to **b)** instrumental playing, which then evolved into **c)** a more advanced type of singing that imitated

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4 Song No. 11, “Shpilt Mir Klezmorimlakh.”

5 Personal communication, Jan. 20, 2008.

6 John Noble Wilford, “In Dawn of Society, Dance Was Center Stage,” *The New York Times*, 2/27/01.

7 C. M. Bowra, *Primitive Song* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 1962: 1-2.

8 Curt Sachs, *The Wellsprings of Music*, Jaap Kunst, ed. (New York: Dover), 1962: 35-37.

the pitches of various instruments found in nature (the wood or reed pipe, for example).

### **Dance, songs, and ritual**

Notwithstanding this and other theories, no one knows for sure just how song and dance originated. Still, there is apparently something in our psyche that gravitates towards action. Whenever we try to connect with a divine power greater than ourselves, we channel that innate kinetic urge into a ritual act. “To ritualize is to make ourselves present,” explains theologian Tom F. Driver,<sup>9</sup> and thereby to simultaneously invoke the presence of that god or force whom it is necessary for us to confront and relate to, if we are to make any sense of why we were put on earth in a particular locale and during a specific time frame. Song and dance—separately or singly—enable us to reconcile ourselves with our experience of an environment that is, as Tennyson maintained, “red in tooth and claw.”<sup>10</sup> Earlier generations idealized that relationship; recent generations have tried to neutralize it through creative—often artistically refined rituals that involve stylized dance.<sup>11</sup> “In a world of suicide bombers and crying children,” asks choreographer Jaamil Kosoko, “why am I dancing? To help us forget, if only for a moment, that we are dying.”<sup>12</sup>

Ritual acts impart meaning to normal events. They sacralize moments which at first glance appear to be mundane because they are in fact so universal, so predictable and so cyclical. Among the most common of these recurring moments is the event of young people meeting and courting one another through social dancing. Jewish folksong anthologist Ruth Rubin reported that Central and Western Europe during the 14th and 15th centuries saw hundreds of men and women in every community—including those predominantly Jewish—dance themselves to exhaustion in the local *Tanzhaus*,<sup>13</sup> following the Black death that began in 1348.

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9 Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual* (HarperSanFrancisco), 1991: 37.

10 Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, 1850: 61.

11 Jamake Highwater, *Dance: Rituals of Experience* (Pennington, NJ: Dance Horizons), 1985: 28).

12 Jaamil Kosoko, “The Power of Dance,” *Broad Street Review*, Philadelphia, 1/2/08.

13 Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People—The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 2000: 182-185, 196: “The *Tanzhaus* was a type of hall where weddings took place and where, during the holidays, Christian bandsmen were permitted to play and the dancing of Jews to their music was tolerated. However much the rabbis in Germany were not in favor of these practices, the dancing halls nevertheless spread throughout France and Germany, until most of the Jewish communities had one.”

Dance also offered younger people a respite from the rabbinical strictures that forbade almost every other pleasurable experience in their lives. In the Tanzhaus they were able to indulge their social instinct even on the Sabbath, and later on Festivals as well—to musical accompaniment.<sup>14</sup> Historian Alfred Sendrey<sup>15</sup> catalogues known instances where Jews engaged in recreational dancing during the Renaissance in Italy: Palermo (1469) and Pisa (1524). They conducted schools of music and dance in Venice (1443), Parma (1466) and Ancona (1575). A century later a French Jew—Isaac of Orleans—conducted a school of dance in Paris.

With their enclosure in secluded ghettos beginning in 1516 (Venice), Europe's Jews were peremptorily excluded from the musical growth that would continue all around them over the next few centuries: the flowering of Polyphony, the Baroque and Classicism. The ghetto-Jews' desire for entertainment found an outlet in dancing that featured "leaps and bounds... hopping in a circle and... vigorous movements of the arms."<sup>16</sup> To Christian eyes it was more athletic than aesthetic, a travesty of folk dance encased in weird rhythms and cacophonous harmonies. It earned the sobriquet, *Judentanz* ("Jewish Dance"), which featured, among other specialties, a *Totentanz*. The celebrated woman entrepreneur Glückel of Hameln (1648-1724) mentions in her memoirs that at a relative's wedding celebration, guests "concluded their performance with a splendid 'Dance of Death.'"<sup>17</sup>

Walter Zev Feldman, a researcher into Ottoman Turkish and Eastern European music, informs that, "on the basis of musical material, Yiddish dance is referenced in a 1674 document [as existing] in Poland, but then almost nothing appears in writing until the 19th century."<sup>18</sup> At that time, observed Ruth Rubin:

dance songs... sprang up as the wild flowers in the field among young men and women, in the main the working youth, of the cities and towns of the Jewish Pale. The secular atmosphere of the Tanzhaus was perhaps carried over, but the formality was gone and the environment was markedly changed, as were already many patterns of life and mores... in

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14 Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 1958: 381.

15 Alfred Sendrey, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff), 1970: 250-252.

16 Ibid. page 323.

17 *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, translated by Marvin Lowenthal (New York: Schocken Books), 1977: 99.

18 "Defining Yiddish Dance," *Internet Proceedings of Yiddish Dance Symposium*, Transcribed and edited by Ari Davidow, New York, Dec. 9, 2007, p. 2.



19th-century Eastern European Jewish communities, every town or city had one or more dance halls, where young men and women gathered to dance for their enjoyment.

The rise of Hasidism with its espousal of unfettered joy, had meanwhile led to a renewed interest in dance among the unlettered masses. “Hasidic dance assumed the form of a circle,” writes Dvorah Lapson,<sup>19</sup> “symbolic of the hasidic philosophy that ‘every one of us is equal, each one being a link in the chain, the circle having no front or rear, no beginning or ending.’” Built on a strong rhythmic underpinning, the early hasidic dances began slowly and accelerated very gradually until the music attained such a level of velocity, volume and pitch that the dancers reached a state of ecstatic exhaustion. When this sort of religious fervor—expressed through song and dance—was experienced by outsiders invited to hasidic weddings or circumcisions, it could not fail to leave a lasting impression.

Perhaps the protracted struggle between emotionally driven Hasidim and their rational-minded opponents (Mitnagdim) engendered a dampening of enthusiasm for the development of dance as a pursuit unto itself. In the minds of many Jews, frenzied dancing became identified with a fanatical kind of Orthodoxy, something to be satirized or even ridiculed. Books of Hasidic teachings were burned and adherents of Hasidic belief had been excommunicated in the 18th century upon orders issued by Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720-1797), the acknowledged religious authority (Gaon) of intellectually oriented Lithuanian Jewry, centered in Vilna.

By the time these internecine fires died out on both sides of the divide, irreparable damage had been done. Hasidism had peaked temporarily, and any chance for social dancing to keep pace with the innovations that had spread across Europe during the 19th century was squelched by a rabbinic misinterpretation of Proverbs 11: 21 that made it read: “Though they walk hand in hand [i.e., dancing], the wicked shall not go unpunished”).<sup>20</sup> This reactionary rabbinic stance made it that much more difficult for Yiddish folk dancing to find its own way among the many pan-European forms that suddenly confronted it.

How did the borrowed terpsichorian garments fit their new wearers? We cite three written accounts of that era, all from memoirs that have now been placed online.<sup>21</sup> The earliest report concerns a women-only affair that was

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19 Dvorah Lapson, s.v., “Dance...Hasidism,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter), 1972, 5: 1268.

20 Sendrey, op. cit., 1970: 326.

21 JewishGen.org/ [plus name of town or country, in this case,] Litvak.

given on a Saturday for single girls about to be married in a small Lithuanian town at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>22</sup>

It lasted all day: eating, playing games, asking riddles, staging contests and congratulating the bride-elect and the rest of the family. Some of the games were very comical, requiring each losing player to forfeit a personal possession such as a fine ring or handkerchief that could only be redeemed by doing something comical: kissing the bride or anyone else, or confessing to something funny about herself. The worst was for a young girl to have to admit to being in love with a certain young man... They also danced a lot: Squares, Polkas and Kazatskes. The last was something like a Jig, with two girls dancing towards each other. The dancers themselves furnished the music by singing a different tune for each dance, as on the Sabbath it is not permitted to play instruments.

The second and third references come from post-Holocaust Yizkor Books that have been placed online, concerning the communities of Bobruisk in Belarus<sup>23</sup> and Borkhov (Borsczow) in the Ukraine.<sup>24</sup>

Bobruisk: In 1892... they brought two dance teachers from afar, and “Jewish Daughters learned to lift their legs and hop as one must.” They taught song and dance an hour a day, for a small price. With them stood together “some two or three single young men. The sessions were held even during the Nine Days of semi-mourning preceding Tisha B’Av... Also on the fast day itself they danced, and not only young women by themselves, but with the single men, together.”

Borkhov: In the years before World War I young people started to perform. Around 1910 the first play put on, Moshe Richter’s comedy, Moshe the Tailor, was performed to great success. The boys and girls acted no worse than the professional troupes that used to come to Borkhov... The admission monies from such plays were given to a “worthy cause.” In order to increase the income they would arrange a dance evening where boys and girls used to dance well into the dawn. Orthodox Jews were not particularly inspired by this new activity. Nevertheless, the forward-looking ladies used to attend these performances and dance evenings as “guards” for their growing daughters. Up to that time, girls would dance only among themselves... They hired a dance teacher and every mother considered it her duty that her daughter learn the new steps because

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22 “Life in the Shtetl of Shnurel,” *The Memoirs of Mary Hellen Herr Bernard* (1886-1942; describing in 1938 the life and times of her great grandmother who had been born in 1785 and died in 1893).

23 *Memorial Book of the Community of Bobruisk and Its Surroundings*, Y. Slutsky, ed. (Tel-Aviv: Former Residents of Bobruisk in Israel and the USA), 1967.

24 *The Book of Borkhov*, Shlomo Reibel, “How They Spent Their Leisure Time,” Miriam Beckerman, tr., Myrna Neuberger Levy, ed. (Tel-Aviv: n.p.), 1960.

shortly there would be another dance evening and the daughter might, God forbid, remain at home.

The songs that were used to accompany or to teach dancing mitigated the difficulty that young people had in trying to impress the opposite sex while attempting to execute steps they had never before encountered. It's not that these dances were "routinely employed as a cure for emotional disorders," explains social commentator Barbara Ehrenreich.<sup>25</sup> Nor were they used by our great-great-grandparents to vent frustrations over their poverty-ridden existence. Instead, the transformational relief that these dance songs provided were on a more humble level. It was consistent with an attitude towards unattainable artistry which centuries of enforced ghetto living had inevitably instilled in their ancestors. Jewish folkdance dance instructor Steve Weintraub sums it up:<sup>26</sup>

The calls [embodied in these song lyrics] seem to combine actual instruction with funny/nonsensical rhymes and formulas. It's interesting that the lyrics make fun of the dancers and expect them to mess up. This might be because dancing a kadril [Yiddish for "Quadrille"] was "putting on airs" in a way, and was made more acceptable by being made fun of (we're Jews, we don't take this dancing thing too seriously).

Yehudeh-Leyb Cahan, an ethnographic researcher of Yiddish dance songs, elaborated on the conditions under which that particular genre emerged, including the attitudes of first-time dance instructors towards their uneasy pupils and vice versa.

Klezmorim were not needed when young male and female friends of a newly married couple met in their tiny apartment on a Friday night or Saturday afternoon—those heymishe surroundings generally had no room for both dancing and instruments. Instead, the young folk sang and danced spontaneously, in complete release from the pressure of daily work and troubles. The tunes they sang were plentiful, picked up from the dance accompaniments of traveling Klezmerim at wedding or circumcision celebrations. And just like the tunes, all sorts of dances were in the air—an international assortment to choose from.

The only thing lacking was a knowledge of the art of dancing, how to execute the actual steps. From out of the resulting chaos—of which all participants were painfully aware—came an endless supply of satirical songs... next to which traditional folksongs seem pale indeed.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Barbara Ehrenreich, "I Am, Therefore I Need to Dance," *International Herald Tribune*, 6/5/07.

26 Steve Weintraub, in an Internet posting to Helen Winkler's *Yiddish Dance* website, "Dances of the Jews of Eastern Europe," 1/15/06.

27 Y. L. Cahan, "Notes on the Emergence of Yiddish Dance Songs" (in Yiddish,

It was obvious to the young folk that they needed instruction, preferably from one of their own.

Who, then, were their instructors? Anyone who could sing and dance well, had the eye of a hawk, and could improvise a running commentary—preferably in rhyme—while maintaining the rhythm! Assuming the honorific of *tantsmayster* (dancing master), this talented self-crowned expert had nothing to go on but his own quick wits in getting dance novices to shape up. Hence, such on-the-spot insults to grammar, rhyme and offending individuals as: *Gey azoyset—drey zikh oyet!* (“Go to the outer—don’t stand and pouter!”).

Hence, also, an inevitable disconnect between the “gallant” form of address used in pan-European ballroom dancing and the desperate attempts of *tantsmaysters* to maintain both their composure and the illusion of high society comportment: *Damen un Herren—a klog tsu aykh!* (“Gentlemen and Ladies—damn your *Zeydies!*”).

Under these surreal conditions, the Gentlemen and Ladies gave their tormentor tit for tat (but politely, of course):

Please don’t be insulted, Señor—  
When our clodhoppers drag on the floor,  
If it seems like we’re all shlepping rocks—  
That’s because of the holes in our socks!

This was improvised folk poetry, and all parties took the liberty of a certain license.

### **Ritual dance and ceremonial dance**

Some of the “asides” stage-whispered by the 19th-and-early-20th-century dance callers in Cahan’s “*Tantslieder*” section still suggest a stern prophetic sense of justice catching up with Jewish missteps. Number 217, for instance, captures both the shouted instruction and its mumbled death-wish: “Why won’t you twirl (or break a leg!)—Honor your partner (or catch the plague!),” a modern take on the ancient calling down of Heaven’s wrath upon wrongdoers.

What Eastern European Jewish callers and dancers produced may not have risen to the level of high art, yet it worked extremely well in context of the celebratory occasion for which it was ultimately intended, most often a wedding banquet. These dances, largely improvised and using gestures from life itself, were ultimately performed during a reception that followed the religious

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*YIVO Bleter* Vol. I, 1931: 28-39), republished in *Studies on Jewish Folk Creativity*, Max Weinreich, ed. (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), 1952: 88-98.

ceremony under the nuptial canopy known as a Khuppeh.<sup>28</sup> The caller on this occasion was a Badkhn (rhymester) who acted as master of ceremonies, preacher, stand-up comedian and evoker of tears, all in one.

Luckily for Jews worldwide who are striving to recapture this vanished communal tradition, the magic of Yiddish dance did not forsake its original realm of ritual for that of the ceremonial. It stubbornly retained its expressive form, never becoming commonplace. That is why its meaning is still felt by Jews—old, young and-in-between—who are avidly pursuing its practice 100 years after its heyday. Yiddish dances—and the Yiddish songs that accompany them—never allowed themselves to become self-conscious. One detects that immediately when looking at the earnest-yet-smiling faces of dancers being put through their paces in a candid photo posted on researcher and dance instructor Helen Winkler’s web site.<sup>29</sup> She is pictured leading a chain of dancers, with arms intertwined, at the Ashkenaz Festival held on Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre in September of 2004. The participants are white, black, and intervening shades. Their expressions range from smiling to ecstatic. But their body language speaks loudest of all—people enjoying themselves in the pursuit of a higher goal—rescuing a culture that had been all but obliterated! As Winkler cautions in her introductory page:

If you read about shtetl<sup>30</sup> dances or watch old Yiddish movies, you will come to realize that the dances usually involved a good deal of improvisation, i. e., they weren’t choreographed dances. You will also notice that the dance descriptions in all of the old folk dance books are choreographed to suit the recreational dance setting. The dances now being taught at the klezmer dance workshops tend to be more like the shtetl versions. Hopefully, there will soon be videos and books that reflect this.

Then there is the pervasive influence of what Ari Davidow terms “Modern Israeli Orthodox,” at a Brooklyn wedding he recently attended, which revealed a striking absence of Klezmer style.<sup>31</sup>

Almost all of the music included singing—sacred texts—as though to ensure That it was inseparable from holy intent. Often the dancers sang along... I suspect that some of the dance steps did come from eastern Europe... There were many Kazatskes and similar dances; this community

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28 (Yiddish for the Hebrew *Huppah*), Beregovsky, *Old Jewish Folk Music*, 1982: 192.

29 *Helen’s Jewish Dance Page—Dances of the Jews of Eastern Europe*.

30 *Shtetl* is the generic Yiddish designation for any small, out-of-the-way mostly-Jewish hamlet in Eastern Europe.

31 Internet *Proceedings of Yiddish Dance Symposium*, Transcribed and edited by Ari Davidow, New York, Dec. 9, 2007, p. 24.

now pays some attention to footwork (although the steps were not sophisticated... the theatrics and efforts were intense). Most of the action still appeared to take place above the waist, as is traditional.

Davidow's conclusion: Yiddish dancing has been largely replaced by a new Israeli style. Today's Jewish bands—even at frum (religiously observant) affairs—now introduce each dance set with heavy-metal riffs (one might call it Frum Pop). This massive dose of Future Shock—where the pace of change far outruns our ability to keep pace—makes it even more imperative to study and preserve that which once was.

## Dance-types

The following descriptions are for dance-types pertaining to the songs cited later in this article. Their number, limited by the need to present only as many Yiddish dance songs as space permits, regrettably precludes such favorites as the Israeli Hora, along with the standard Freylekhs variation—Threading the Needle—whose execution lies beyond the scope of this music-oriented survey. The expositional material derives principally from the “Dance Descriptions” section of Helen Winkler's Dance Page, a comprehensive and ever-growing website recommended to researchers of all levels. Contributors were webmaster Winkler and those listed in bold type below, whom she credits throughout:

**Michael Alpert et al,**<sup>32</sup>

**Erik Bendix et al,**<sup>33</sup>

**Fred Berk,**<sup>34</sup>

**Milton Blackstone,**<sup>35</sup>

**Jacob Bloom,**<sup>36</sup>

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32 Michael Alpert, “Freylekhs on Film: The Portrayal of Jewish traditional Dance in Yiddish Cinema,” *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Newsletter*, 1986;

Michael Alpert, Fr. Bohulan Hladio & Erik Bendix, Internet site “Kolomeyke,” danced to, *Brave Old World: Klezmer Music*, CD FF70560, 1993.

33 Erik Bendix, Helene Domergue-Zilberberg, Andreas Schmitges and Jill Gellerman, *Yiddish Dancing—Jiddische Taenze*, video of a dance workshop held in Weimar July 28-31, 2007.

34 Fred Berk, *The Chasidic Dance* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations), 1975.

35 Milton Blackstone, e-mail to the website, 9/23/02.

36 Jacob Bloom, informant for various dances taught by Michael Alpert at Klez-Kamp in 1994.

**Walter Zev Feldman,**<sup>37</sup>

Florence Freehof,<sup>38</sup>

**Zvi Friedhaber,**<sup>39</sup>

Troy Gawlak,<sup>40</sup>

Lori Heikkila,<sup>41</sup>

Josh Horowitz,<sup>42</sup>

**Judith Brin Ingber,**<sup>43</sup>

**Klezmer Music,**<sup>44</sup>

**Jack Kugelmass et al,**<sup>45</sup>

**Dvora Lapson,**<sup>46</sup>

Poland.com!<sup>47</sup>

**Isaac Rivkind,**<sup>48</sup>

George Routledge,<sup>49</sup>

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37 Walter Zev Feldman, "Bulgareasca/Bulgarish/Bulgar—The Transformation of a Klezmer Dance Genre," *Ethnomusicology* 38: 1, 1994.

38 Florence Freehof, *Jews Are a Dancing People* (San Francisco: Stark-Rath Printing Co.), 1954.

39 Zvi Friedhaber, "The Dance with the Separating Kerchief," *Dance Research Journal*, 1985-86.

40 Troy Gawlak, "On the Polka and Other Polish Dances," posted on the website of alt.music.polkas — July 20, 2007.

41 Lori Heikkila, "Polka," s.v. *History of Dance*, 1996, on website of Centralhome.com Company, Inc., 2008.

42 Josh Horowitz, *Ultimate Klezmer* (New York: Tara), 2001.

43 Judith Brin Ingber, *Dancing into Marriage: Jewish Wedding Dances*, video of a workshop that included Yemenite, Persian and Eastern European dance sessions, 1982; available at <http://www.jbriniger.com>

44 *Klezmer Music: A Marriage of Heaven and Earth*, compilation book and CD by various artists, Ellipsis Arts, 1996.

45 Jack Kugelmass, Jonathan Boyaran & Zachary M. Baker, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 1998.

46 Dvora Lapson, *Dances of the Jewish People* (New York: Board of Jewish Education), 1954.

47 Poland.com! website, "Five National Dances of Poland," 2005.

48 Isaac Rivkind, *Klezmorim—Jewish Folk Musicians—A Study in Cultural History* (New York: Futuro press), 1960.

49 *Routledge's Manual of Etiquette* (Project Gutenberg—Online Book Catalog), 2004, part 3, section 6.



**Henry Sapoznik**,<sup>50</sup>

**Lillian Shapero**,<sup>51</sup>

Myron Shatulsky,<sup>52</sup>

Maja Trochimczyk,<sup>53</sup>

**Nathan Vizonsky**,<sup>54</sup>

Sonny Watson,<sup>55</sup>

**Steve Weintraub**,<sup>56</sup>

**Steven Zeitlin et al.**<sup>57</sup>

Every dance-type description that follows lists one or more songs that can be sung to the dance. In each case, the song title in bold type is given with music later on, mostly from Cahan's collection. The other songs listed with it are equally suitable—if a bit less accessible to researchers.

### 1. Broyges (“Angry”) Dance

It was customary at a shtetl wedding for two individuals who had perfected the characterizations and habitually used the Broyges Dance as a vehicle for entertaining those gathered, to dance a pantomime of fighting and then making up, a life lesson for the newly married couple. To underscore the point, the music was played slowly as the couple danced away from each other. When they forgave each other and embraced, the music became more lively. Quite frequently, the designated “couple” turned out to be the two mothers-in-law.

Nathan Vizonsky, Florence Freehof and Dvorah Lapson all offer varying choreographed versions. Jack Kugelmass cites a descriptive excerpt from a Holocaust Yizkor book, while several artists in the CD compilation, *Klezmer Music: A Marriage of Heaven and Earth*, provide relevant narratives. In

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50 Henry Sapoznik, *Klezmer! Jewish Music from Old World to Our World* (New York: Macmillan), 1999.

51 Lillian Shapero, “The Patsh Tants,” in Lapson, *Dances of the Jewish People* (1954).

52 Myron Shatulsky, *The Ukrainian Folk Dance* (London: Kobzar), 1980.

53 Maja Trochimczyk, “Mazur (Mazurka),” *Polish Dance* website.

54 Nathan Vizonsky, *Ten Jewish Folk Dances, a Manual for Teachers and Leaders* (Chicago: American-Hebrew Theatrical League), 1942.

55 Sonny Watson's website, [Streetswing.com](http://Streetswing.com).

56 Steve Weintraub, Winnipeg Klezmer Dance Workshop, November 2001.

57 Steven Zeitlin, A.M.J. Kotkin & Holly Cutting Baker, “The Wedding Dance,” *A Celebration of Family Folklore Tales & Traditions from the Smithsonian Collection* (New York: Panteon Books), 1982.



Kugelmass's shtetl scenario, a mother believes her son is marrying beneath his status. She performs this dance at the wedding with the grandmother of the bride, just before the *bedekn* (veiling) ceremony. By the end of the dance, the groom's mother and the bride's grandmother have kissed and made up. Another account, provided by Milton Blackstone, has the Broyges Dance starting out with a disagreement as the male courts the female, followed by the male seeking her forgiveness. In a reverse switch during the dance the indignant female pursues the offending male, after which they get together—and the celebration begins as they dance off.

Only one Yiddish song was composed to accompany the Broyges Dance (the first of two listed here); yet others will work equally well, so long as their music matches the gliding motions of the dance (and its improvised pantomimes, of course!).

*Bistu mit mir broyges*—Words: Rubin, p. 42; Music: Kammen 1937, no. 50

*Di zeydes mit di bubbes*—Beregovski, no. 59

*Efsher farlangstu*—Words: Cahan, no. 223; Music: Bar-Ilan, 1992, A:1

### 1. BROYGES TANTS—*Bistu mit mir broyges*

You're angry with me now  
 And I haven't got a clue—  
 Please wipe that wrinkle from your brow  
 And tell me what to do!  
 ((: Dai dai-da, dai-dai-dai :))  
 Please wipe that wrinkle from your brow  
 And tell me what to do.

Bistu mit mir broyges,  
 Veys ikh nit farvos,  
 Geyst arum a gantsn tog  
 Aropgelost di noz!  
 ((:Day day-day, day-day-day:))  
 Geyst arum a gantsn tog  
 Aropgelost di noz.

Perhaps we should seek  
 Some professional advice—  
 I am free all week,  
 Next Friday would be nice!  
 ((: Dai dai-da, dai-dai-dai :))  
 I am free all week,  
 Next Friday would be nice!

Un efsher vilstu visn  
 Az ikh hob dikh lieb,  
 Lomir beyde ariberform  
 Tsu dem gutn Yid!  
 ((:Day day-day, day-day-day:))  
 Lomir beyde ariberform  
 Tsu dem gutn Yid!

I've got a better thought:  
 Why don't we just admit—  
 That the two of us ought  
 To make a perfect fit!  
 ((: Dai dai-dai, dai-dai-dai :))  
 That the two of us ought  
 To make a perfect fit!

Tsu dem gutn Yidn,  
 A pidyen im opgegebn,  
 Vet er far unz Gott betn  
 Far a gutn lebn!  
 ((:Day day-day, day-day-day:))  
 Vet er far unz Gott betn  
 Far a gutn lebn!

Music—Kammen (1937, no. 50)

Yiddish Words—Ruth Rubin (1965: 22)

English Words—Joseph Levine (2008)

1 **With Attitude**



Verse: Bis - tu mit mir broy - ges — veys ikh nit far vos, geyst a - rum a gant - sn tog — a

4



rop - ge - lozt di noz. Day day - day day - day day,

6



day day-day day-day day, geyst a - rum a gant - zn tog - a - rop - ge - lozt di noz.

## 2. Bulgar

Zev Feldman asserts that the Bulgar will be familiar to anyone who has experience with dances of the Balkans, where it appears under different names in the various countries (e.g., Sarba in Romania). The Bulgar became the predominant dance in the early 20th-century American Jewish community, due to a perception that it was a secular dance—Bulgareasca—picked up by European Jews from the surrounding community of Moldavia. The fact that it did not have a strong association with Orthodox Jewish weddings gave it an additional appeal to many. In subsequent American-born generations the Bulgar did not survive, due to the overall decline of Klezmer music and dance in the United States. Jacob Bloom describes a Bulgar as taught by Michael Alpert at KlezKamp in 1994:

**Formation:** Shoulder hold, circle or line, revolving either right or left, or snaking around the room; if a circle, some people can move into the center and show off their moves (a feature that is permitted in most Yiddish dances, according to LeeEllen Friedland).<sup>58</sup>

**Basic step:** Resembles that of the Israeli Hora.

- A) Right foot steps to right, left foot crosses in front (or behind)
- B) Right foot steps to right, left foot swings across
- C) Left foot steps to left, right foot swings across

**Variations:** The designated leader (whether in a circle, or line if the circle happens to break) determines which variation everyone does. The steps are not called, everyone just watches and imitates the leader. It is also acceptable for people to do their own variations (different from the leader's) so long as they don't interfere with the other dancers.

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58 LeeEllen Friedland, "Tantsn iz Lebn: Dancing in Eastern European Culture," *Dance and Research Journal* 17/2 and 18/1 (1985/86), page 78.

Examination of music marked “Bulgar” in the listed collections leads to the conclusion that Bulgar and Freylekh instrumental settings are usable interchangeably as accompaniments for either dance. The Bulgar appears to be a “lively” Freylekh (based on *Kammen Folio No. 1*, 1924: nos. 17, 18, 19). Music for both dances is written in an A-B-A form—not counting additional instrumental interludes—with section C generally repeating material from section A.

*Ikh vel mikh shtekhen*—Words: Cahan, no. 253; Music: Kammen, 1924, no. 19

*Kh’beit zhe mir*—Beregovski, no. 46

## 2. BULGAR—*Ikh vel mikh shtekn*

I’m going to stab myself!  
And then I’ll hang myself!  
Oi oi-oi Momme, Mommele mine!

Ikh vel mikh shtekhn,  
Ikh vel mikh hengen,  
Oy oy-oy Momme,  
Mommele!

I’d pay a ransom to win that handsome  
Dashing gentleman, so fine.  
You know the one I mean,  
Who keeps on tapping  
All those messages on the window screen,  
While you’re supposedly napping!

Far dem sheynem  
Un faynem kavalier!  
((:Vos er ruft bay vazhanskin  
Fun fenster:))

Here’s what he sends to me—  
It makes no sense to me:  
Oy oy-oy Rokhl, please come out and play;  
I know he’ll think I’m shy.  
(And really, so will I)  
Until I steel myself to meet him  
One fine day

((: Oy oy-oy Rokhele :))  
Kum nor aher!  
((: Tra la-la Rokhele:))  
Kum nor aher!  
((:Vos er ruft bay vazhanskin  
Fun fenster:))

(PINSK)

Music: Kammen (1924, no. 19)

Yiddish Words: Cahan (1957, no. 253)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

*Lively*

Ikh vel mikh shte-khn, Ikh vel mikh hen-gen, oy,oy-oy mom-me, mom-me -le!  
— far dem shey - nem un— fay - nem, un— fay - nem— ka - va - lier;—

17 **Fine**  
 Ikh vel mikh lier! vos er ruft bay va -  
 26 zhangs - kin, vos er ruft bay va - zhangs-kin fun fens - ter;  
 35 ter. Ikh vol mikh shte - khn, Ikh vol mikh hen - gen, far dem  
 42 shey - nem un fay - nem ka - va - lier; Ikh vol mikh lier. **DC al Fine**  
 using 2nd verse

### 3. Freylekhs

A “cheerful” dance in 2/4 time that Helen Winkler identifies in her Dance Description section as “the major group-dance of the East European Jews... the one you see in all the old movies... at most weddings and Bar Mitzvahs.” The concept is simple: either a line or a circle (or both formations interchanging); everyone steps in their own way to the music. That doesn’t mean it’s a free-for-all. There are characteristic movements—like a shuffling sort of walk—a two-step, alternately stepping and stamping. The circle/line can move to the right or to the left, snaking around the room. People can go into the middle of the circle to show off their moves.

A spontaneous Freylekhs works best with a large group interacting. For smaller groups of 10 to 15, the choreographed versions are sometimes safer. This would ultimately depend on the experience level or preferences of the dancers and the dance leader. For some enthusiasts, a totally improvised Freylekhs will work no matter how small the group. For others, who are uncomfortable with the idea of improvising, a choreographed version might work better.

The community at large probably gets confused about a Hora vs. a Freylekh. The Hora can mean many things. The Israeli Hora is a fast-paced dance done with a shoulder hold and several characteristic steps—not really much like the Freylekhs—with the basic step being the same as the Roumanian Sarba (i.e., Bulgar) step.

There is also a “slow” (or “Roumanian”) Hora, done to very leisurely 3/8-time music, with its own distinctive footwork; again, it’s very different from either

the Israeli Hora or the Freylekhs. In Roumanian dancing, the Hora seems to be a generic word for dance, but quite often refers to a “saw-toothed” pattern that moves in and out of the line or circle. when traveling through the Balkans—including Greece—one finds many Horas, Horos and Oros—all of which are really non-specific terms for “dance.”

Just as steps seemingly migrate from dance to dance—so, too, do dance tunes migrate—to the point where melodies that have proven themselves as effective vehicles for a particular dance will inevitably be applied to other dances as well. The Freylekhs offers a parade example: more settings exist for it than for any other Yiddish dance. Here are a half-dozen that will do nicely—in various musical modes and moods—but you might also hear them accompanying Hopkes (see immediately below).

*Die mekhutonim geyen*—Mlotek, 1972, pp. 56-57

*Du zolst nit reydn*—Words: Cahan, no. 251; Music: Cahan, no. 252

*Hekher besser*—Mlotek, 1972, pp. 54-55

*Ir fort shoyrn avek*—Beregovski, no. 50

*Shpilt ir klezmorimlekh*—Kammen, 1924, no. 11 (including words)

*Soreh rivkeh*—Cahan, no. 217

### 3. FREYLEKHS—*Soreh-Rivkeh*

Soreh-Rivkeh, turn to the center, Tra-la-la—	Soreh-Rivkeh, drey zikh durkhn mitn , Tra-la-la—
Khaykele, now’s your time to enter, Tra-la-la.	Khaykeleh, gey zhe du baym zayt, Tra-la-la.
Why won’t you twirl (or break a leg)!	Nu, tu zikh a drey (a brokh tsu dir)!
Sashay down the line—	Gey zhe durkhn mitn—
Honor your partner (or catch the plague)!	Nu, tu zikh a drey (a klog tsu dir)!
You’re really doing fine.	(Ikh brekh dir dayn gorset)!
Make way, Tamara, see how it’s done—	Zey, Tamareh, makh a vareh—
Watch! Gekhele (oi, what fun)!	Zey, Gekheleh, vi ikh gey!
Lift her, Yenkele, she’s not a nun—	Un du, Yenkele, durkhn mitn—
(Even though she weighs a ton)!	Khaykeleh, tu zikh a drey!

(MINSK)

Words & Music: L Cahan, 1957, no. 217

English Words: Joseph Levine, (2008)

**1 Animated**

So - reh Riv - keh, drey zikh dur-khn mi - tn, tra, la, la! Khay-ke - leh, gey zhe du baym  
 10 zayt, tra - la - la! Nu, tu-zikh a drey,a brokh tsu dir! Gey-zhe dur-khn mi - tn. Nu,  
 17 tu zikh a drey, a klog tsu dir! Ikh brekh dir dayn gor - set! Zey, Ta-ma-reh, makh a va-reh!  
 23 Zey-Ge-khe-leh, vi ikh gey! Un du, Yen-ke-le, dur-khn mi - tn, Khay-ke-le, tu.zikh a drey!

#### 4. Kazatske (Ukrainian Kozak)

Nathan Vizonsky and Steven Zeitlin both remark on the sheer physicality of the Kazatske, based on a dance of the bareback-riding Cossacks, and are puzzled by its later adaptation as a Yiddish dance. After all, the ancestors of these same Cossacks had murdered and pillaged perhaps 150,000 innocent Ukrainian, Volhynian and Polish Jews during the mid-17th century,<sup>59</sup> Yet this voluntary act of acculturation only mirrors the perverse desire of contemporary Hasidim to continue donning the garb of Polish and Russian royalty that they were prohibited from wearing by the Piotrikov Council’s decree back in the 16th century.<sup>60</sup> The caftan and shtrayml have since become their silken and fur-trimmed badges of courage as if to say: “What you once denied us we now proudly sport—af tsu l’hakhis” (just for spite)! So it is with the Kozak / Kazatske, a warrior’s display of somersaults, handstands and flips invented by our people’s drunken tormenters. Now, young talmudic scholars are free to call the Kazatske their own at every Jewish simkha—whether on the floor surrounded by a ring of fellow dancers or on a table-top surrounded by the bride and groom, family and friends.

The Kozak was performed by two Cossacks with arms folded aggressively at shoulder height, from a crouch, with opposite legs kicking forward synchronically and torsos leaping to whatever heights of gymnastic bravado their macho compulsion prompted them. Today, the Yiddish adaptation of

59 Shmuel Ettinger, s.v., “Chmielnicki, Bogdan,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter), 1972, 5: 480-484.

60 Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russian and Poland*, Vol. I, 1916; cited in Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), 1967: 125.

this bravura dance is proudly (almost defiantly) performed at Traditionalist Jewish gatherings by the community's religious figureheads: its rabbi and cantor. As *k'lei kodesh* ("holy vessels") of the assemblage's spiritual heritage they sublimate their individualism into a solemn partnership (one can typically see this determination in their facial expressions) by grasping each other's forearms and swinging clockwise in tandem, stomping to the music's beat.

More than a strange twist of history, this turnabout ironically replays what took place at the Second Temple's annual Festival of the Water Drawing (*Simkhat beit ha-sho'eivah*) on the second night of Sukkot, culmination of the early-Autumn High Holiday observances. At that over-the-top revelry the greatest sages of the day would dance before the assembled multitude with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises while the entire corps of Levites played on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets.<sup>61</sup>

The dancing was spectacular. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, head of the Sanhedrin (High Tribunal of Justice), would throw eight burning torches in the air and juggle them so they were all aloft at any given moment and no two of them ever touched. When he prostrated himself he would dig his two thumbs in the ground, bend down while still leaning on them, kiss the ground and leverage his body upwards without using his hands.<sup>62</sup> Next to this, a *Kazatske* seems like child's play.

*Bin ikh gefor'n keyn adess*—Cahan, no. 239

*Khatskele*—Cahan, no. 261

*Reb abba*—Cahan, no. 262

*Momme momme di kalle geyt*—Cahan, no. 263

#### 4. KAZATSKE—*Bin ikh geforn*

I took me to Odessa town  
On the mighty Dnieper,  
Met a gal whose hair was brown,  
she treated me like a leper!

Refrain  
Hot tea turns to frigid tea,  
Cookies and biscotti,  
Girls who when young are pretty  
Often act quite haughty!

Bin ikh geforn keyn adess  
Oyf der Moldavanke,  
Hob ikh getantst a polonyez  
Mit a charlatanke!

Refrain:  
Heyse tey, kalte tey,  
Teyglekh mit fasolyes,  
Alle sheyne meydelekh  
Hobn miyuse dolyes!

61 Based upon Mishnah *Sukkot* 4.9.

62 Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 53a (more probably it was Shimon ben Lakish, a noted athlete, cf. JT, *Gittin* IV. 9; BT, *Gittin* 47a).

All week she cooked très gourmet:

Chicken cacciatore;

Shabbos, much to my dismay:

Bread crumbs, end of story!

Refrain:

Hot tea turns to frigid tea,

Cookies and biscotti,

Girls who when young are pretty

Often act quite haughty.

Vos hostu gekokht a gantse  
vokh?

Teyglekh mit fasolyes;

Vos hostu gekoht oyf Shabbes  
nokh?

Farfel mit barbolyes!

Refrain:

Heyse tey, kalte tey,

Teyglekh mit fasolyes,

Alle sheyne meydelekh

Hobn miyuse dolyes!

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, no. 239)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

*1* **Very Fast**

7 Bin ikh ge-fo-rn keyn a-dess, oyf der mol-da-van-ke, hob ikh ge-tanst a po-lo-nyez,  
12 mit a char-la-tan-ka! Hey-se tey, kal-te tey, teyg-lekh mit fa-  
sol-yes; al-le shey-ne mey-de-lekh ho-bn mi-yu-se dol-yes!

## 5. Laanse (“Quadrille of the Lancers”)

Sonny Watson relates that the Lancers Quadrille was introduced in France by M. Laborde in 1836 and spread to England two decades later. Solemnly slow, with graceful salutes and delightful curtsies, the Lancers Quadrille became a salon favorite—the men referred to as Cavaliers and the ladies as Dames. Its music (Cahan no. 219) reflects that courtliness. Written in 6/8 time, it recalls a Tarantella, only more deliberate and minus any hint of the madness associated with the Italian folk dance.<sup>63</sup> The Lancer’s directions still bore classical ballet nomenclature: jeté, croissez, balancez, etc.

### Opening formation—The Rose:

1. The first lady and opposite gentleman advance and retire, turn with both hands and return to their places.

63 Resulting from a bite by the poisonous Tarantula spider, whose venom supposedly could be countermanded only by continuous and energetic dancing (Wikipedia).



2. The leading lady and her partner cross over, hand in hand, and the opposite couple do the same, separately and passing on the outside.
3. All turn and set at the corners.

**Fourth formation—The Star:**

1. The first couple pays a visit to the couple on the right hand, and bows,
2. Then to the couple on the left hand, the same, while assuming an arabesque-like pose.
3. Back to places, right and left.

The weight of the music’s driving-but-controlled rhythm contrasts nicely with the light frivolity of this choreography (a pale shadow, to be sure, of its original military imitation of charging lancers, in which anyone who strayed into the Lancer Quadrille’s path would be knocked aside). By late-Victorian times the Lancers Quadrille had been refined to suit upper-class taste. *Routledge’s Manual of Etiquette*<sup>64</sup> cautioned that it be danced only by four couples in each set, though of course there could be many sets dancing at the same time: “The number being so limited, one awkward or ignorant person confuses the whole set. Therefore, it is indispensable that every one who dances in the Quadrille should have a thorough mastery of its graceful intricacies.” Indeed, the refined English version creates a movie-set effect (especially if period costumes are worn) that transports participants and spectators to a different time and place, culminating in a peeling-off of and regrouping of partners into two sashaying (a corruption of the French *chassé*<sup>65</sup>—“chased”) lines known as The Great Chain.

It should come as no surprise that Yente, Gitl and Dvoreh—the hapless botchers of Cahan’s Laanse in song lyrics no. 219, named after the prime culprit, Motl—got off on the wrong foot!

*Motl, motl*—Cahan, Words: no. 219; Music: no. 218

### 5. LAANSE—*Motl, motl*

Motl, Motl, turn your head towards me,	Motl, Motl, tsu mir mitn ponim,
Yente, Yente, try to bend your knee.	Yente, Yente, gey in der mit!
Gitl, Gitl, it’s your turn to advance,	Gitl, Gitl, gey shoy n aher—
Dvoreh, Dvoreh, why don’t you	Dvoreh, Dvoreh,
Give the dance a chance!	Gey shoy n tsurik!

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64 Part 3, section 6.

65 *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1981: 2016.

You want to know why it didn't work  
 (Besides the fact you're acting like a jerk),  
 It's because you stand around and diddle—  
 Instead of listening and going in the middle!

Du bist nisht gegangen git.  
 Host badarfn geyn in der mit!  
 Host badarfn geyn aher—  
 Geb zhe di hant dem ber!

The reason why I'm fregn kashyes,  
 Is to get you to pick up your galoshes  
 You're not swabbing a deck  
 With this Quadrille—  
 So get it right, and give me a thrill!

Bist nisht gegangen git,  
 Host badarfn geyn in der mit!  
 Host opgeklogt di Laanse—  
 Zol dir foyln di mayseh!

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, nos. 218, 219)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

**1 With Spirit**

5 Mo - tl, Mo - tl, tsu mir mi - tn po - nim, Yen - te, Yen - te gey in der mit!

10 Gi - tl, Gi - tl, gey shoy'n a - her Dvo - reh, Dvo - reh, gey shoy'n tzu - rik! Du bist nisht ge - gan - gen

15 git. Host ba - dar - fn geyn in der mit! Host ba - dar - fn geyn a - her,

Geb zhe di hant dem ber; Host op - ke - klogt di laan - se! Zol dir foy - ln di may - seh!

## 6. Mazurke (Polish Mazurka)

This is Poland's national dance, *avars Maja Trochimczyk*, since it appeared in the Polish national anthem—*Dabrowsky Mazurka*—in 1797, sung by Polish troops serving under Napoleon with the hope of regaining independence for their homeland. The music is written in triple time and moderate tempo, and features a variable accent on the second beat (unlike the *Waltz* whose accent falls consistently on the first beat of each measure). The dance is fairly complicated, and includes hops, sliding steps and kicking the heels together while leaning to one side in mid-air.

An excellent example of its Yiddish variant is this lilting melody from Warsaw, set to a biting commentary by the dance instructor, who skewers the pathetic social aspirations of both men and women.

*Hayntike meydelekh*—Cahan, no. 245

## 6. MAZURKE—*Hayntikeh meydelekh*

Women today (who speak like Okies)	Hayntike meydelekh di fonferonkes,
Go to weddings and dance the Polkies—	Zey geyen oyf khasunes un tantsn polkes;
They can twirl the whole night through, To pay the band they haven't a clue!	Polke-mazur iz zeyer lebhn, Zey hobn keyn groshn dem klezmer tsu gebn!
 Bandleader, play it hot—	 Klezmer, klezmer, shpilt mir sheyn,
For that I'll give you a five-spot A five-spot and perhaps you'll sing a song— While tootin' a clarinet the whole night long	A prayer meyn iz gor keyn sakh, Kh'vel aykh gebn a drayer meyn! Ir zolt mir shpilh a gantser nakht!
 A wedding gig is not as bad a drag As gettin' hitched to an ancient nag—	 A gantser nakht iz keyn sakoneh, M'tor nisht khasune hobn mit an almoneh;
Whose knee-bones rattle and dentures click I'd rather snuggle with a cute young chick!	An almoneh hot kalte fis— A sheyn meydele iz tsuker zis!

(WARSAW)

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, no. 245)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

*Staccato First Beat*  
*Accented Second Beat*

Hayn-ti - ke mey - de - lekh di fon - fe - ron - kes, zey gey-en oyf kha - su - nes un  
tan - tsn pol - kes; Pol - ke Ma - zur iz — ze - yer le - bn, zey  
ho - bn keyn gro - shn der klez - mer tsu ge - bn!

## 7. Mitzvah Tants

It fulfilled the Talmud's injunction to "dance before the bride."<sup>66</sup> The Badkhn, acting as master of ceremonies, traditionally called up male wedding guests to dance with the bride, one at a time. Isaac Rivkind differentiates the term

<sup>66</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *K'tubot* 16b-17a, "Our Rabbis taught: How does one dance before the bride?... the school of Hillel say, 'while singing her praises as—graceful and beautiful!'"

Mitzvah Tants as being danced with both bride and groom. *Sefer minhagim*, a “Book of Customs” published 1590 in Venice, describes the Mitzvah Tants as a form of group involvement in which the men danced with the groom and the women with the bride. Little more than a century later, the primer *Derekh ha-yashar* (“The Righteous Path”; J. M. Epstein, Frankfort, 1704) stipulates that men took turns dancing with the bride after wrapping something around their hand as a symbol of separation (general use of a handkerchief came into play early in the 19th century). Some have called this the “Kosher” dance, since the bride had undergone ritual purification in a Mikveh—ritual bath—prior to the wedding. The bride was usually seated amidst a circle of chosen guests while the Badkhn called each by name to step forward and dance with her. First honors went to the parents on both sides, the next ones went to scholars and community leaders, etc. During the weeklong festivities, neighbors and townspeople—even beggars—had the right to dance with the bride. She, in turn, would look down modestly in order to avoid making eye contact with any of the men she danced with.<sup>67</sup>

In the shtetl, everyone would have improvised their own steps when they took a turn dancing with the bride, and that would have worked. In today’s climate of group-centered folk dancing, however, no participant wants to sit on the sidelines watching others dance with a fictitious “bride.” So the Mitzvah Tants has been modified into a vehicle for couples or for mixing. To avoid chaos it is choreographed, yet participants ought not to worry if they don’t get the footwork quite right, since this was originally an improvised dance. The only concern is that people change partners at the same time or they might collide.

**Music:**

a 4/4 (i.e., moderately slow) Freylekhs or Bulgar will do; for faster music use two beats per step, for slower music use one beat per step.

*Far vemen*—Beregovski, no. 56

*Hey, hober in korn*—Cahan, no. 133

*Shteyen di kareten*—Beregovski, no. 52

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<sup>67</sup> Dvora Lapson, s.v., “Wedding Dances” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter), 1972, 5: 1265.

## 7. MITZVAH TANTS—*Hey, hober un korn*

Hay, barley and millet,  
Rivkeh has lost her skillet,

And Yenkl has found it—  
No need to expound it!

Rivkeh sees in the looking glass  
The image of a pretty lass—  
And, standing beside her  
Is Yenkl, ever ready to chide her!

They're made for each other,  
Not like sister and brother—  
Rivkeh has made up her mind  
And Yenkl is not far behind!

Hey, hober un korn,  
Rivkeh hot dem fartukh  
farlorn,

Un Yenkel hot es gefunen,  
Hobn zikh beyde genumen.

Shteyt Rivkeh in shpigl—  
Un kamt arop di herlekh;  
Iz tsugangen Yenkl—  
Un hot ir bashotn mit kerlekh.

Dos veysn dokh alleh,  
Az Rivkeh iz a Kalleh;  
Un Yenkl iz a khosn—  
Un hobn zikh beyde geshlosn.

(PINSK)

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, no. 233)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

*Gracefully*

Hey, ho - ber un ko - rn, Riv - keh hot dem far - tekhn far - lo - rn, un

Yen - kl hot es ge - fu - nen, ho - bn zikh bey - de ge - nu - men.

## 8. Potsh Tants (“Hand Clapping” Dance)

Several different versions exist, the one most people know being by Lillian Shapero, given in Dvora Lapson’s book. All the sources agree that it belongs to the later phase of a wedding celebration, when the mood is notably light-hearted. Nathan Vizonsky believed that it was used to welcome the bride into the fold of married women. Given that relaxed atmosphere, it is but a small leap to adapt a rather cynical text from Cahan’s “Family Songs” section—reflecting on how easy it is to fool a prospective bridegroom—to a well-established melody for the Potsh Tants (see the recommended song, below).

As a mixer, the dance provides great fun for families; children enjoy the clapping and the stamping that goes on. In fact, it can even be performed *a cappella* in situations where musical instruments may not be appropriate. Isaac Rivkind cites a Hasidic belief that the dance was created by Rabbi Zusya of Hanipoli to be accompanied only by clapping and stamping—expressly teach-

ing Jews to worship God quietly—without words or even melody. Hasidim knew it as the Shtiler (“silent”) Dance. In line with this thinking, a version of the dance that appears in the 1938 Yiddish movie from Warsaw, *The Dybbuk*, is identified in the subtitles as “Tapping Dance.” As there are many different musical arrangements of the dance, the one chosen for this survey is specifically titled “Patsh Tants” in *Kammen International Dance Folio No. 9*.

### 8. POTSH TANTS—*Ot azoy nart men op*

If you really want to attract a beau—	Ot azoy un ot azoy
This is the way that you should go:	Nart men op a khosn:
Telling him your Dad is very rich—	M'zogt im tsu a sakh nadan—
Should suffice to give him the itch!	M'git im nit keyn groshn—

Throw out a hint (clap, clap, clap)—	Ot azoy un ot azoy
You're inheriting a mint (clap, clap, clap)—	Nart men op di shviger:
Another he won't find (clap, clap, clap)—	Zi zogt im tsu zaydns geben—
Once the Ktubah's signed (clap, clap, clap)—	Un git im nit keyn tiger!

Under the canopy, wearing the ring—	Ot azoy un ot azoy
Think of how your heart will sing:	Nart im op der shver:
As your groom leads you off, handsome and cool—	Er zogt im tsu toyznt glikn—
He won't know that he's been made a fool!	Un heyst im kushn a ber!

#### Formation:

Everyone in a single circle, facing towards center:

1-4 Circle right eight steps

5-8 Circle left eight steps

9-10 Two steps forward (drop hands), clap three times

11-12 Two steps back (drop hands) clap three times

13-16 Repeat measures 9-12

17-24 Turn with your partner for eight counts

25-32 Reverse direction and turn for another eight counts

*Ot azoi un ot azoi*—Words: Cahan, no. 288; Music: Kammen, 1937, no. 52

(VILNA)

Music: Kammen (1937, no. 5)

Yiddish Words: Cahan (1937, no. 288, "Family Songs")

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

**1 Playfully**

Ot, ot a-zoy un oy a-zoy nart men op a kho-sn: m'zogt im tsu a  
sakh na-dan, m'git im nit keyn gro-shn! Ot a-zoy nart im op di shvi-ger.  
Zi zogt im (clap) tsu zay-dns ge-bn (clap) un git im (clap)  
nit keyn ti-ger. (clap) Ot a-zoy, ot a-zoy nart im op, nart im op der  
shver. Er Zogt im tsu toy-znt gli-kn un heist im ku-shn a ber!\_\_\_\_\_

## 9. Polke (Polka)

This is a vivacious couple dance of Bohemian origin, writes Lori Heikkila, using a basic pattern of hop-step-close, in 2/4 time. It was first introduced to ballrooms in Prague, 1835. Its Czech name—Pulka—means “half-step,” and refers to the dancers’ characteristic rapid shift from one foot to another. (Some sources believe that the later Polish version—echoing this “shuffle”—was at first performed in a manner that deliberately mocked the way local peasant girls danced.) It spread throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire and, by 1840, had reached Paris.

Troy Hawlak theorizes that the Polka caught on so quickly and so universally because it was a very informal dance that required the two partners to be quite close! When it arrived in the United States in 1849, reported Thomas Balch in his book, *Philadelphia Assemblies*, Breiter’s Band was prepared for it—having already composed and rehearsed a new Polka for that year’s Assembly.<sup>68</sup>

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68 Philadelphia, then the nation’s capitol, had shed its “plain and simple” Quaker manners and dress right after the Revolutionary War, and by 1849 had been holding an annual “Assembly” or Coming-out Ball in a center city hotel for over half a century; Kate Haulman, “Fashion and the Culture Wars of Revolutionary Philadelphia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 62:4, October 2005.

The Polka is one of the few dances originating in the 19th century that has remained widely popular. To be sure, when Ragtime, Jazz and Swing burst on the scene early in the 20th century, the Polka did decline for a while. After World War II, however, with the arrival of Polish immigrants and the inception of a weekly TV showcase for Polkas provided by Lawrence Welk's Band, interest in this "heel and toe and away we go" dance with its variance in style from robust stepping to smooth gliding and ever-happy music picked up again.

*Az a meydele geyt*—Cahan, no. 250

*Eyns tsvey dray fir*—Cahan, no. 221

*'Khbeyt zhe mir a fin'f-un-tsvantsiker*—Beregovski, no. 46

### 9. POLKE—*Eyns, tsvey, dray, fir*

One, two, three, four, five-six, seven—

Eyns, tsvey, dray, fir, finf, zeks,  
zibn,

Play that Polka and send me to heaven,  
Swing your partner here,  
Swing your partner there,  
Swing it before the clock strikes eleven!  
Azoy vi di rozeve blumen bliy'n

Shpilt zhe mir di poylke  
vi es shteyt geshribn;  
Shift zi zikh aher,  
Shift zi zikh ahin,  
(Bom ta-da...).

One, two, three, four, five-six, seven-eight,

Eyns, tsvey, dray, fir, finf, zeks,  
zibn,

I've found me a girl/boy friend

Avu iz di meydele vos ikh tu ir  
libn?

Who is really great,  
And knows how to dance,  
So I'll take a chance  
On romance, before it's too late!

Ot iz zi do,  
Ot iz zi nito  
Un ot iz zi avekgegangen  
Tsu al di shvarts-yor  
(Bom ta-da...).



(PODOLIA; VILNA)

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, nos. 221, 222)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

**Bouncy**



1 Eyns, tsvey, dray, fir, finf zeks zi - bn, shpilt mir di poyl-ke vi es shteyt ge-shri-bn.

5 Shift zi zikh a - her, shift zi zikh a - hin, a-zoy vi de ro - ze - ve blu - men bliy'n;

9 Refrain  
blu - men bliy'n. Bom ta - da di - di bom ta - da dom, bom ta - da di - di

13 di - di dom; bom, ta - da di - di di - di dom-dom, bom ta - da di - di dom.

## 10. Roumanian or “Slow” Hora

A slow, dignified dance that Helen Winkler assures is “easy to perform,” the Yiddish Hora is “essentially a social dance, for any number of dancers can join in.” What is more, it does not necessitate partition into couples or into better-and-worse dancers. Notated in slow 3/8 time, it is not to be confused with the brisk Israeli dance of the same name, that is danced in a much faster 4/4 time. The Roumanian Hora’s rhythmic pattern is calmer and its pace is more relaxed. Here are its basics, as described by Jacob Bloom, learned from Michael Alpert at KlezKamp 1994.<sup>69</sup>

### Formation:

A circle or line, with a “W” hand hold.

### Styling:

Dance progresses to the right. Steps made to the right are larger than steps to the left. There is no movement to the center.

### Basic steps:

- 1) Arms up and joined, raising slightly on each step
- 2) Facing right—walk right, left, right
- 3) Facing center—touch left foot
- 4) Facing left—walk left, right, left
- 5) Facing right and leaning back slightly—touch right foot

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<sup>69</sup> According to Helen Winkler, the above steps may originally have been taught to Michael Alpert by the legendary Klezmer clarinetist, Dave Tarras (1897-1989).

*Epelekh un barelekh*—Beregovski, no. 57

*Gold un zilber*—Words: Cahan, no. 212; Music: Kammen, 1924, no. 16

*Shviger, a gut helf aykh*—Beregovsky, no. 53

### 10. ROUMANIAN HORA—*Shviger, a gut helf aykh*

Good day to you, Father-in-Law,  
What have you to say  
Of your Daughter-in-Law?  
She pleases me very much,  
Teases me so—I'd like to touch!  
Ta ra-ra ram...

Shviger, a gut helf aykh,  
Tsu di shnur gefelt aykh?  
Gefeln iz tsu mir freyer,

A sheyne shnur in shleyer.  
Ta ra-ra ram...

She is gentle as a feline,  
She is pretty as a fox,  
And should I step out of line—  
Both my ears she would box!  
Ta ra-ra ram...

Sheyn iz zi vi a kalineh,  
Zis iz zi vi a malineh,  
Gut iz zi vi di malke Ester,  
Vi a kalleh iz zi di besteh!  
Ta ra-ra ram

(UKRAINE)

Words & Music: Beregovski (1982, no. 53)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

1 **Coyly**

7 Tra ta-ra ra-ra ram ta, tra ra-ra ra-ra ram ta. Ram ta-ra -ra-ra. ram ta-ra ra-ra

13 ta ra-ra ra ra ra. Ta ra-ra ram, ta ra-ra ram, ta ra-ra ta-ra-ra-ra-ra ra.

19 Ta ra-ra ra ra ra-ra-ra ra ay ra; \_\_\_\_\_ Ta ra ra-ra ra ra ra-ra. **Fine**

25 ta-ra-ra-ra-ra- ram ram ta-ra ra-ra ram ta-ra ra-ra, ram ta-ra ra-ra ra.

29 1. Shvi - ger, a gut helf aykh, tzu di shnur \_\_\_\_\_ ge - felt aykh? Ge -

fe - ln iz tsu mir \_\_\_\_\_ frey - er, a \_\_\_\_\_ shey-ne shnur in \_\_\_\_\_ shley - er. **Dal Segno al Fine**

## 11. Sher

An old dance of the Eastern European Jewish communities, its name may derive from *sher*—Yiddish for scissors—because the crossing movements of the couples resemble the crossing motion of scissor blades. Dvora Lapon therefore speculates that it originated as a Jewish Tailors' Guild dance. The name might also be associated with the traditional cutting off of the bride's hair with a scissors on her wedding day, a custom alluded to in Judith Brin Ingber's video, *Dancing into Marriage*.

Nathan Vizonsky claimed that the Sher in its present form seems most directly influenced by the Quadrille, a square dance of four couples, that was popular in the courts of European monarchs—especially in France—during the 18th century. In its tempered movements and graceful bowings, the Sher still retains the trappings of its courtly beginnings. At the same time, its elements are equally representative of the Hasidic devotional attitude known as *d'veikut* or “clinging” to God, a gentle hesitance that in other circumstances could be taken as the shyness which dominated relations between the sexes in the ghettos. The partners in this dance do not actually join hands, but hold the opposite corners of a handkerchief.

LeeEllen Friedland<sup>70</sup> explains the often-confusing nomenclature of Jewish group dances, especially for the Sher.

The group dances generally had simple patterns that encouraged a wide range of participation. There were two patterns, a circle dance and a dance in square formation. In many areas the circle dance was called a Freylekhs; in other areas it was called a Redl [small group]. It was, in all areas, the dance performed most often. It consisted primarily of everyone dancing in a circle, every person doing his or her own individual variation of stepping. A winding snake figure was often introduced, in which the dance leader would lead the rest of the circle through a series of arches and then back out those same arches. The dance in square formation was known as a Sher. Although it's configuration resembled that of the Kadril [Quadrille], dancers have been adamant about the fact that the Sher was considered a Jewish dance and the Kadril was not a Jewish dance. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that most of the figures performed in a Sher are pan-European patterns! In a Sher, figures that involved the whole group—such as circling or a snake—would alternate with figures that involved the two couples facing opposite each other, such as the two ladies dancing to the center and crossing over to change partners.

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70 Friedland, “*Tantsn iz leb...*,” p. 78.

### Formation:

A square formed by four couples, male to the left of the female. Each man holds in his right hand a handkerchief, which his partner grasps with her left hand.

### The Steps:

Since the Sher is not a fast dance, most people dance it in a sort of shuffling walking step or in an ordinary walking step, two steps to each bar of the melody. The steps remain the same throughout, while the choreographical groupings change.

### The Music:

Most often, musicians would string together a medley of tunes when accompanying the Sher, and all of them worked—as long as they were played in the right tempo and style. Tunes for the Sher were known in all the former Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Here are two typical ones whose lyrics specifically mention the Sherele (“Little Sher”), in the contrasting keys of E major and in F minor.

*Shpielt mir op*—Beregovski, no. 14

*Shpielt zhe mir*—Cahan, no. 260

## 11. SHER—Shpilt zhe mir

As I download the latest Sher  
Off of **iTune**,  
I’m thinking of a girl so fair—  
I’d love to see her soon.

If only she were closer  
(She lives so far away)—  
I’d tell her how I chose her  
That very first day.

I am not ashamed  
Of my secret love—  
One fine day she will be named  
Before the One Above.

Shpilt zhe mir dem nayem sher  
Vos iz aroysgekumen;  
Kh’hob mikh farlibt in a meydele a sheyner  
Un ken tsu ir nit kumen.

Kh’volt tsu ir gekumen,  
Zitst zi zeyer vayt;  
Kh’volt ir a kush gegeben,  
Shem ikh mir far layt.

Nit azoy far layt,  
Nor far Gott aleyn;  
Ikh volt mit ir farbrakht di tsayt,  
Az keyner zol nit zeyn.

Words & Music: Cahan (1957, no. 250)

English Words: Joseph Levine (2008)

**Merrily**



1  
5  
9  
15  
21

Shpilt zhe mir dem na - yem— sher— vos iz a - roys - ge - ku - men,  
kh'hob mikh far-libt in a mey-de - le a shey-ner un ken tsu ir nit ku - men. Kh'  
volt tsu ir ge - ku - men, zitst zi ze - yer vayt, kh' - volt zi a kush ge - ge - bn,  
shem ikh mikh far - layt. Nit a - zoy far layt vi far Gott a - leyn. Ikh  
volt mit ir far-brakht di tsayt, az key-ner zol nit zeyn; key-ner zol nit zehn.

## Dance Songs

### Instrumentals and Vocals

Klezmer has always meant instrumental music, from its early-17th century beginnings with Violin/Cimbalom<sup>71</sup> duets to modern ensembles consisting of ten players who alternate between eighteen instruments:<sup>72</sup>

Accordion	drums	piccolo
alto saxophone	flute	poyk <sup>73</sup>
baritone saxophone	guitar	tambourine
bass	mandolin	tenor banjo
clarinet	percussion	trombone
cornet	piano	violin

71 Cimbalom is what the dulcimer was called in Hungary, Romania and Bohemia (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 1977: 168).

72 Garnered from Personnel Lists of the Klezmer Conservatory Band, given in various *Klezmershack KCB* reviews, Winter 2007-2008.

73 Yiddish: large double-headed bass-drum with a brass cymbal mounted on top (Michael Alpert, "All My Life a Musician," *American Klezmer*, Mark Slobin, ed. (Berkeley: University of California press), 2002: 77).

Like Flamenco, another intensely emotional folk music that was first played—then danced and sung—Klezmer has undergone “a series of evolutionary cycles in which it spiraled closer to popular culture and legitimacy before being... forced to reinvent itself to avoid assimilation and disappearing for good.”<sup>74</sup> After World War I, Flamenco was saved by two Spanish folklorists who were also musicians, the writer Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936), and the composer Manuel de Falla (1876-1946). Simultaneously, Klezmer was rescued by two rival virtuoso clarinetists, Dave Tarras (1897-1989) and Naftule Brandwein (1884-1963). The impetus of their brilliant playing carried Klezmer music in the United States until the immigrant generation began to die out in the 1960s—and with it the Yiddish language in which the dances had been taught by myriad instructors—and the wedding rituals had been parodied by countless Badkhnim.

As Jason Webster observes concerning Flamenco, “salvation came a second time around” for Klezmer in the 1970s, when a younger group of enthusiasts, spurred by the general renewal of interest in folk music spearheaded by Pete Seeger, The Weavers, Oscar Brand, Peter Paul & Mary, and other performers and anthologists. Unfortunately, our analogy ends at the point where the heart and soul of Flamenco begins—with its “deep song” (*cante jondo*)—which is completely foreign to Klezmer, an exclusively instrumental art form despite the vocals that permeate recent “Klezmer” recordings.

### **The Role of Yiddish Dance Songs**

Simply put, they fill the gap between Klezmer and folk songs. They cover seams that might otherwise separate what musicologist Walter Zev Feldman postulates as Klezmer “Genres.”<sup>75</sup> These are:

the *Core Repertoire* of Old Style Freylekhs and Shers;

the *Transitional Repertoire* of Volekhl, Slow Horas and Bulgars, with Moldavia as its main source;

the *Co-Territorial Repertoire* originally played for Gentiles by Klezmerim—Mazurkas, Kolomeykes, Kazatskes, Hopkes, Krakowiaks;

the *Cosmopolitan Repertoire* of Western-and-Central European origin Quadrilles, Lancers and Polkas.

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74 Jason Webster, *Duende: A Journey into the Heart of Flamenco* (New York: Broadway Books), 2002: 46-47.

75 Walter Zev Feldman, “Bulgareasca / Bulgarian / Bulgar—The Transformation of a Klezmer Genre,” *American Klezmer: Its Roots and Offshoots*, Mark Slobin, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2002, pages 91-96.

This continuum was set in motion after the Jewish Enlightenment, says Feldman, when

it became more common for men to dance with women<sup>76</sup>... and models for such music were sought outside of Jewish life. In particular, Roumanian music grew in popularity after dances such as the Bulgareasca and Suba became, in effect, dance crazes among Jews at the end of the 19th century.

Yehude-Leyb Cahan completed his first Warsaw collection at that same time—the late 1890s—and it is no coincidence that most of the “Dance Songs” in the 1957 re-issuing of all his successive *Shtudyas* (“Studies”) as well as all 11 of the songs for which music and words are provided in this article—fit neatly into one or another of Walter Zev Feldman’s four “Genre” categories.

Two of them—a **Bulgar** from Minsk (2.) and a **Slow Hora** from Romania (10.)—are *Transitional Repertoire*.

Two others—a **Laanse** from Warsaw (5.) and a **Poylke** from Podolia (8.)—are *Cosmopolitan Repertoire*.

Two are *Co-Territorial Repertoire*: a **Kazatske** from Podolia (4.), and a **Mazurka** from Warsaw (6.).

The largest number—five, or 45% of the total—are *Core Repertoire*: a **Broyges Tants** that is universally known (1.), a **Freylekhs** from Minsk (3.), a **Mitzvah Tants** from Pinsk (7.), a **Patsh Tants** from Vilna (9.), and a **Sher** from Podolia (11.).

Given the opportunity to enter modern life, our East-European great-great grandparents seized the moment and danced what was current. In retracing their path 100 years after the fact, we recognize that the tunes and steps of their dance songs were modified to fit Jewish preferences. The words are, of course, the original creations of their hearts and minds.

## Music and Words

The published collections of Cahan (1957), Kammen (1924, 1937), Beregovski (1982), and Rubin (1965) reflect usage and preference of the late-19th and early-20th century when Yiddish dance songs still flourished in the old Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and had taken root as well among the recently arrived immigrant Jewish population in North America. Though

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76 This phenomenon is documented in *The Memorial Book of Czystewo* ( Poland; published by its former residents, Tel-Aviv: 1961, “A Wedding in Town,” p. 498): “Some stood ready to challenge the prohibition, beginning with the second decade of the 20th century, when men and women could be found dancing together before the seated bride, undisturbed.”

limited to only one for each of the Dance-types discussed above, the 15 songs are remarkably versatile. Example 3., *Soreh rivke, drey zikh durkhn mitl*, from Cahan (no. 217)—sung *Allegro* (metronome mark 120) but played *Presto* (M.M. 150)—can accompany not only Freylekhs, but also Bulgars, Hopkes and Kazatskes when it is judiciously ritarded or accelerated. Its melody’s A section opens in G harmonic-minor when ascending (with the F sharpened) and G natural-minor when descending (with the F remaining natural). The B section moves to G minor’s relative-major key of B-flat. The C section—in the synagogue mode of D-*Ahavah-Rabbah* (meaning, “With Abundant Love”; a major scale on D with E-flat and B-flat)—quotes the well known folk song from the town of Talnoye in the Ukraine: *Reb dovidl* (“Rabbi David, formerly of Vasilkov, now resides in Talnoye”).<sup>77</sup>

If we carefully examine the tunes and texts presented here, it quickly becomes evident that they epitomize the term, “folksong.” Motifs repeat in the music and the poems, in true folk fashion for a given cultural group. These dance songs emerged from the common usage of a people at play; they were never intended for concert performance. In fact, the concept of “performance” is extraneous to the process by which they evolved. Neither does the label, *Gebrauchsmusik*—music composed for a specific use—quite fit, for the songs were never “composed”; they simply happened over time. As for their lasting value, Ruth Rubin puts the question in a realistic perspective.

We may not find pearls of literary creation in these incidental, often accidental little rhymes, which at first performed a utilitarian function of rhythmically accompanying the social dancing of the young people. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it is clear that these fragments contain values pointing in two directions. One represents the preserved remains of old dance and love songs of several hundred years ago; the other, latent seeds of love songs in the making. This endows these fragments with a quality that, in its entirety, [embodies] a wellspring of primitive folk poetry of a high order.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, Rubin sees in the dances that these poems accompanied, a pantomime of neglected little details of shtetl existence. Like kinetic *B’dikas-khomets* candles on the eve of Passover, the dance songs cast a flickering light into the nooks and crannies of Eastern European Jewish life. Every snatch of verbal or tonal assonance that was in the air—no matter how tiny—was swept up and incorporated into these dance songs, including the nonsense

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77 The tune of *Reb dovidl* was the subject of a famous short story by I. L. Peretz: *Gilgul Fun A Niggun* (“The Transmigration of a Melody”), 1901.

78 Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People—The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), first paperback edition, 2000: 195.



syllables that a mother made up on the spot and sang to her children as instant Yiddish nursery rhymes.<sup>79</sup>

There is also no doubt that some of the resentful patter disguised as dance instruction in songs like *Motl motl* (Cahan no. 219, a Laanse)<sup>80</sup> or *Soreh-rivkeh* (Cahan no. 217, a Freylekhs) were reflective of a social dynamic peculiar to Yiddish-speaking Jews who'd recently emerged from a cloistered existence that might be described as medieval. Lyrics such as, "[Women] can twirl the whole night through, but to pay the band they haven't a clue," reveal an evident naïveté about the way things really work in the modern world (*Hayntike meydelekh*, Cahan, no. 245, a Mazurka).

The dance songs under discussion lie much closer to folksong than to Klezmer music which, as Helen Winkler observes, "had no vocals whatsoever... Traditional Klezmer bands had the Badkhn, but he didn't sing for the dancing." She concludes that songs collected by ethnographers like Beregovski, Cahan, Mlotek and Rubin were most probably "used in the home or in smaller social gatherings, rather than weddings." Dvorah Lapson concurs:

In many communities of Eastern Europe—especially in Hungary, Moravia and Romania—Jewish youths would assemble on Saturday afternoons for dancing under the supervision of a woman. The dancing would be held, when possible, in the synagogue courtyard, which became popularly known by the name of a dance they loved, the Joc, a type of Hora common among their Gentile neighbors.<sup>81</sup>

This appellation perfectly suited the place (dedicated and secure) and time (the weekly Sabbath). The Joc is an old Roumanian circle dance, similar in pace (slow) and mood (solemn) to the Yiddish Roumanian Hora, though in 4/4 rather than 3/8 time. The feeling of sameness in both is imparted by a delayed trill—or a delayed accent—in each measure of the Joc.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, readers who detect a soupçon of misogyny mixed into the English lyrics, are assured that an effort was made to paint all players in these J-dating games a bit outlandishly—yet appealingly. From the Broyges Tants's quarelling couple ("Perhaps we should seek some professional advice") through Rivkah

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79 Ibid. P. 184.

80 Cahan's endnote to this song is revealing: "A dance-improvisation, with bitingly humorous remarks regarding a Laanse."

81 The dancing would have been accompanied by *a cappella* singing, given the rabbinic prohibition against playing instruments on the Sabbath; Dvorah Lapson, s. v., "Sabbath Dances," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter), 1972: 1267.

82 An video of this Roumanian dance is accessible at folkdancemusic/j—Joc Batrinesc—Video—"Seminar Ulm 1998"—Bärbel & Jacques Lonneaux.

and Yenkel among the barley and millet—who “are made for each other—not like sister and brother,” to the rapacious father of the groom whose daughter-in-law, “gentle as a feline” “pretty as a fox,” would summarily “box his ears” if ever he “stepped out of line”—the lads and lassies (and old bucks) who cavort without end in these slightly naughty musical romps—all seem to know the score, even if their footwork might need a bit of attention.



“Mitzvah Tants,” oil painting by the English artist, Siegfried Alva (1901-1973), Independence Hall, Tel Aviv

*The Journal is indebted to Helen Winkler, an avid student of Jewish folkways and webmaster of **Helen’s Yiddish Dance Page: Dances of the Jews of Eastern Europe**, for providing much of the foregoing material, for suggesting many additional sources, for permitting the reprint of her own expositional writing, and for expertly editing the result. Joseph A. Levine is editor of the Journal.*

# Folk Songs and the Fragments of Ashkenazic Common Culture

*By Philip V. Bohlman and Otto Holzapfel*

## **On Identities German and Jewish**

As the twentieth century passes into the twenty-first, the contentious, often heated, debate about the possibility of rapprochement between Germans and Jews shows no signs of abating. Although the historical contexts for the discussions are changing, the debate itself is anything but new. For both Germans and Jews, it has not proved possible to extricate themselves from the debate, even if most of those on both sides might prefer that solution. Rather than showing signs of becoming threadbare or even of disappearing as the final generation of Holocaust survivors passes away, new dimensions to the discussions are revealed and new questions are posed. If anything, the discussions have acquired a new immediacy precisely because they refuse to go away.

The question that again arises from the debates has historically received various names, but by the turn of the twenty-first century, the discussants increasingly began to settle on a variant name, “the German question,” a deliberate and provocative alteration of the older historical name, “the Jewish question” (Judenfrage). Both Jews and Germans were re-posing the question, clearly with the hope that it might have a different, in other words, more positive, answer than previous answers, be they the cases of anti-Semitism and pogrom in pre-modern Europe, be they the limitation of acculturation and the embourgeoisement that accompanied Bildung, be they reduced to the single answer of the Holocaust. Surely, German history itself had kept the Jewish question alive by rarely according it anything but the most brutal resolutions.

Why, we might ask ourselves, were the “German” and “Jewish questions” being asked again (and again) at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as if to imagine there would be a different answer? The Cold War was over, Europe wanted to be unified, Germany was reunified, Berlin was again the capital, and Germany aspired to be the most powerful political, economic, and cultural nation in the New Europe. The German question was a blemish on this New Germany, and many in the younger generation shaping the new politics were eager to disentangle themselves from the German question’s vestiges in “their” Germany. If the answer to the German question would

persist in being negative, it would mean that the past would forever scar the present.

*The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz*, a volume of folk songs whose variants are Jewish and German, poses the German and the Jewish questions too, but it employs a body of empirical evidence and a set of perspectives on history that the public debates at century's end do not. Historically, the German and Jewish questions took as their point of departure that Jews and non-Jews in Germany not only practiced different religions, but lived in different societies and affiliated themselves with myth, history, and the nation-state in vastly different ways. The debates remained so fixed on difference that the possibility of cultural traditions in common was beyond consideration.

The songs gathered in *The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz* provide clear evidence that there were rapprochement and a common culture shared by Germans and Jews. The question posed by the songs in the volume is not about difference and dual identities, as postulated by Franz Rosenzweig's *Zweistromland*, "land of two rivers," or in Hebrew, *naharayim*, but rather about an historical and geographical folk-song landscape produced by the many tributaries of a single river. The identities these songs document, or at least represent as traces, did not necessarily fall into German and Jewish components, but were remarkably more complex. The versions of these songs—the tributaries of this vast river on the cultural geography of Ashkenaz—reveal common culture at the everyday level. They reveal that song was occasionally common to Judaism and Christianity. They narrate the attempts to transform Jewish folk song into a language for staking out positions in nineteenth-and-twentieth-century Bildungsbürgertum, the educated middle-and-upper-middle class that opened new paths of emancipation for Jews in Central Europe. These songs also lay bare the complex contradictions of prejudice and anti-Semitism and the inscription of Otherness.

The songs in this volume, then, reveal that there was a common culture, made of fragments, shared repertoires and practices, and occasional moments of rapprochement and leveled differences, even if there was ultimately no culture of commonality. The collection gathers songs from specific places and times, and to the extent it has been possible, it endeavors to identify who the individuals were that sang the songs, collected and transcribed them, and published them within specific contexts. No individual version or variant stands for an entire repertory or song family, but rather it offers one type of evidence, a fragment or thread. The volume does not represent the whole of Ashkenazic folk song in some sweeping sense. Instead, it is organized in

such a way as to illumine some of the ways in which parts were connected to create a whole: historically speaking, probably several wholes.

If we speak of the fragments and threads of a common culture, we do not wish to suggest that these deny the conditions and tragedies of dual identities. The seams and ruptures that produce dual identities are hardly invisible in the anthology's songs. Many of the songs probably circulated between Jewish and non-Jewish communities in spite of the seams and ruptures, which therefore makes the common culture of which they were a part even more complex—and remarkable. The authors do not wish to claim that the folk songs in this anthology answer the German and Jewish questions, but they do believe that the songs provide evidence for posing those questions in new, perhaps more nuanced, ways. Their answers, like those offered at the beginning of the twenty-first century at an historical moment of renewed passion for the questions, insist that the crucial lesson of these questions lies in posing them repeatedly. The lasting value of the German and Jewish questions lies not in settling their answers, but rather in being unsettled by their answers.

### **“Ashkenaz”**

If one looks in a modern Hebrew-English dictionary, the single definition offered for the entry “Ashkenaz” is simply “Germany.” The Germany in that entry is not the modern nation-state of Germany, with Berlin as its capital city; that Germany is referred to as “Germaniah” in modern Hebrew. Ashkenaz is another Germany, historically situated, but not in the present, or even in the modern era of European history. Searching again in the modern Hebrew-English dictionary under “Ashkenazi,” an individual living in Ashkenaz, one finds two meanings: “German” and “Eastern European Jew.” Lexicographically, separating a German from an Eastern European Jew is not possible. The meanings may seem to be geographically contradictory, but etymologically they overlap. And this is precisely the case with their folk songs.

The term “Ashkenaz” appeared first in the Bible, where it refers to both people and places. In Genesis 10:3, Ashkenaz is one of the sons of Gomer, hence a grandson of Noah. Elsewhere, there are references to a place, even a kingdom of Ashkenaz (e.g., Jeremiah 51:27-28), which lay between Assyria and Armenia, in other words, in a border region that would today include northern Iran and the southern Caucasus. During the first century C.E., in the diaspora that dates from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and includes the inscription of the Babylonian Talmud, the location of Ashkenaz shifted from western Asia to Europe. The exact location of Ashkenaz in Tal-



mudic sources of the first millennium is not fixed, but it inevitably includes regions settled by Germanic tribes, in both Scandinavia and Germany. By the beginning of the second millennium C.E., however, the geographical identity of Ashkenaz has become fixed, for it increasingly refers, for example in the commentaries of the great eleventh-century religious authority, Rashi, to the Jewish communities of the Rhine valley, especially those near the centers of administration for the Holy Roman Empire: Worms and Mainz.

In Hebrew writings of the High Middle Ages, Ashkenaz increasingly ascribes a distinction of selfness to the Jews of Germany; various writings concern themselves with the atrocities against the Ashkenazim committed during the crusades. By the end of the European Middle Ages, in other words by the fifteenth century, Ashkenaz possessed a double meaning, not only describing the intensive Jewish settlements of the Rhine valley, but the areas in which Jews spoke a Germanic language. Historically, this is the point at which *The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz* picks up its story.

It was also in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that Jews from the Rhine valley, fleeing massacre and persecution, migrated eastward into the regions of Eastern Europe. They brought with them many of their religious traditions, among them traditions of Ashkenazic prayer and liturgy (i.e., a distinctively Ashkenazic religious discourse), and the vernacular language of medieval German communities: Middle High German. As emigrants from the land of Ashkenaz and bearers of culture from Ashkenaz, the Jews of Eastern Europe were increasingly referred to as Ashkenazim. During the early modern era, especially in response to the spread of Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, who settled on the European and North African littorals thereafter and acquired the name “Sephardim” (lit. “Spaniards”), the distinction between Ashkenazic and Sephardic cultures became culturally more pronounced, forming the essential dichotomy between European and Mediterranean/Middle Eastern Jewish communities. Later in the modern era the boundaries of Ashkenaz were increasingly fixed to the larger region of Central and Eastern Europe, and in this region Jews spoke vernaculars derived from Middle High German. But for various reasons, not least among them administrative, they also acquired fluency in modern literary German, that is, High German.

If the external boundaries of Ashkenaz lent themselves to clearer definition by the era of European modernity, the internal boundaries were more indistinct and fluid than ever. The vernacular languages—and the presence of vernacular language in folk culture—were incredibly varied, bearing many different relations to High German and modern literary Yiddish. These lan-

guages were still inchoate in Jewish communities at the end of the eighteenth century. Ashkenazic culture, it follows, was a mosaic of local forms far more than a single landscape with larger Central and Eastern European regions. The distinction between East and West followed the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), but also—and very significantly—the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), which itself followed different paths in German-and-Yiddish-speaking Europe. The responses to modernity were, therefore, all Ashkenazic, if indeed they revealed the increasingly disparate responses to modernity that would also lead to a proliferation of folk-song repertoires and traditions. Some responses to the variant folk-song traditions exaggerated the differences within Ashkenaz. Others celebrated those differences, and still others sought ways in which rapprochement might eliminate tendencies toward divisiveness and usher in a new era of common culture in Ashkenaz.

### **Ontologies of Ashkenazic Folk Song**

Just as the historical and geographical concepts of Ashkenaz accommodate a multitude of identities, so, too, do the ontologies of Ashkenazic folk song that emerge from the book. The folk song of Ashkenaz has historically assumed many forms, and each form of Ashkenazic folk song embodies many identities. What Ashkenazic folk song is, then, depends on many variables and the ways in which they interact. Some of the variables that constitute a given repertoire or song-type might result from sameness (e.g., variants of the same song in a linguistically and culturally unified region as in the case of “*Ryti-Rössli-Lied*,”), while others may result from the juxtaposition of variables that are different or even distinct in essential ways (e.g., related melodies that appear with entirely unrelated texts, as in the melodies for “*Frau von Weisenburg*.”) Similarity and difference may fuse in some songs, while in others they may enter into competition. The ontologies of Ashkenazic folk song, therefore, result from the processes that allow individuals and communities, performers and audiences, to accommodate and respond to the complex patterns of identity that are themselves evident in the identity of each song, variant, and repertoire.

Because the ontology of Ashkenazic folk song bears witness to multiple identities, the theoretical framework of this volume rests on the premise that the Jewish and non-Jewish cultures of Ashkenazic Europe were not isolated from each other. There were pre-modern, early modern, and modern conditions that tended to produce separation—the medieval *Judengasse* (lit. street of the Jews) on the outskirts of the medieval village or city, the ghetto of late

Renaissance and Baroque Europe, and the immigrant neighborhood on the periphery of the modern metropolis—but these did not prevent communication and exchange any more than they eliminated confrontation. The authors focus their attempts to identify ontologies of Ashkenazic folk song on the processes of exchange and communication, for folk song was one of the forms of connection and communication. The volume opens, to take one case in point, with the ballad “Die Jüdin,” the text of which refers to the very sites of border-crossing between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish world beyond the Judengasse. The volume closes with several songs (“Zayt gezunt, mayne liebe Eltern” and “Die waisse Taibel”) whose texts problematize the dilemma of departure, of leaving the world of tradition for an unknown life beyond. Communication and connection make literal appearances in the songs (e.g., “Das jüdische Schaffner-Lied”), but just as often they manifest themselves as metaphor (e.g., “Unmögliche Dinge”).

Among the variables that constitute the ontologies of Ashkenazic folk song are several that, within the traditional concepts of German and Yiddish folk music, would be unexpected. Ashkenazic folk song is not necessarily relegated to the Jewish community. Not only did non-Jewish traditions contain songs about Jews or with Jewish subject matter, but also non-Jews did, under some circumstances, sing Jewish songs. This is strikingly evident in several children’s songs that appear in the anthology. It is also an aspect of traditions that belong more to popular than to folk culture, for example, in the cosmopolitan couplet traditions at the turn of the past century (e.g., the “Viennese Broad-sides”) or in klezmer traditions, in which Jews were not infrequently joined in multiethnic border regions, such as Burgenland and the Carpathian Mountains, by non-Jewish minorities, especially by Roma.

We do not wish, however, to ignore the fact that there were other reasons for looking across the divide between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures: persecution and prejudice; financial and other socio-economic reasons; and power and the transformation of political rights. Such pressures on the Jewish community also led to the complication and proliferation of identities within Ashkenazic folk song. Though many processes of contact and exchange contributed to the mixing and remixing of identity in Ashkenazic folk song, three general processes emerge from the songs in the book. First, because many of the songs themselves were collected in border regions, it is hardly surprising that their identities bear witness to border-crossing. Second, variables within the songs that combined because of their similarities often led to hybridity. Third, those variables that were less compatible, for linguistic, musical, or religiocultural reasons, nonetheless accrued to identities that reflected the dual



accommodation of selfness and otherness. Each of these patterns of identity arises from the conditions of modernity, and, accordingly, they produce a set of ontologies that are indices for the entrance of Jews, however fraught with problems, into modern European society and into modernity itself.

### **Cultural Geographies of Ashkenazic Folk Song**

The cultural geographies of Ashkenazic folk song are literal, metaphorical, and discursive. The places where folk song entered European Jewish life and in which music in turn came to represent a specific geography are real, and, though they frequently changed during the course of history, we can locate them on the maps that inscribe European Jewish history. Folk song also lent itself to the construction of metaphors about place, be these stereotypes about the shtetl or the ghetto, or be they the regions with large Jewish populations, such as Galicia, where Jewish culture was shrouded with images of otherness. Together, the literal and the metaphorical geographies of Ashkenazic folk song generated what we might call a discursive cultural geography, the vocabularies used to talk about, describe, and represent the place of Ashkenazic Jewish culture in Europe. Folk song not only contributed to such vocabularies, it became one of the most complex and historically durable vocabularies for representing both the expansiveness of an Ashkenazic cultural geography and the local sites where it played itself out in the everyday lives of individuals and communities.

Just as the term “Ashkenaz” itself came to identify the distinctiveness of Jewish place in a largely non-Jewish Europe, so too has the cultural geography of Ashkenazic folk song formed along the borders between Jewish and non-Jewish places. The iconic site of Eastern European Jewish culture, the shtetl, stands at one extreme on a continuum of place in a cultural geography of modernity. The shtetl remains buffered from European modernity, isolated from the center of Ashkenaz, Germany, and withdrawn to the extent that this was possible from surrounding non-Jewish culture. The culture of the shtetl survives in folk tradition as a constellation of stereotypes. Significantly, shtetls appear in many folk tales and folk songs as if they were entirely interchangeable. Their residents fall into certain types—the shopkeeper, the innkeeper, the yeshiva student, the hapless schlemiel, the klezmer musician—and the cultural and musical activities cluster around a typical axis running from the local inn along the central street to the synagogue.

The cultural geography of village life in Ashkenazic Europe was, of course, much more complex than images such as these. There were Jewish villages

throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and these, too, contained musical cultures that responded to the relative degrees of isolation from or interaction with non-Jewish neighbors. Jewish village life also responded to the rapid urbanization of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with shtetl dwellers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire moving to the urban centers, where Jewish populations swelled, but often in specific districts or neighborhoods, which in turn sustained the cultural geography of the village. The shtetl gave way to the ghetto, and the cultural geography of modernity formed along the historical paths connecting the traditionally rural places in Ashkenazic Europe to the increasingly urban.

Diaspora, too, contributed to the mapping of a cultural geography of Ashkenazic folk song. The historical discourses of Ashkenaz were shaped by a recognition that the German-and-Yiddish-speaking Jews of Europe did not live in the Land of Israel. Folk song absorbed this recognition of diaspora, for example, by sustaining song variants in Hebrew and German or Yiddish; in other words, the languages of a diasporic and a non-diasporic people. Diaspora left its imprint on the cultural geography of modern Jewish folk song, not least the continued expansion of diaspora through mass-migrations to North America from the late nineteenth century to World War I, and later as responses to European persecution and the Holocaust. The cultural geography of Ashkenazic folk song, then, expanded the idea of diaspora to include specific places in American cities (e.g., the Lower East Side of New York City) and the settlements taking root in Palestine (e.g., the kibbutzim).

German folk song, too, was inseparable from a vocabulary imbued with strong connections to place and to literal, metaphorical, and discursive cultural geographies. No geographical metaphor affixed itself more powerfully to the spread of German culture into Eastern Europe than the Sprachinsel, or “speech island.” The Sprachinsel, as its name made clear, was a place of isolation, created as a concept that described the survival of the German language and culture in regions surrounded by non-Germans, for example, the Siebenbürgen and Banat settlements of Romania or the so-called “Volga Colonies.” Like the shtetl, the Sprachinsel increasingly became the stage for stereotype. As a discursive cultural geography, it plays a role in *The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz* not unlike the role played by the shtetl.

It is also significant that the cultural geography of emigration, at least obliquely comparable to diaspora, plays an important role in the collection. Many of the song collections, historical and ethnographic, upon which the authors have drawn for the edition, come from the periphery rather than the center of a larger German folk-song tradition. Accordingly, they have been

shaped by history and geography in ways not unlike those shaping Jewish folk song within the cultural geography of Ashkenazic Europe.

Even more crucial than the distinctive German and Jewish cultural geographies represented by the songs in the volume is what is called the cultural geography of Jewish “betweenness.” The map of betweenness highlights border regions and regions that overflow historical and political boundaries. Betweenness results not from isolation in shtetls or speech islands, but emerges in zones of exchange and hybridity. The cultural geography of Jewish betweenness depend: on historical and political realities such as the Habsburg monarchy which comprised the larger region known today as Mitteleuropa and which included the most intensively Jewish areas of Ashkenazi Europe. Whereas cultures of betweenness may form along borders, they also tend to negate the divisive impact of borders, increasing instead the possibility for a new common culture. The conditions that supported common culture were also those that created the places in which German and Yiddish folk song intersected, and, accordingly, they are particularly important for the cultural geography of betweenness that the folk songs in the book represent.

### **Folk Song and the Common Culture of Border Regions**

Border regions dominate the cultural geography represented by the folk songs of Ashkenaz. These border regions range from those created by political boundaries, topographical boundaries, linguistic boundaries, historical boundaries, and, perhaps most often, all of these. Whereas such boundaries would seem to divide repertoires and traditions of folk song into distinct parts, just the opposite has taken place in those border regions where Yiddish and German, Jewish and non-Jewish folk songs have formed from the threads of a common culture. The possibility of a common culture, particularly in border regions where it is unexpected, is critical to the larger narrative of *The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz*, for it is not simply enough to identify songs that happen to exist in German and Yiddish variants. There were reasons that encouraged exchange and shared repertoires. These reasons were specific to the places where common cultures themselves took shape, where linguistic and regional differences blurred, and where religious and cultural differences were not debilitatingly divisive.

The border regions from which many of these songs came were of very different kinds, and accordingly, so too were the common cultures. One of the border regions most frequently plumbed in the anthology formed along the northeast frontier of the Austro-Hungarian empire, consisting of two

provinces administered by the monarchy. Silesia and Galicia constitute a border region along the northern side of the Carpathian Mountains, starting with Silesia in southwestern Poland and stretching across southern Poland into southern Ukraine, where Galicia stretches farther toward the east. One of the most distinctive qualities of both provinces was—and to some extent is—their multiculturalism and interethnicity. Silesia contained large numbers of Poles and Germans, Catholics and Protestants. Galicia claimed Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, Ruthenians and Austrians. The Jewish population in both provinces was extremely large, and in the major metropolises of both (Breslau/Wrocław in Silesia and Lemberg/L'vov/Lviv in Galicia), Jews played an active and visible role in the cultural and intellectual life.

The folk songs in the collection document the common cultures of Silesia and Galicia for a number of reasons. Silesia was the source for a large number of German songs, collected and sent to German folklorists and folk-song scholars such as Ludwig Erk by German teachers and other officials, not least among them Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Because Galicia's political affiliation was with Vienna, regional collectors sent their songs to Austrian collectors; the 1904 project "Das Volkslied in Österreich," for example, commissioned a Galician volume, but specified Jewish songs for the volume, which would have been published in Lemberg had World War I not intervened. Even more important for the book was the extensive immigration of Jews from Galicia to Vienna, where a new urban folk music grew from the regional repertoires that accompanied the Jewish immigrants. In short, Silesia and Galicia became important regional sources for folk songs both in the provinces themselves and in the centralized collecting endeavors in Germany and Austria.

One other border region with an exceptionally large presence in this edition is the so-called Dreieckland (Three-Corner-Land) of southwestern Germany (Baden), France (Alsace-Lorraine), and Switzerland (primarily Basel and its environs). There is a practical reason for the frequency of songs from this border region: the Deutsches Volksliedarchiv is located in Freiburg im Breisgau, which is in Baden, but extremely close to France and Switzerland. The region forms, therefore, an ethnographic epicenter for this volume, especially for the examples collected prior to World War II. Practical contexts notwithstanding, the Dreieckland is truly a border region with a common culture comprising a shared geography (the Upper Rhine), a regional dialect (Alemannisch) stretching across national boundaries, and a Jewish history dominated by small villages connected by an extensive trade and cultural network.

Border regions were also the products of modernity and urbanizing Jewish communities. If the applicability of the notion of a “border” is somewhat different in the cases of urban Jewish districts such as the Scheunenviertel in Berlin or the Leopoldstadt in Vienna, these districts nonetheless became the crucibles for a common culture precisely at the metropolitan border crossed when rural Jews entered the city. The music of these urban common cultures is best recognized in the new genres of folk-like and popular music, for example the Viennese broadsides that constitute the anthology’s Group 16. In the urban border regions, common culture underwent dizzying change, but music responded quickly and decisively to that change.

In the *longue durée*, the border regions separating Ashkenazic from Sephardic Europe also played a role in shaping the common culture of Ashkenazic—and, of course, Sephardic—folk song. The Ashkenazic-Sephardic border regions are, moreover, vital to the larger narrative of the volume. There were significant bastions of Sephardic musical culture in both the northwest (stretching from the Netherlands to Hamburg) and the southeast (primarily the Balkans) of Ashkenazic Europe, and these areas possessed all the functions of border regions. The nineteenth-century transformation of Ashkenazic liturgical music, for example, was particularly indebted to Sephardic influences. In some of the more localized Jewish border regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, notably Burgenland, from which many songs and variants in the collection have come, Sephardic influences unleashed complex forms of Jewish interethnicity. The folk song from such border regions with Sephardic populations reveals that Ashkenazic Europe had permeable Jewish boundaries, which more often encouraged than stifled musical border-crossing.

Any attempt to identify the common culture from which Ashkenazic folk music formed, especially from the mid-nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, cannot ignore the questions of diaspora and immigration. Jewish immigrants to North America, for example, shaped distinctively American Jewish music cultures, such as the Yiddish musical-theater scene in New York City or the transformation of liturgy in the Reform movement. Zionist settlements in Palestine aggressively laid the foundations for modern Jewish song, taking what was necessary from Ashkenazic traditions and recasting it in Hebrew. Historically, immigrant settlements in North America and Palestine demonstrated all the earmarks of border regions, and in the second half of the twentieth century it was in these settlements that the modern common culture of Ashkenazic Europe gave way to that of a post-Holocaust world.

## **Folk-Song Landscapes and Common Culture**

Theoretical models with discrete geographical and linguistic boundaries have dominated the history of European folk-music scholarship. The very names of such models privilege this emphasis on boundedness, for example, in describing the isolation of music in a mountain valley or in the German Sprachinsel, the “speech island,” of Eastern Europe. Further, approaches to regionalism and nationalism have often simply projected the village or the aristocratic court onto a wider topography. But, whereas folk song is shared within a geographic and linguistic unit, and whereas it may serve as an emblem of a shared tradition, few scholars have sought to trace folk songs disseminated beyond the borders of such units, assuming instead that the identities of individual folk songs ascribe a unity wherever they are found. The political, in other words, nationalistic, implications of claims that folk song shored up geographical and linguistic boundaries have too often been obvious, for they have turned folk music into a tool for the construction of exclusive political boundaries.

The book’s authors espouse an entirely different approach. The evidence they have mustered from folk songs in both Yiddish and German clearly unveils processes of exchange, dispersion, borrowing, transformation, and hybridity that belie the boundedness of discrete geographical or linguistic units. Some of the German and Yiddish variants indicate a high degree of stability when Jewish and non-Jewish traditions overlapped; others reveal that change—even radical change, such as the transformation from Yiddish to Hebrew or German—characterized the tradition. There was, moreover, no single way in which folk song moved across geographical and linguistic boundaries, and similarly there was no single way in which songs became fixed in versions anchored in a particular region or place.

The folk-song landscape of Ashkenaz was multicultural and multi-ethnic. It was multicultural insofar as the Jewish communities in which collectors gathered the variants in this volume were never entirely isolated from other religious and linguistic groups. Not even the rural shtetl or the urban ghetto at the end of the nineteenth century existed in isolation. It is not by chance that the intensively Jewish border regions from which the largest number of variants in this edition come were some of the most multicultural of Europe: Alsace and the Dreieckland of the Upper Rhine; Burgenland; Galicia.

*The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz* uses the term “multi-ethnic” to refer to the differences within Jewish communities themselves, both at the local level and at the pan-Ashkenazic level. The Jews in any given community were not all alike. Again, if we examine areas with high concentrations of Jewish resi-



dents, we discover vast differences between and among the villages or within specific villages. The “Seven Holy Cities” (sheva kehillot) of Burgenland, for example, could claim Sephardic and Ashkenazic residents, as could Vienna, some fifty kilometers away (Bohlman 1997). Within the villages, moreover, varying degrees of observance split the Jewish communities into different ethnic alignments, as did the variety of vernaculars, which ranged from German and Yiddish in multiple dialects to Slovak and Hungarian. The folk songs in this volume often thematize such ethnic tensions, which at times dramatically illustrate the complex multi-ethnic Jewish culture of rural and urban Ashkenaz.

In this study, cultural and ethnic diversity is assumed as a background for focusing on folk song as a component of the common culture of Ashkenaz. Granted, of course, that pairing diversity and common culture seems on its surface to be contradictory. Crucial to the authors’ argument, and ultimately to their theory, however, is that diversity actually encouraged exchange. They have drawn on the theoretical work of several scholars, notably Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann (1978) and E. P. Thompson (1991), both of whom have contributed extensively to the literature on “interethnicity” and “customs in common,” in both cases from modified Marxian perspectives. Weber-Kellermann has examined the processes of exchange that characterize folk music in Southeastern Europe, arguing with very convincing empirical evidence that folk-song traditions flow back and forth between the German-speaking communities of Sprachinseln and the Slavic-or-Romanian-speaking neighbors. Indeed, every aspect of folk music—language, symbolism, musical structure—is subject to negotiation and transformation.

Thompson brings a more strictly historical approach to the emergence of the English working class in the eighteenth century, arguing that a new culture took shape because the “customs in common” made it possible for rural and urban workers to respond in similar ways to industrialization, to growing literacy and the spread of print culture, and to the restructuring of English society through the Enlightenment. Folk music plays a particularly important role for both Weber-Kellermann and Thompson, providing not only a cultural commodity with new exchange value, but also a specific and palpable vocabulary for the common cultures of Southeastern Europe and the English working class.

The songs in the present volume reveal that exchange across cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic boundaries also accompanied the entry of Ashkenazic Jews into the public sphere of early-modern and modern Europe. It is not the book’s aim, however, to claim that this entry was widely successful or that it

in any sense leveled boundaries. It is not claiming that a common Jewish and non-Jewish culture was ever achieved, even exceptionally, but rather that folk song comprised a tentative, if occasionally flourishing, locus of common culture. Exchange took place from song to song, when one repertory enriched itself by drawing upon traditions shared with another. Each of the twenty-seven song groups in this volume documents different sites and processes for the formation of common culture, again contributing to the theoretical point that diversity is the precondition for common culture. It was also the case that the many forms of common culture documented by these songs may well have precluded more extensive forms of rapprochement. But recognition of that fact can only sharpen the analytical tools that lead us to the real sites of common culture and the folk songs of Ashkenaz sung at those sites.

### **Sites and Stages for Ashkenazic Folk song**

The places in which Ashkenazic folk song was sung, performed, collected and published were very specific. These places, moreover, fall into two general categories: private spaces and public spaces. Folk song's private spaces were occupied by the family, by children playing together, by ritual and custom in the home, and by local religious communities. Because the folk songs in this anthology acquire some measure of their cultural importance through religion and identity, it might seem reasonable to presume that the private sphere would actually dominate the volume. This is not entirely the case. Among the forms of expressive activity occupying the public spaces of Ashkenazic folk song were the dances accompanied by klezmer bands, the Yiddish theater of Eastern Europe, Jewish men's singing societies in Central Europe, and the small stage for couplets and cabaret in the growing metropolises. In contrast to the private sphere, the public seems more modern, less unequivocally Jewish, and more properly serving the performance of popular rather than folk song.

This, too, is not entirely the case.

Whereas private and public spheres are both evident in this collection, they rarely stand apart. More often than not, songs move between them, and that movement maps historical change onto the folk-song landscape of Ashkenaz. There are several reasons why the distinction between private and public is important, even if it does not form a neat dichotomy. First of all, folk song, though it may depend on the intimacy of the private sphere, often bears the public with it when circulating within the private spaces of the home. The synagogue, whose musical life exclusively embodies liturgy and ritual, for example, exemplifies many traits of the private. Yet, when new



melodies enter the music of the synagogue, it is often the result of pressures coming from the public sphere, be these the changing role of the cantor, or be they new repertoires accompanying Reform in nineteenth-century Germany. In quite different ways, the revival of Yiddish folk song at several historical moments (e.g., in Germany between the world wars or in North America in the decades after the Holocaust) relies on stereotyped images of the private sphere: songs that accompany rites of passage; play songs; songs that narrate the integration and disintegration of the family.

The transformation of print culture in modern European Jewish culture also recalibrated the relation between private and public. Broad­sides introduced (and reintroduced) folk songs into an increasingly cosmopolitan Jewish society, bridging the gap between public performance and private consumption of songs. The broad­sides and couplets gathered as the sixteenth group in this volume, for example, expose complex processes of exchange between the new Jewish popular-music stage and changing Jewish neighborhoods in Vienna. The explosion in the number of Jewish literary journals, too, combined private and public in new ways, for example, when *Der Jude* or *Ost und West* included sections with folk songs, some meant to look authentically Yiddish and Eastern European, others arranged for piano and solo voice, as if best suited for performance in the intimate literary salon. The folk song of Ashkenaz, therefore, juxtaposes the private and public, thereby creating new repertoires that mix stability and change.

The exchange between private and public is not without agency, and the agents whose activities set in motion the historical processes documented by the present volume are very clear. Many of the songs bear witness in one way or another to specialized musicians. There are cantors and village church musicians, choir directors and rabbis, school teachers and intellectuals. There are also semi-professional and professional musicians, ranging from klezmer players to the troupes who brought couplets to the nascent Jewish cabaret stages of the fin de-siècle metropolis. Finally, there are the collectors themselves, whose activities and whose imprint should not be overlooked in this volume. All these agents encountered the folk music of Ashkenaz in sites of private and public music-making, and they gathered, performed, and transcribed these traditions in such ways that they would represent German and Yiddish folk-song traditions in decisively modern ways. Each performance and each edition redefined the historical trajectory of songs traveling between the private and the public, transforming the sites and stages of Ashkenazic folk song itself.

## Language as a Site for Folk-Song Histories

The folk songs in this book are not in two languages—Yiddish and German—but rather in many, which in turn are related because they stretch across a continuum. At the ends of that continuum are literary German, known also as Hochdeutsch, or High German, and literary Yiddish. The literary languages at the poles connect the continuum to several moments in modern European history, specifically to the moments, beginning roughly in the mid-nineteenth century, that led to the canonization of literatures in German and Yiddish, moments approximately coeval with the impact of Goethe and Schiller on German and of Sholem Aleichem and Y. L. Peretz on Yiddish literature. The songs in this edition are implicated in the formation of the continuum's poles, because many of them were gathered and placed in published anthologies as evidence for the cultural and vernacular underpinnings of modern literary languages.

It is, nonetheless, the continuum between the poles that contains the many languages represented by the bulk of the songs in this volume. For the most part, however, the versions of German and Yiddish in the songs are not discrete languages, but rather dialects, regional variants, local hybrids, or ossified versions of a language used in revival traditions. The continuum forms along both geographical and historical axes. Different dialects and vernaculars occupy different places on the map of Ashkenazic Europe. Whereas it is well known that folk songs from different parts of Germany or Austria are transmitted in different dialects, it is less common to recognize that Yiddish, too, is a language with many different dialects and vernaculars. The Yiddish spoken in the Baltic region is, therefore, quite different from that spoken in, say, Romania or in the areas of Germany where Westjiddisch survived into the nineteenth century; the modern forms of Yiddish spoken in Brooklyn or in the Eastern European Me'ah She'arim neighborhood of Jerusalem differ vastly not only from each other but also from the Yiddish found in the earliest collections, such as Ginsburg and Marek (1901).

The linguistic continuum that concerns the authors contains vernacular languages or, in the case of some published collections, literary renditions of vernacular languages. It is at the level of the vernacular, furthermore, that an axis with songs in Hebrew intersects the continuum and adds another dimension to it. The Hebrew songs in the volume have entered a vernacular world in which oral transmission has provided the context for their absorption into repertoires of folk song. In the case of "Yavo Adir," this process of vernacularization is clearly evident, for variants with lines in Yiddish and German have been woven into the Hebrew texts through oral transmission.

The intersecting axis of Hebrew variants also includes more than a single language, for not all Hebrew texts are the same. The Hebrew texts that enter the vernacular tradition in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, utilize Ashkenazic pronunciation, whereas those that enter the tradition in Israel reflect the linguistic reforms that have transformed modern Israeli Hebrew and Israeli liturgical repertoires to reflect Sephardic pronunciations. Such distinctions are evident in the variants of “Yavo Adir” and “Tsur Mi-shelo.”

The historical axis of the linguistic continuum has unfolded in parallel with the entry of Ashkenazic Jewish society into European modernity. At the earliest stage of that history, prior to the advent of printing and to the major pogroms and emigrations of Ashkenazic Jews from Central Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it may well have been the case that the vernaculars of a Germanic language spoken by Jews and non-Jews in the Rhineland were closely related, or at least that the distinctions between them were blurry. The entry into modernity begins with a second phase, the evidence for which comes from the earliest printed collections. “Graf von Rom” survives as one of the clearest pieces of empirical evidence for early modern Ashkenaz, for the song appears in a sixteenth-century version with Hebrew characters, which nonetheless adheres closely to the printed versions of late Middle High German (Mittellhochdeutsch), albeit with overtly Christian references expurgated. The printed Hebrew version, therefore, is not yet a Yiddish version, though there are some telling signs of its shift away from Middle High German.

In the German Enlightenment (Aufklärung) and Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) of the eighteenth century, the gap between Low and High languages, vernacular and printed versions, widened at an ever increasing rate. The languages of folk-song collections either responded to the processes of modernization, or they resisted them, retaining the markers of dialect and the vernacular. In the course of the nineteenth century, the languages of German and Yiddish folk song responded to the influences of both Romanticism and Nationalism. Canonic repertoires of songs in the literary language developed, such as the German Ballade, or ballad. As Jewish national consciousness grew along with Zionism in the second half of the nineteenth century, a canon of Yiddish folk songs emerged to give voice to a type of national song. It was not until roughly the turn of the past century that the term “Yiddish” was used exclusively to name the vernacular language of Eastern Ashkenaz, which was referred to by names such as the common Jüdischdeutsch, literally “Jewish-German.”

By World War I, the language of Ashkenazic folk song had become relatively standardized, not least because individual songs and collections were appearing in print in relatively large numbers. The Holocaust, however, would undo the transformation of vernaculars in Ashkenazic folk songs, for the destruction of European Jewry would eliminate the possibility for oral transmission, and alter the relation between oral and written transmission. After the Holocaust, the collectors of Yiddish folk song attempted to bring about a form of discursive survival. Memory and the politics of memory, therefore, provided new contexts for the ways in which Yiddish song provided a font for revivalists in Central and eastern Europe. German singers “rediscovered” Yiddish as a Germanic language, and they approached the language with the fervor of *Wiedergutmachung* (literally, “making things good again”), as if to atone for the Holocaust through song. Yiddish songs, therefore, entered German repertoires again, with revival extending and altering the historical axis of the linguistic continuum that the songs in this collection map on post-Holocaust Ashkenazic Europe.

### **Ashkenazic Folk Musicians**

With the rise of modernity that followed the *Haskalah*, new forms of musical professionalism began to transform the landscape of Ashkenazic folk song. Whereas there had been musical specialists in the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe prior to the *Haskalah*, their specialties—and, hence, their degree of professionalization—had not been solely or even primarily limited to the performance of folk music. The professionalization of musicians performing Ashkenazic folk music accompanied the economic transformation of the Jewish community and the growing social interaction with non-Jewish European society that made the transformation possible. For example, financial records in the northern Italian court of Mantua, as well as contracts and petitions of various kinds, reveal that the late Renaissance Jewish composer Salamone Rossi (ca. 1570-ca. 1628) performed with various ensembles within and outside the Jewish community, thus encouraging scholars to designate him the first professional Jewish musician of early modern Europe, perhaps even a proto-klezmer musician.

By the eighteenth century, the Jewish communities in many areas of German-speaking Europe were required to make their financial records available, in part as a means of extracting more taxes, but also in part to liberalize interaction between Jews and non-Jewish governments. These records, too, indicate the presence of Jewish specialist musicians, for example, those with designations such as cantor (probably a synagogue *hazzan*) and *musikant*

(probably an instrumental musician) in the intensely Jewish settlements of Burgenland, along what is today the Austrian and Hungarian border.

As professionalization of Ashkenazic folk musicians expanded and increasingly spread across Ashkenazic Europe, three general groups became recognizable: musicians largely within the Jewish community; musicians functioning at the borders between the Jewish community and non-Jewish society; non-Jewish musicians playing Jewish music. The first of these groups of specialist musicians is best known to us, and the musician-types in the group have Hebrew names: *hazzan* and *klezmer*. Traditionally, the *hazzan* and the *klezmer* are further distinguished by the social realms in which they played, that is, the sacred vs. the secular. As modernity swept across the Ashkenazic folk-song landscape, however, such distinctions became less and less meaningful. It was, indeed, mobility—the capacity to move across the landscape at various social levels—that characterized the growing professionalism.

The specialization of Jewish musicians at the borders between Jewish and non-Jewish society was a product of growing emancipation during the nineteenth century. By the century's second half, Yiddish theatrical and musical troupes traveled between Eastern and Central Europe, and the secular Jewish stage had established itself in the growing Jewish neighborhoods of urban centers. As the broadsides in the sixteenth group in this volume demonstrate, the singers and actors who performed the new Jewish urban folk and popular music had achieved a fair degree of fame, or at least notoriety, by the turn of the twentieth century. As professionals, these Jewish popular musicians performed new genres, which in turn calibrated the urbanization and modernization of Ashkenazic folk song in the opening decades of the last century.

It is important to recognize that non-Jews also played a role in the professionalization of modern music making in Ashkenazic Europe. Many of the songs that appear in this volume circulated in traditional societies (e.g., villages in the Dreieckland of the Upper Rhine) with Jewish and non-Jewish residents. In the nascent decades of the German singing-society movement (from ca. 1830 to ca. 1880), before Jewish singing societies separated from synagogue choirs, Jews often participated in the public choral life of an urbanizing Germany. With the advent of Jewish singing societies, it was also common for non-Jews to participate, not least because Jewish singing societies were themselves constituent members of regional and national leagues. Many songs in the present volume reveal that there were movement and exchange between singing societies, and that the song anthologies facilitated such movement.

Other “others” also joined Jews in the ensembles that accompanied the expansion of professional music making. The most notable of musicians from outside the mainstream were Roma (Gypsies), who were particularly evident in ensembles in border regions such as Burgenland and the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, where large populations of Jews and Roma cohabited the same folk-song landscapes. In such areas, it is impossible to think about klezmer, or Jewish instrumental music, without also recognizing that Roma musicians were contributing to it. Similarly, Jewish musicians were often active players in professional Roma ensembles. Growing specialization and professionalization therefore, were inseparable from intensified hybridization, and all of these processes of change characterized the Ashkenazic folk-song landscape presented in this collection.

### **Anti-Semitism and the Language of Modern Ashkenazic Folk Song**

There is a truly remarkable play of images, stereotypes, and symbolic representations of numerous Others in the folk songs of Ashkenaz. Several of the genres that appear in this volume have historically depended on stereotype; others have survived in oral tradition or in the traces of written tradition because of the durability of stereotyped images. Some stereotypes seem to belong fully to the common culture of both Jewish and non-Jewish repertoires. For example, the exotic representation of Africans in the third song, “Zehn kleine Negerlein,” spills over into much more pervasive forms of European prejudice and racism. Other stereotypes, however, depend on more localized forms of prejudice and racism, not least those forms that constitute the profound presence of anti-Semitism in the European history this collection documents.

The folk songs of Ashkenaz, therefore, have not mapped a path of cultural history that somehow circumvents anti-Semitism. Quite the contrary, these songs bear witness to the complex ways in which anti-Semitism came to shape European discourses of otherness. Already at the advent of print culture and the publication of broadsides in the sixteenth century, folk songs drew upon the stereotyped images (e.g., in woodcuts or engravings accompanying broadsides) and descriptions (i.e., in song texts) of Jews. Particularly at historical moments of tension between Jewish and non-Jewish communities, anti-Semitism assumed the form of a flagrantly racist imagery. Characteristically, those moments, in which Jews might be gaining entry into the public sphere and enjoying greater success there, spawned a proliferation of anti-

Semitism. The couplet tradition at the turn of the past century, for example, was notable for the dissemination of songs with anti-Semitic contents.

Stereotypes also appeared in Jewish songs, and there, too, they formulated different languages for representing and then inscribing otherness. The otherness historically encoded in Ashkenazic folk songs emerged from the social and religious fissures implicit in the songs in this volume: East and West; Yiddish and German vernaculars; secular and religious Jews; or tradition-bound and acculturated communities. Some stereotypes expressed an attempt to understand coreligionists more fully, even to use folk song as a means of bridging the fissures; this was unquestionably the case with the bilingual anthologies published between the world wars (e.g., Eliasberg 1918; Kaufmann 1971; Nadel 1923).

Other stereotypes depended on self-hatred, functioning to distance one community, usually that with more social mobility, from the other. As the Viennese broadsides reveal, the prejudice that appeared in such songs may have wantonly crossed the border into a domain marked by anti-Semitism. It may well be that one explanation for such forms of prejudice and anti-Semitism is that the genres their creators and performers employed (e.g., couplets and cabaret) depended on parody, and parody by its nature communicates by means of stereotype. Still, there can be no question that stereotype, prejudice, and anti-Semitism produced images and stylized languages within folk song that were recurrent in the common culture of Ashkenaz, proving it to be not only complex but contradictory.

### **Between the German and Jewish Questions—an Ashkenazic Question?**

The 1920s were a heady, almost frenzied time for the Jews of Ashkenaz. World War I had been devastating in its impact on Europe, but it had nonetheless created several palpable openings in the old imperial public culture, that would prove fruitful for the Jewish citizens of Central and Eastern Europe who had served with distinction on all sides of the Great War. In Weimar Germany, Jewish cultural activities would accelerate so decisively that some were sufficiently emboldened to speak of a “Jewish Renaissance,” reaching back to a moment in European cultural history, or a “New Babylon,” drawing on a much earlier moment in Jewish cultural history. In the imperial capital of the imploded Habsburg monarchy, too, the cultural revolutions ignited by Jews at the turn of the century would explode and resonate with their public political presence in “Red Vienna.” In the new communist regime of the Soviet Union, too, a moment of Jewish cultural efflorescence swept into



public life with the winds of reform and rebirth. For the Jewish communities in many areas of Central and Eastern Europe, it seemed as if the promises of cultural rapprochement, which had proceeded only in fits and starts in the nineteenth century, might be fulfilled.

The acceleration towards rapprochement—between German-and- Yiddish-speaking Jews, between Jews and non-Jews—found an increasingly audible voice in Jewish folk song. Already in the final years of World War I and then in even greater numbers during the 1920s, collections of “ostjüdisch” and Yiddish folk songs were appearing in rapid succession, providing staples for several emerging Jewish publishers in Germany, such as Schocken and Jüdischer Verlag. Collections with new folk songs, including those in modern Hebrew, documented traditions from all regions of Ashkenazic Europe and extended those regions to the yishuv in mandatory Palestine and second-generation settlements in the New World, especially the urban centers of the United States. Jewish composers, too, perceived in Jewish folk songs new possibilities for investing the language of folk identity with the impulse of national identity. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Jewish folk song occupied an increasingly central position in a public discourse about Jewishness in music and music in Jewish Europe.

If in the 1920s there seemed to be signs of a final rapprochement between the various sides of the Jewish question, the 1930s would divert European Jewish history along a dramatically different route. By the mid-1930s the narrowing of differences, that hopeful praise of renaissance in the 1920s, had all but ceased. By Kristallnacht in November 1938 and then with the outbreak of World War II, new answers to the Jewish question were unequivocally scripted. And these answers bore little resemblance to—one might say they even mocked—those proposed by Jewish folk-song collections in their effort to represent the accelerating pace of modern Jewish history in Europe.

This edition of songs from Ashkenazic Europe, a musical landscape occupied by both Jews and non-Jews, who sometimes lived in close cultural and geographic proximity to each other, has gathered empirical evidence that leads us again to the Jewish question and to its twenty-first-century counterpart, the German question, along routes not yet charted by modern cultural historians, ethnomusicologists, and folklorists. The authors decidedly do not propose to answer either the German or the Jewish question, nor do they suggest that they be re-posed. Their aim has been to explore their inner workings and broaden their dimensions. Their hope is that the book contributes a new form of empirical evidence and suggests new forums for debating these questions. They remain of the opinion that posing the questions incessantly and critically



is an essential result of their weight and significance for understanding the full measure of tragedy in modern Jewish history, including the destruction of a once vital common culture. The folk songs presented are fragments of this common culture; fragments, however, of a common culture that, even at its moments of most intense rapprochement and occasional renaissance, was constituted primarily, if indeed only, of fragments.

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*This article is adapted from the authors' collaboration, **The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz** (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions), 2001: Introduction, and appears here with the publisher's kind permission.*

# “Provisions for the Journey”—A Rarity from the Lost World of Yiddish Religious Song<sup>1</sup>

By Janet B. Leuchter

*Bod zikh di yiddishe gas in lider*  
(“The Jewish street is bathed in songs”)  
Noyekh Prilutski<sup>2</sup>

*We in the Jewish world are forced to work with fragments,  
with the merest crumbs of the rich banquet  
that was once the Yiddish folksong tradition.*  
Mark Slobin<sup>3</sup>

*In these sections of Brooklyn, one can hear Orthodox music  
playing in bakeries, restaurants, butcher shops and giftstores...  
members of the Orthodox community claim their space ...  
by “broadcasting” their music as other ethnicities do.*  
Mark Kligman<sup>4</sup>

## Introduction

The foregoing quotes encapsulate the extraordinary death, revival and transformation of East European Jewry and its popular music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traditional instrumental (*klezmer*) music has undergone a remarkable worldwide revival in the last 30 years, bringing in its wake a smaller revival of songs in Yiddish, the principal vernacular of East European Jewry. In the rich legacy of Yiddish songs that has been reclaimed, one major sub-genre has been overlooked: religious songs. And although Yiddish as a spoken language has been preserved among Hasidim here and around the world, and as an educational

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1 Editor’s note: The data for this article was researched from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, and the bulk of it is extracted from the unpublished thesis Janet Leuchter submitted in 1999 as part of her Masters project for the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College in New York. For a note about the subsequent use of this researched data and an updated view, please see the Epilogue at the end of this article.

2 Noyekh Prilutski, *Yiddishe Folkslider*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Farlag “Bikher-far-Alle), 1911, from *The Forward*.

3 Mark Slobin, “Studying the Yiddish Folksong,” *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 6 (1983-84): 10.

4 Mark Kligman, “The Media and the Message: The Recorded Music of Brooklyn’s Orthodox Jews,” *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 16, no. 1 (1994): 9-11.

language even in non-Hasidic right-wing Yeshivas, the old Yiddish folksongs have survived among the Orthodox only in truncated form.

In researching the Masters thesis from which this article was later adapted, my goal was to examine the corpus of traditional religious folksongs in Yiddish, survey the repertoire in print on commercial and archival field recordings and in oral circulation, and choose a relatively unknown yet outstanding example for analysis, in the process offering a notated version of it that has never been collected or published.

### Definition of the genre

The appellation “religious” has no standard definition among the pre-War collectors.<sup>5</sup> Ginzburg and Marek,<sup>6</sup> the commonly acknowledged first major collection of Yiddish folk songs, designated their first category of song texts as “religious-spiritual, national and holiday.” In his multi-volume *Thesaurus* (1932), Idelsohn<sup>7</sup> devoted an entire book to “The Folk Song of the Eastern European Jews,” and another to “The Songs of the Hasidim.” Yet many seemingly “religious” songs also appear in the former (“Folk Song”) volume, which is categorized not by text at all but entirely according to Idelsohn’s melodic scale-types. In Kipnis<sup>8</sup> (1918, 1925), one can find religious songs under two categories: 1) “religious, hasidish, misnagdish, and philosophical folksongs,” and 2) “Jewish-Ukranian or “Jewish-and-goyish” folksongs. These appellations are used synonymously in different collections. Hazzan A.M. Bernstein<sup>9</sup> calls his collection “zemirots and folk melodies,” yet they are all either wordless *niggunim*, instrumental tunes for the various stages of a wedding, or songs with sacred texts.

Nor are matters more clarified in post-war collections. In her comprehensive treatment of Yiddish folk song (1963), Ruth Rubin<sup>10</sup> puts this mate-

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5 In this article, pre- or post-“War”, unless further qualified, refers to World War II.

6 S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, *Yiddish Folk Songs in Russia* (1901), Dov Noy, ed. (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press), reissue, 1991.

7 A. Z. Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies*, vols. IX and X (Leipzig: Friedrich Hofmeister), 1932.

8 M. Kipnis, 60 *Folkslider, Ershte tayl*; 80 *Folkslider, Tsveyte tayl* (Warsaw: Farlag A. Gitlin), 1918; 1925.

9 A.M. Bernstein, *Musikalisher Pinkas*, vol. I (Vilna: 1927); reprint, New York: Cantors Assembly, 1958.

10 Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People* (New York and London: Thomas Yoseloff), 1963.

rial in two different categories: 1) “customs and beliefs,” which she further delineates as songs about the Sabbath, the Messiah, superstitions and death, Bible heroes, as well as mixed-language songs; and 2) “Chasidic melody and song.” The two anthologies of Vinaver,<sup>11</sup> one of “Jewish” and one of “Hassidic” music, are both devoted entirely to religious material. Dov and Meir Noy,<sup>12</sup> in their publication of songs collected before the War by S.Z. Pipe, divide the religious material between “religious and national songs” and “songs for the festivals and holidays.” In their second popular collection, Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek<sup>13</sup> scatter religious songs among “humorous songs and songs for celebrations and parties,” “our beloved Rabbi,” and “songs of survival and national aspiration.” In their third volume,<sup>14</sup> religious songs can be found under the renamed category of “hassidic and national songs,” as well as under “songs in a quiet and reflective mood” and “songs of the Holocaust.” In his second volume of Hasidic songs, Velvel Pasternak<sup>15</sup> includes a “songs in Yiddish” category (which also contains an Hungarian and a Russian song).

So how shall we define “religious songs”? For the purposes of this article, I am defining “religious folksong” as is customary: though the text’s subject matter—rather than through musical traits or performance context. Excluded are those whose composer is known, except if it has become folklorized, such as songs attributed to Rabbi Levi Yitzkhak of Berdichev. Somewhat arbitrarily but simply to narrow the field down, I also exclude the following categories: songs about or for use on holidays and weddings, and ballads about love and topical subjects, even though many of their texts include entreaties to God and statements embodying religious beliefs such as Divine reward and punishment.

And what are the “core topics” about which there could be broad agreement?

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11 Chemjo Vinaver, *Anthology of Jewish Music* (New York: Edward B. Marks Music Corporation), 1955; *Anthology of Hassidic Music*, Eliyahu Schleifer, ed. (Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre at Hebrew University), 1985.

12 Dov and Meir Noy, eds., *Folklore Research Center Studies*, volume 2., *Yidisher folkslider fun galitzye*, collected by Shmuel Zanvil Pipe (Jerusalem: Hebrew University), 1971.

13 Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, *Perl fun der yidisher poezie/Pearls of Yiddish Song* (New York: Workmen’s Circle), 1988.

14 Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek, *Songs of Generations—New Pearls of Yiddish Songs* (New York: Workmen’s Circle), 1996.

15 Velvel Pasternak, *Songs of the Chassidim*, vol. II (New York: Tara Publications), 1971.

1. paraliturgical hymns [*zmires* in Yiddish, *z'mirot* in Hebrew] that include some Yiddish text along with the Hebrew and/or Aramaic;
2. texts on the following subjects: the Sabbath, God's giving the Torah to the Jews, the soul, the Messiah and Redemption, the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, the stages of life, Hasidic rebbes [but not the parodies thereof], biblical events, the ten mystical emanations of God [*s'fires* in Yiddish, *S'firot* in Hebrew], and the importance of observing divine commandments [*mitzves* in Yiddish, *mitzvot* in Hebrew], and of helping the poor.

### **Yiddish as a criterion for identification and categorization**

Much of the repertoire identified is not strictly in Yiddish but is actually in Yiddish plus one or more other languages. These “mixed-language” songs have long fascinated collectors and scholars. Several forms of such songs exist:

1. Yiddish lines, verses or even phrases alternating with *loshn koydesh* [literally the “holy language”], meaning Hebrew or Aramaic in a variety of forms—biblical, talmudic, medieval;
2. Yiddish plus the East European non-Jewish vernacular [the most common being Ukranian, but also including Russian, Polish, Hungarian and even Czech];
3. The addition of *loshn koydesh* to #2.

If, then, a noticeable part of the East Ashkenazi repertoire is in more than one language, why define it as “Yiddish” altogether?

To explore this issue, I will start with my own place on the complicated Jewish map. Like most American Jewish children educated Jewishly in the 1950s and 1960s, I was oriented toward Hebrew, the language of Jewish prayer and the spoken language of our present and future. Yiddish and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) were languages of the past, period. The intense Zionist indoctrination I received as a teen-ager underscored this outlook. However, as I began to realize the cultural differences between American and Israeli Jews, I began—perhaps unconsciously—to look for an alternative source of Jewish cultural identity.

I found much of it ultimately in East European *Yiddishkayt*—and particularly in Yiddish song. As I had grown up loving the sounds of traditional prayer along with the songs of the *Yishuv*—first in Palestine, then in Israel—I was delighted to discover that both musical traditions were essential components of Yiddish song (albeit that the former is a source and the latter an offshoot). Moreover, I had studied and performed Balkan and Russian traditional song,

and was delighted to find that they shared their beautiful musical language with a folk repertoire I could call my own. Finally, I was happy to discover that the repertoire included popular, theater and even art songs, so that I could put my classical vocal skills to good use.

In short, the Yiddish song repertoire is diverse enough to appeal to a post-modern fragmented identity like mine. But it was not always viewed as such. Indeed, the socio-historical reality of Yiddish-speaking Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century dictated a different view: the use of Yiddish had then been intimately connected with ideology.<sup>16</sup> To speak Yiddish, to write and sing in Yiddish, to use Yiddish expressions in another vernacular—or not to do any or all of these—are statements about Jewish identity in a particular time and place, and are often decisions made consciously by both individuals and groups. The framing of this article as being about “Yiddish religious songs,” rather than as the wider genre of east Ashkenazi or Hasidic religious songs (which could include cantorial chants, wordless *niggunim*, and traditional religious songs in Hebrew and/or Aramaic), itself reflects an outlook that is modern but not contemporary. That is because the topic “Yiddish religious songs” takes as its standard a Jewish identity based on language, which is a kind of Yiddishist perspective—once shared by a mighty portion of Ashkenazic Jewry whose Jewish identity meant secular Yiddish culture.

### **Pre-war scholarship**

Most of the classic pre-war Yiddish folk song collectors and scholars shared this perspective and defined their work in its terms. With few exceptions, they collected only those religious songs that included some Yiddish in their texts. These songs were then laid side-by-side with the non-religious songs in the same collection. While this approach can certainly be useful and even illuminating, it misses the larger religious-music context of the songs—the context of traditional prayer modes (*nusah*), cantorial recitative, and Hasidic *nign* (Yiddish for Hebrew *niggun*).

Only two collectors in print took this more comprehensive approach to religious song: Bernstein and Idelsohn. Monumental and sophisticated as Idelsohn’s collecting and analysis was, the fact remains that his locus of activity was the Ashkenazi communities of Jerusalem, where repertoire was not developing along the same lines as the main body of Yiddish-speaking Jews in Europe. Paradoxically, political conditions in Palestine were more favor-

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16 For a good overview of this topic, see Emanuel S. Goldsmith, “The Language of Ashkenaz,” *Modern Yiddish Culture* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers and the Workmen’s Circle Education department), 1987: 27-44.

able to his activities than conditions in the USSR were to Yiddish scholars there. Had the Soviet Jewish musicologists been permitted to publish a truly representative sample of items from S. An-Ski's and Joel Engel's voluminous pre-World War I field collections, which after the Revolution were repositied in St. Petersburg and later Kiev, we would today have a far more complete picture of religious song in Yiddish,<sup>17</sup> and perhaps even of the totality of East European Jewish song. The survival of a good portion of this "mother lode" of wax cylinders in the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev has recently been confirmed, and limited scholarly investigation by Western and Israeli scholars is being allowed by the Ukraine government. A single Compact Disc with 40-odd items has been pressed in limited quantities, and is available at the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research in New York (I have heard selected songs). So perhaps we may all yet see and/or hear more of these treasures.

In any case, during the last 30 years, scholars have shifted their gaze to the multi-cultural aspects of Yiddish language and culture. Benjamin Hurshavski/Harshav<sup>18</sup> describes east European Jewry as internally and externally polylingual, with Yiddish as mediator among all the languages—both Jewish and non-Jewish—that Jews had to negotiate. In the field of Yiddish ethnomusicology, scholars like Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Mark Slobin have pioneered the study of a folksinger's total repertoire in all languages.<sup>19</sup> And Mark Kligman<sup>20</sup> has taken a contemporary ethnological approach to contemporary Orthodox and non-Orthodox popular music, showing how language choices continue to be ideological markers within the Jewish world.

### **Post-war scholarship and the new Yiddish-speaking Orthodox**

After World War II, the division persisted between the treatment of Yiddish religious songs as, on the one hand, a subset of the entire corpus of Yiddish song (Rubin 1963; Mlotek and Mlotek 1972, 1988, 1996) and, on the other, as a subset of Ashkenazi or Hasidic religious song. Andre Hajdu and Yaakov

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17 Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, "Soviet-Yiddish Folklore Scholarship," *Musica Judaica*, Vol. II, 1 (1977-78): 75.

18 Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1990: passim.

19 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Patterns of the Jewish Song World;" Mark Slobin, "Patterns of Musical Style," both in booklet accompanying *Folksongs in the East European tradition: from the repertoire of Marian Nirenberg*, Global Village LP GVM117, 1986.

20 Mark Kligman, "The Medium and the Message," op. cit.



Mazur,<sup>21</sup> Chemjo Vinaver (1955, 1985),<sup>22</sup> Uri Sharvit,<sup>23</sup> Joachim Stutchewsky,<sup>24</sup> M.S. Geshuri,<sup>25</sup> and Eliyahu Schleifer<sup>26</sup> (Vinaver, 1985) are all serious post-war Israeli scholars who have focused on Hasidic vocal music. Nevertheless, Vinaver—whose two anthologies are meticulously annotated (the latter by Schleifer)—wrote relatively little about the Yiddish component of this repertoire. The others include virtually no songs in Yiddish. They concentrated rather on the wordless *niggunim*.

The only truly ethnological treatment of Hasidic music I have seen was carried out in the late 1970s by a non-Orthodox Jewish ethnomusicologist, Ellen Koskoff,<sup>27</sup> who studied musical composition among the Brooklyn Lubavitch. Her work, while interesting, is concerned with the legitimization and status of Hasidic composers of new songs. Coming before the cheap cassette-recording revolution, her research is probably quite dated by now.

In a more popular vein, Velvel Pasternak has written the most extensively in English on the Yiddish song genre within the Hasidic world (1968, 1971).<sup>28</sup> Pasternak, a Modern Orthodox Canadian living in New York, arranged and produced a number of Hasidic recordings in the 1950s, 1960s and possibly more recently, working with the communities in Brooklyn. He is undoubtedly the outstanding American popularizer of Hasidic music in the post-war period. He was trusted by and given wide access to some, if not all, of the Hasidic dynasty circles—including the more insular—and his observations

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21 Andre Hajdu and Yaakov Mazur, "The Hasidic Dance-Niggun: A Study Collection and Classificatory Analysis," *Yuval Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre*, Israel Adler and Bathya Bajer, eds. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University), 1974.

22 Chemjo Vinaver, *Anthology*, op. cit., 1955; *Anthology of Hassidic Music*, 1985.

23 Uri Sharvit, *Niggunei Hasidim Mei-Galitsiah/Chassidic Tunes from Galicia* (Ramat Gan: Renanot/Bar Ilan University), 1995, cassette included.

24 Joachim Stutchewsky, *120 Chassidic Melodies* (Tel Aviv: General Federation of Labour/Government of Israel), 1950.

25 M.S. Geshuri, "Ha-niggun v'ha-rikud b'-hasidut/Melody and Dance in Hasidism" vol. I of *Intsiklopediyah shel Hasidut/Encyclopedia of Hasidism* (Tel Aviv: Netsah), 1955.

26 Eliyahu Schleifer, in Vinaver, *Anthology*, op. cit., 1985

27 Ellen Koskoff, "Nigun Composition in an American Hasidic Community," *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, James Porter, ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1978.

28 Velvel Pasternak, (New York: Bloch Publishing Company), *Songs of the Chasidim* 1968: Introduction; *Songs of the Chassidim II*, 1971: Preface and nos. 169-177.



justifiably carry weight. However, Pasternak is not a trained scholar. In an interview with me in June 1998, he said that he knows few or no religious songs in Yiddish apart from the handful he had published until then.

However, as a Jewish music publisher and seller of recorded music, Pasternak, whose Tara Publications has become America's largest Jewish Music distributor, does reflect a popular zeitgeist of the post-war period, at least through the 1960s. His "Great Jewish Classics" series, now up to seven volumes of out-of-print sheet music, is a smorgasbord of East European song types. Each volume might include one or more of the following categories:

- songs of Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev;
- songs satirizing the Hasidim;
- bona fide religious songs;
- Yiddish theater songs;
- Yiddish art songs.

Popular singers like the American-born operatic tenor/cantor Jan Peerce (1904-1984) performed and recorded similar types of programs (but please notice that cantorial solos were largely excluded from the "Great Jewish Classics" series).

However, a generation arose during the 1960s and 1970s that knew not Jan Peerce. Its members largely rejected the smorgasbord sentimentalism of the past and began looking for authenticity as they understood it—in the more distant past. The changing parameters of popular taste with regard to East European-derived Jewish music deserves its own serious study. Suffice it to say that in the last 30 years the American music audience has fragmented into many more genres and sub-genres than possibly ever before. At the same time, cheap recording technology has become widely available. The Orthodox Holocaust survivors successfully rebuilt their communities, and their children began to benefit from the sustained economic growth of the Western world, including Israel. Enter the Orthodox recording industry and its Yiddish sub-genre—which is undergoing a mini-revival of its own.

It is beyond the scope of this article to treat adequately the complicated role of Yiddish in contemporary Orthodox life. Nor can it give a comprehensive survey of contemporary Yiddish-language song recordings and concertizing by Orthodox Jews for an Orthodox audience. What it can do is describe the range of recordings found in major music stores in Borough Park (where both "yeshivish" and various types of Hasidim live) and Williamsburg (dominated

by Satmar Hasidim; Crown Heights, the world center of Lubavitch, is not covered).

In light of the foregoing, I can unequivocally state the following:

- a) Certain contemporary Hasidim, in America and elsewhere, speak Yiddish among themselves and with their children as a primary (but not exclusive) vernacular. Lubavitch is a notable exception.<sup>29</sup>
- b) Most Hasidic yeshivas for boys in North America and Israel “taytch” in Yiddish (itself a redundancy, for “taytch” is an old synonym for “Yiddish”). That is, they translate Bible and Talmud from Hebrew and Aramaic to Yiddish, as their forefathers did in Eastern Europe. Non-Hasidic right-wing yeshivas for boys, while they do not translate to Yiddish, do offer some familiarity with the language, sometimes in the form of a weekly lecture from the principal. However, neither Hasidic nor non-Hasidic right-wing yeshivas for girls “taytch” or otherwise expose the girls to much Yiddish.
- c) There is considerable divergence among contemporary Hasidim as to their knowledge of Yiddish religious folk songs, particularly parts of the older core repertoire found in all of the pre-War Yiddish-song collections.
- d) Store holdings of Yiddish songs vary even among different Hasidic neighborhoods.

### **Contemporary Yiddish religious recordings**

In the late 1980s to late 1990s when I first researched the Masters essay from which this article derives, the following Yiddish religious-song recordings were on the shelves at Eichler’s—a major Judaica chain—in Borough Park and at several stores on Lee Avenue, the main business street of Jewish Williamsburg.

- a) Superstars Avraham Fried’s and Mordecai Ben-David’s recordings of Yiddish songs by Yom Tov Erlich (see next paragraph). The arrangements are standard “Ortho-Pop”: professional studio sound, rich instrumentation (keyboard synthesizer, guitar, bass, strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion). The compositional style is sentimental and middle-brow, verging on the kitschy and distinctly dated by today’s non-Orthodox standards. Adult and boy choirs are used; the alto voices adding to an aura of sentimentality.

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<sup>29</sup> Because Lubavitcher Hasidim make it a point to interact with the outside world, their primary language is not Yiddish (see Ester-Basya ((Asya)) Vaisman, “‘She Who Seeks Shall Find’: The Role of Song in a Hasidic Woman’s Life,” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Fall 2010: n.4).

Yom Tov Erlich was a European-born Karliner Hasid who lived in Williamsburg after the war, functioned as a *badkhn* (traditional wedding rhymester) and composed numerous Yiddish songs that spread throughout the North American Hasidic world in the 1950 and 1960s. Beginning in the 1970s, he issued many poor-quality home-recorded cassettes of his songs with himself as performer. Erlich's style combines the tradition of pre-war songwriters Mark Warshawski (1848-1907) and Mordechai Gebirtig (1877-1942) who wrote affectionately about many topics, with the didactic ideological style of earlier *maggidim* (itinerant preachers) and *maskilim* (proponents of Enlightenment). Erlich's themes include aggadic and midrashic tales, the celebration of holidays, classic Hasidic heroes (including modern ones of the Soviet underground), assimilated Jews who return to their religion, and the Hasidic neighborhood of Williamsburg with its volunteer ambulance service (*Hatsoleh*).

- b) Avraham Fried's two-cassette album, made in Israel with the Prague Symphony Orchestra. On it he sings his own Yiddish songs on messianic themes, to texts found in traditional Jewish and Hasidic literature. The arrangement style is similar to the one mentioned in the previous subsection. Fried is a Lubavitcher, in his late 40s when I interviewed him, who grew up and still lives in Crown Heights.
- c) Suki and Ding's *Yiddish Classics*, vols. 1-3. Suki Berry's arrangements for volumes 1 and 2 are simply keyboard and drums; on volume 3 he adds guitar, bass, winds and percussion. Stylistically, the arrangements are more sophisticated than those of Fried and Ben-David—certainly more artistic than those on any of the official Hasidic-dynasty tapes—while still being essentially middle-brow-Pop. The repertoire is highly eclectic within the strict bounds of current right-wing Orthodox standards. It consists of Erlich songs, well-known trademark songs of the various dynasties, a few samples of Old Core repertoire, and word-for word, note-for-note copies (with new arrangements) of songs recorded for the hard-to-find series *Zmires Yisroel* (see letter g, below).
- d) Tapes of new Yiddish religious songs composed and sung by a few younger “yeshiva boys” (as described by Mendy, head of the Music section of Eichler's Borough Park store).
- e) Many tapes of Yiddish songs for children, all on religious themes, with simple keyboard or accordion accompaniments, and no lyrics included. The singers are usually boys, when they're not adult men.
- f) Tapes and CDs of various non-Orthodox *klezmer* bands, including women singers and instrumentalists (e.g., Klezmer Conservatory Band, Klezematics). This section was created by popular demand (according to Mendy), and represented a definite cultural shift, for the right-wing

Orthodox had previously been studiously uninterested in *klezmer* music.

- g) The rare two-cassette series *Zmires Yisroel*,<sup>30</sup> issued—according to legend and confirmed by the father of the men “who made the tape”—by a group in B’nei B’rak—world headquarters of the Vizhnitzer dynasty.<sup>31</sup> These cassettes are a reissue of an earlier LP recording; on neither version does the name of any individual or dynasty appear. We do know that Rav Itzhak Unger is official “court composer to the House of Vizhnitz,” though I’m guessing he was not involved in producing the first two volumes.

Another clue of the recordings’ origin comes from a songster called *Ha-Shir V’ha-Shevah*.<sup>32</sup> Printed in B’nei B’rak, its title page<sup>33</sup> lists the same songs that are sung on the *Zmires Yisroel* recordings. A golden-covered *bentcher*<sup>34</sup>—also titled *Zmires Yisroel* (subtitled: “Songs of the God-fearing and Hasidim”)—offers complete texts of all the songs on the identically-named cassettes, in addition to the usual *bentcher* texts of *z’mirot* for Sabbath and Festivals as well as prayers to be recited before and after meals. The *bentcher* was printed in New York State and is also carried by stores on Lee Avenue.

The *Zmires Yisroel* selections form part of the Old Core repertoire but include songs not found elsewhere, except on Suki and Ding volumes 2 and 3, which copied them. The adult male singers are clearly non-professional, and the instrumentation is acoustic: accordion and violin.

Arrangements appear to have been improvised on the spot—neither player sounds sure of what the singer is doing or about to do. The mood is definitely “Old World,” and probably intended as such.<sup>35</sup>

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30 *Zmires Yisroel —niggunei y’re'im v'-hasidim b'-idish*, Kol Yeshurun cassette TS 106, n.d.

31 The father is Yaakov Mazur, a B’nei B’rak resident, identified to me by Dr. Gila Flam, Director of the Israel National Sound Archives in Jerusalem.

32 *Ha-Shir V’ha-Shevah*: a collection of 67 songs in Yiddish (B’nei B’rak: HaLaM), 1986.

33 A photocopy of the title page—from a review of the songster—was graciously sent to me by Jack (Zev) Falk of Portland, Oregon.

34 A small book named for the act of *bentchn* (Yiddish for “blessing”).

35 In fall 1988, *klezmer* authority Professor Walter Zev Feldman and I listened to the opening item on side A of the first *Zmires Yisroel* cassette. His immediate reaction was that the accordionist, coming in on off-beats, was not playing in an authentic style.

## **An important word about field recordings of Yiddish songs and singers**

While the Yiddish song collections in print and in commercial recordings reflect an ideological point of view, this is blessedly not the case with several important American archival and commercially available field recordings of amateurs singing Yiddish songs. These recordings were made to encompass the entire repertoires of their subjects. Therefore they contain all sorts of material, including religious songs, simply not found elsewhere.

Archival recordings I consulted included the Ben Stonehill Song Collection (1947) and the Ruth Rubin Folk Song Collection (1948-62) at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, and the Miami Beach Project (1976-79), in the music library of the University of Miami. I was not able to peruse the largest such collections: the Hebrew University's sound archive, and the Cabinet of Jewish Language, Literature and Folklore of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Kiev. The latter houses the Engel wax cylinders recorded in Volhynia in 1912, and the Moshe Beregovski recordings from 1928-48.

Commercially released "field" recordings by non-professional singers include "Folksongs in the East European Tradition: from the repertoire of Marian Nirenberg" (Global Village, 1986); "Jewish Life: "The Old Country," selections from Ruth Rubin's collection (Folkways, 1964, available from the Smithsonian Institution as a CD); "Az di furst avek" with Lifshe Schaechter-Widman (Global Village 1986, available as a CD from [www.yiddishland.com](http://www.yiddishland.com)).

## **The difficulty for outsiders in gaining access to Hasidic circles**

Apart from the Lubavitch, Hasidim discourage sustained contact with non-Hasidim, albeit to varying degrees. As a non-Orthodox Jew, I face a certain degree of hostility and prejudice. As a woman, I face stringent restrictions on associating with non-family-related men. And presenting myself as a Reform cantor is out of the question.

Nonetheless, in researching this article I was able to conduct three interviews with American Jews who were born Hasidic and remain so; and four interviews with former Hasidim. This group includes those born in Europe and America as well as those of both sexes, ranging in age from their mid-20s to about 80. One lives in Atlanta, one in Toronto, and the rest live in New York City. I asked them two categorical questions:

- 1) what Yiddish songs they knew, from where did they know them, and when they were sung;

- 2) whether they knew specific songs whose titles I supplied (most of these songs I took from recordings currently circulating in the community).

This was far from a scientific survey, but from the answers it elicited I began to discern “the lay of the land.” Only one of the interviewees considered him/herself a “singer” or “musical,” which is unfortunate, for those who love to sing are usually the ones who remember songs. I also asked Mendy, the Music Department manager of Eichler’s Jewish Bookstore in Borough Park, to describe what types of people buy the Yiddish-song tapes. His answer was: yeshiva-age boys and young men, primarily.

Three major factors emerged as determinant of the level of knowledge of religious songs with a Yiddish component: gender, dynasty affiliation, and residence. Three of the four women interviewees, ages 25-ish, middle-aged and 80, did not know the Yiddish songs I asked them about, nor could they remember others. The fourth woman did, with prodding, remember a few of the songs on *Zmires Yisroel*<sup>36</sup> as ones she had sung or heard in childhood. This woman, in her mid-50s at the time, grew up in Borough Park in a Galitzianer Hasidic family. The other women belonged to Satmar, a smaller Hungarian dynasty, and Lubavitch. The youngest had lived all her life in New York, the others had lived in New York since the end of the War.

The level of familiarity with Old Core repertoire was slightly higher among the men, but here dynasty and personal predilection seems to have proved decisive. This bore out what I had learned in conversation with performers of Yiddish songs. The popular American-born Lubavitcher singer Avraham Fried, known for his original compositions, told me he knew a few Lubavitch-related songs, but otherwise nothing. Hazzan Isaac Goodfriend of Atlanta (since deceased), a Holocaust survivor then in his 70s who had grown up in Lodz among Alexander Hasidim (an off-shoot of Ger), knew several Yiddish religious songs, not from his childhood but from post-war collections and recordings.

Only Michael Wex, who grew up after the war in a Strykover family (also an off-shoot of Ger) among assorted Hasidim in Western Canada, was familiar with many of the songs on *Zmires Yisroel* and with other parts of the old repertoire. He had heard them at public gatherings in his home community of Alberta as well as at a Winnipeg yeshiva he’d attended as an adolescent. Shmuel Weiss, a younger ex-Hasid then in his early twenties whom I had met twice but never interviewed extensively, also indicated that he knew significant parts of the Old Core repertoire. He grew up in Omaha among Hungarian

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36 *Zmires Yisroel* 1 and 2—*niggunei y’re'im v’-hasidim b’-idish*, Kol Yeshurun cassette TS 106, n.d.

Hasidim. It is an intriguing but untested hypothesis that those Hasidim who live far from large concentrations of other Hasidim, or even non-Hasidic Jews, were more motivated to keep the old songs alive as important symbolic expressions of group values and identity.

But is the surviving Yiddish religious song repertoire in fact of Hasidic origin? The answer cannot be “yes”—based on the fact that an older core repertoire exists—that some Hasidim still record, hear on recordings, and even sing (as witness the B’nei B’rak Vizhnitzer songster, *Ha-Shir V’ha-Shevah*, and *Zmires Yisroel* cassettes). Idelsohn writes that the Hasidim would “invent new meditations and set them to tunes. Their texts were often a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish, such as those of Levi Yitzchok of Berditshev... This procedure stimulated the antagonism of the *Misnagdim*.”<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, he does not attribute solely to Hasidim either bi-lingual texts in which Yiddish interprets the Hebrew, or tri-lingual texts that include a non-Jewish vernacular.<sup>38</sup>

The larger Yiddish-speaking community knows a handful of religious folk songs through their many renditions on recordings and in concert by major star singers of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Jan Peerce. These songs are almost invariably Hasidic, attributed mainly to Levi Yitzhak (examples are “A Dudele,” “A Din Toyre mit Gott,” and “Meyerke mayn Zun”). But, though these are also included among the songs gathered by pre-War non-Orthodox collectors, the older collections also include many other religious songs. A number of the latter have not been recorded by Hasidim and do not seem to be known by them.

Apart from the results of my random testing of the above-mentioned interviewees, I adduce as evidence for this split a comparison between such non-Orthodox collectors and performers as the Mloteks, Ruth Rubin, and Aharon Vinkovetzky,<sup>39</sup> and the post-war Hasidic collections of Pasternak, and Orthodox commercial recordings. Apart from the Levi Yitzhak material and the song “*Habeit Mi-Shomayim U-R’ei* (“Look Down from Heaven and See”),<sup>40</sup> little correlation exists between the Yiddish religious folk songs published and recorded by the Orthodox on the one hand, and the non-Orthodox on the other, despite the authenticity of both repertoire groups.

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37 (Literally “opposers”), Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company), 1948: 415.

38 Ibid. 392-93, 396.

39 Aharon Vinkovetzky, Abba Kovner and Sinai Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*, vols. 1-4, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University/Magnes Press), 1989.

40 Published in Shmelke Kaczerginski, *Lider fun di getos un lagern*, ed. H. Leivick (New York: Tsiko Bicher Farlag), 1948; Mlotek, 1996, B’nei B’rak, 1986.



For example, “Kotsk” (about making pilgrimages to the rebbe, using a triple pun on the Hebrew root *R-G-L*) and “Fun Kosev biz Kitev” (about R. Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism) are two apparently authentic or at least folklorized songs from the Old Core repertoire that can be found in the post-war collections of Belarsky<sup>41</sup> and the Mloteks.<sup>42</sup> “Kotsk” is mentioned in a non-scholarly English work sympathetic to Hasidism.<sup>43</sup> In fact, according to Hazzan Goodfriend, Elie Weisel knew “Kotsk” as “Vizhnitz,” and the late Grand Rabbi Menachem Schneerson knew it as “Lubavitch.” This points to a wide diffusion of the song, from Poland to Belorussia to Bukovina. The different versions could conceivably fit Idelsohn’s definition (above) of Hasidic “meditations” set to music. Yet these two songs do not seem to be part of the Hasidic repertoire of the last 30 years. It is puzzling why today’s Orthodox are not singing some of these old songs, like the song *Tseydo ladorekh* (discussed next), while continuing to sing others. Perhaps the songs located specifically in European centers of Hasidism would be irrelevant to non-European Hasidim, whereas religious *texts* are still in use. But this is only a guess.

### **The song *Tseydo ladorekh*: Sources**

*Tseydo ladorekh* is a genuine find for Yiddish song researcher, since neither text nor tune has previously been documented. I know it in two forms:

- a) the version sung by Moti Friedman of Jerusalem, recorded by me in 1986,<sup>44</sup> and the same source recorded again by Itzik Gottesman in 1998,<sup>45</sup> the recordings being virtually identical;
- b) a fragmentary version sung by Gottesman himself as well as by his mother, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman, who grew up in Czernowitz. Their version consists only of a refrain, remembered from the singing of Mrs. Gottesman’s late husband, Jonah. Jonah and his sister were raised in a small town near Czernowitz amidst a Vizhnitzer Hasidic milieu, and they considered the song a product of *Hasidei Vizhnitz*. The refrain’s melody is quite similar to that of the Friedman version, except that it is rhythmically metric (measures 24-31), nor has the refrain’s complete text been retained.

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41 Sidor Belarsky, *Sidor Belarsky Songbook* (Flushing, NY: Yiddish Books, Queens College/CUNY), 1988.

42 Eleanor & Joseph Mlotek, *Pearls of Yiddish Song*, op. Cit., 1988.

43 H. Rabinowics, *The World of Hasidism* (Hartford, England: Hartman House), 1970: 114.

44 The present writer’s private cassette-tape recording of Moti Friedman, November 1986.

45 Itzik Gottesman’s private cassette-tape recording of Moti Friedman, April 5, 1998.



The version I wish to consider in depth is that of Moti Friedman, a native of Jerusalem who was, at the time of this writing, in his early sixties. Moti works for the Jewish Agency, and his passion is religious music, especially *hazzanut*. He is an experienced Orthodox *ba'al t'fillah* (prayer leader) from childhood, having served as a High Holiday cantor in Conservative and Orthodox synagogues during the years he lived in America. Moti learned this song from his Hungarian-born father who had emigrated to Palestine in 1936. Moti stated that he had not sung *Tseydo ladorekh* in a long time, yet he quickly reconstructed the song in its entirety. Moreover, the earlier and later recorded versions are alike—musically down to the last ornament—and textually word for word, except for the interchangeable use of *geyn* (“go”) and *furn* (“travel”; measures 3 and 11).

Moti’s Yiddish dialect primarily follows his late father’s, though influenced by other dialects to which he has been exposed. He considers his father’s Yiddish vocabulary to include certain “Germanisms” (rendering it as *Daytshmerish*, in Yiddish parlance). These and other departures from standard Yiddish are reflected in the song text: “derum,” “umferhof,” “ferveynt,” “furbraytn,” “emfang,” “ist,” “leyben,” “upgeyben,” and “laydet.” Sometimes a whole word is closer to German, othertimes only a prefix or suffix, as noted.

### Origins and connotations of the phrase *Tseydo ladorekh*

The Hebrew phrase *Tseidoh la-derekh*<sup>46</sup> means “provision for the journey”—i.e., food and drink—when occurring in the Bible<sup>47</sup> and Midrash.<sup>48</sup> In his biblical commentary, Rashi affirms the plain sense of the text.<sup>49</sup> In his talmudic commentary on BT *Rosh HaShanah* 17a, however, he interprets the phrase metaphorically, identifying *tseidat ha-meitim* (“provision for the dead”) as *takhrikhin* (“burial shrouds”).

In *Sha'arei T'shuvah* (“Gates of Repentance”), an influential ethical work of the medieval period, R. Jonah ben Avraham Gerondi (c.1200-1283) uses the phrase to mean *mitzvot* (in this context, “good deeds”).<sup>50</sup> Opposing the

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46 “*Derekh*” is the primary form of the word. The variation in Ashkenazic spelling (“e” instead of “o”) depends on the position of the word in a sentence: “o” when it falls at the end of a major clause ( Sephardic usage would dictate the spelling *tseidah la-derekh*).

47 Genesis 42: 25, 45: 21; Joshua 9: 11.

48 *Midrash Zota* on *Eikha* chapter 1; *Otsar ha-midrashim* (Eisenstein).

49 Rashi on Genesis 44: 16; on Joshua 9: 11; on Isaiah 47: 2; on Jeremiah 2: 2.

50 Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi, *Sha'arei T'shuvah* (Fano, 1505; Constantinople, 1511), *The Responsa Project*, version 5 [CD-ROM] (Ramat gan: Bar-Ilan University), 1995.

influence of Aristotelian philosophy on Judaism, Gerondi and other Spanish, Provençal and Italian rabbis stressed the importance of deeds, rather than thoughts and beliefs, in connection with an individual's reward in the World to Come.<sup>51</sup> Gerondi spurred the development of *Hanhagot* ("Directions") literature, which emphasized the details of daily living and integrated *Halakhah* (Jewish Law) with ethical principles. His *Sefer Ha-Yir'ah* ("Book of Fear [of Heaven]"), prototype of the *Hanhagot* literature, was translated into Yiddish, in which form it was published numerous times from 1583 on.

Interestingly the *Encyclopedia Judaica* cites only one other major work of *Hanhagot* literature: *Tseidah La-Derekh*,<sup>52</sup> by Menahem ben Aaron ibn Zerah (c.1310-1385), first published in Ferrara, 1554.<sup>53</sup> The book is a Code of Law concerning *mitzvot* that are obligatory for individuals as part of daily life (as opposed to those that are obligatory for the community or for groups within it, like the *Kohanim* (priestly descendants of Aaron)). Ibn Zerah wrote the book as a guide for busy members of the upper classes who were beginning to cease observance of the *mitzvot*, his title-phrase—*tseidah la-derekh*—assuming the role of a polemic in the late Middle Ages. We will revisit this struggle below, in its 19<sup>th</sup>-century manifestation.

### The song Tseydo ladorekh: the text

Tseydo ladorekh nemt aykh,  
brider, mit.

Provisions for the journey,  
brothers, take with you.

Ven ayner furt uf a veg,  
upgetsaylte tsvey dray teg,  
esn darf er zakh mitneymen meyr.  
In es kimt fur zeyer oft,  
shlekhte tsaytn umferhof,  
az der ban ken nisht vayter geyn.

When one goes on his way  
for two, three days,  
he must bring more food with him.  
And very often (hopefully not),  
bad times occur,  
when the train cannot go further.

Tsi ist amul a vint in a shney,  
di veg iz in gantsn ferveynt,  
der ban ken nisht vayter geyn.

Sometimes there are wind and  
snow,  
the road is bleary  
the train cannot go farther.

51 Ephraim Kupfer, s. v. "Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972, 10: 180.

52 Kupfer, loc. cit., 6: 924,

53 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 11: 1304.

Derum ven ayner geyt uf a rayze  
darf er zakh mitneyemen meyr shpayze,  
hingerik vet er nit darfn zayn.

(Refrain):

Tseydo, tseydo ladorekh nemt aykh,  
brider, mit.

Der ver es tit zikh furbraytn  
der laydet kayn mul nisht.

Tseydo nemt aykh, brider, mit ahin,  
vayl oyfn veyg ken men shoyn  
gur nisht tin.

Tseydo ladorekh nemt aykh,  
brider, mit.

Aroys, der groyser gevir,  
vos shoymrim shteyen bay dayn tir.  
Efsher hosti a mentschlekh gefil?  
In ven es kimt ayn uremen tsi dir,  
efen im oyf brayt dayn tir,  
in emfang im mitn gantsn harts.

Bevern ikh dir, brider, du,  
k'dey di zolst hubn of yenem shu,  
in efsher vet dir dort beser zayn.  
Bevern ikh dir, brider, mayn leben,  
in efsher vet men ayn shvakh upgeyben.  
In efsher vet dir dort beser zayn.  
(Refrain... )

Tsi hosti aynem gringer gemakht?  
Tsi hosti aynem nitsn tsebrakht?  
Tsi hosti geholfn oy an uriman?  
(Bevern ikh... )

Therefore when one goes on a trip  
he must bring with him more food  
so that he does not go hungry.

(Refrain):

Provisions for the journey,  
brothers, take with you.

The one who prepares never  
suffers.

Provisions, brothers, take with you,  
for on the road nothing more  
can be done.

Provisions for the way, brothers,  
Take with you.

Come out, wealthy man,  
whose guards stand by your gate!  
Have you maybe a human feeling?  
And when a poor man comes to you,  
open wide your gate  
and receive him with all your heart.

I warn you here, brother,  
so that you will not go lacking at  
that hour  
and perhaps you'll be better off.  
I warn you, my dear brother,  
and perhaps your way will be  
better there.  
(Refrain... )

Have you eased someone's path?  
Have you been of use?  
Have you helped a poor man?  
(I warn you... )

## The song Tseydo ladorekh: the music

(Original Pitch)  $\text{♩} = 47$

4 Tsey do la-do rekh nemt aykh, bri-der, mit. Ven ay-ner furt uf a veg up-ge-

6 tsayl - te tsvay dray- teg es - n darf er zakh mit-ney-men meyr. In es

8 kint for zey - er oft, shlekh-te tsay - tn um - fer - hof,

10 az der ban ken nisht vay-ter geyn. Tsi ist a - mul a vint in a shney, di

13 veg iz in gan-tsn fer veynt, der ban ken nisht vay - ter geyn. Der - um ven ay-ner geyt uf a ray-ze

darf er zakh mit-ney-men meyr shpay-ze hin-ger-ik vet er nit dar - fn zayn.

15 Refrain (in tempo)  $\text{♩} = 60$

18 Tsey - do, tsey-do la-do-rekh nemt aykh, bri-der, mit... Der ver es tit zikh fur - bray-tn

21 der lay-det kayn mul nisht. Tsey-do nemt aykh, bri-der, mit a - hin vayl

23 oy - fn veyg ken men shoyn gut nisht tin.

tsey - do la - do - rekh nemt aykh, bri - der, mit.

25 Gottesman Family version (Rhythmic)



Tsey-do tsey-do tsey-do la do-rekh nemt ir, bri-der, mit. Vayl ver se nemt zikh tsey-do mit der

28



hin - gert keyn mul nisht. tsey - do nemt\_\_ ir mit a - hin,

30



tsey-do nemt\_\_ ir mit a - hin; tsey-do la-do - rekh nemt ir, bri-der, mit.

### The song Tseydo ladorekh: form of the text

The basic structure of its rhyme is a not-uncommon type in Yiddish folksong: a-a-b, a form Hurshovski<sup>54</sup> identifies as literature-influenced. The verse is built of four such units: a-a-b, c-c-d, e-e-f, g-g-h. Contrarily, the third and fourth units of the verse are longer than the first two (i.e., containing more words and beats per line). This lends to the text an improvisatory quality, putting it into the Hurshovski category of an older form. The rhyme scheme of the refrain is a-a-b-b, which can be an older form, particularly as the melody reinforces the strophic character. Surprisingly, the refrain ends with a repeat of its first line, a very non-traditional feature.

The text's overall structure is:

verse—refrain,  
verse—refrain,  
half-verse—refrain.

While some folk songs do have repeating refrains, in Hurshovsky's analysis they would not belong to the oldest strata, unless they were children's songs—which our song is not.

The text displays other unusual features.

- 1) Its final refrain changes slightly: *tit zikh furbraytn* becomes *bet zikh vaykh*; *laydet* becomes *kvetcht*, and *veyg* becomes *yenem velt*. Such a change is not standard in folk songs.
- 2) The song opens with a single line: the last line of the refrain. This, too, is highly unusual for a folksong.

Taken together, all of these uncharacteristic deviations would seem to indicate a literary influence, if not a literary origin.

54 Benjamin Hurshovsky (Harshav), "On Free Rythms in Yiddish Poetry," *The Field of Yiddish*, Uriel Weinreich, ed. (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York), 1954: 219-266.

### The song *Tseydo ladorekh*: meaning of the text

The text's topic advances a central Jewish religious teaching: that one should lead a moral life in order to be rewarded in heaven. Jewish tradition provides multiple reasons for adhering to moral and ethical principles, including the promise of divine reward (and punishment). Responding to the popularity of medieval rationalism, Maimonides and Jacob ben Asher offered moral principles, aggadic literature and other non-halakhic "reasons" within their Codes of Jewish Law (*Mishneh Torah* and *Arba Turim*, respectively).<sup>55</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a new context for rationalizing observance developed with the Hasidic and Musar movements, both of which stressed the importance of living a moral life. During this period, Gerondi's writings could be found in the libraries of Musar yeshivas,<sup>56</sup> and Spanish proto-Musar texts greatly influenced Hasidic teachings as well.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, this *Hanhagot* literature was popular not just in sectarian circles but among the common masses of East European Jewry.<sup>58</sup> The Haskalah movement produced a spate of literature that preached to the masses in Yiddish, propounding the modern (and—in that milieu—subversive and radical) view that ethical behavior is the essential core of Judaism, rather than the fanatical observance of rituals.

Furthermore, in view of the *ban* ("train") metaphor, we must conclude that our text was created no earlier than the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is highly didactic: its form is that of a moralistic parable (Hebrew *mashal*, Yiddish *moshl*) being preached to a congregation. While many Yiddish folksongs, particularly love ballads, are simply addressed to an audience (e.g., my dear mother, my dear people), few such "sermons" are preserved in genuine folksong.<sup>59</sup> The didactic sermon qua sermon, however, is typical of two "types" of Yiddish songwriters: maggidic and maskilic, like Eliakum Zunser (1836-1913) and

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55 Menachem Elon, s. v., "Codification of Law," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5: 639, 646.

56 H.H. Ben-Sasson, s. v., "Musar Movement," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 12: 536.

57 Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, s. v., "Hasidim," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 7: 1413.

58 Telephone interview with Leonard S. Kravitz, Professor of Midrash at Hebrew Union College, January 22, 1999.

59 For a possible exception, see *Akavyo ben Mahalalel Omeir*, a Yiddish interpretation of *Pirke Avot* 3:1, in Chaim Kotylansky, *Folks-Gezangen/A Collection of Chassidic Songs and Chants, Yiddish-Ukrainian FolkSongs and "Shteiger-Lieder"* (Los Angeles: Chaim Kotylansky Book Committee and "YCUF"), 1944. Kotylansky was a Hasid-turned-Yiddishist who lectured and performed throughout the United States during and following the war. He guessed that our text was derived from a *maggid's* sermon because it expressed blind fear of sin, death and God—in contrast with Hasidic willingness to hold God accountable. But he may have been over-generalizing from the famous Levi Yitzhak songs which form the bulk of religious songs in his book.

Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908). In an intriguing parallel, Zunser's *Dos Lid fun Ayzenban*<sup>60</sup> uses the train journey as a metaphor for life, with God as the conductor. But Zunser's all-embracing moral is different, and nothing in its text would suggest that it might be the source for *Tseydo ladorekh*.

Given all the above, I would suggest that our text is a folklorized form originating from one of the following:

- 1) a maggidic sermon,
- 2) a maskilic story or song,
- 3) a parable from *hanhagut* literature,
- 4) a Hasidic parable.

Of particular interest is the fact that our text—as a sermon on the importance of helping the poor—remains practically *sui generis* as a song form. So far, I have been unable to locate any songs like it—either in print, on recording, or in the oral tradition.

### **The song *Tseydo ladorekh*: analysis of the music**

The melody for the verses is a non-rhythmic, non-metrical recitative, in the style of a *ba'al t'fillah*. The melody for the refrains is less easily categorized. Our informant sings it as a semi-recitative, non-metrically. The endings of each line are at the least syncopated and even a bit rushed—a traditional style also characteristic of the ends of phrases in *klezmer* music. (This may be related to the phrase-shortening that seems to typify unaccompanied solo singing in Yiddish.)<sup>61</sup> This hybrid style could mean that the refrain was originally metric, but that the informant and/or his father adapted it to a non-group style of singing in which meter could have given way to individual expressiveness. Or, perhaps this is simply a co-temporal variant of the Gottesman family's metrical version.

The melodic pattern is as follows.

Verse: a-a-b-b, refrain: a-b-c-d-e, with the opening interval of (c) being the same as that of (a).

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60 Eliakum Zunser, *Verk*, Mordkhe Schaechter, ed (New York: YIVO Institute), 1964.

61 Moshe Beregovsky, *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski* (1934, 1935, 1937, 1942, 1962), translated and edited by Mark Slobin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1982: 293.

The refrain's closing tag line (e) also opens the song. In other words, the same text—*Tseydo ladorekh nemt aykh brider mit* is set to two different melodies. This is quite unusual, but consistent with the Gottesman version. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the Friedman version is strophic, with the last line tagged on almost as an afterthought. It is not needed harmonically, as the previous line has brought the melody back to the tonic. The Gottesman version of the refrain, on the other hand, resembles the melodic form of an English limerick:

a (long), a (long), b (short), b (short), a (long).

The last line of this version brings the melody from the “b” lines—where it outlined the dominant—back to the tonic. It thus has an essential function. This “limerick-like” form (my term) also crops up in Yiddish folk song, yet Hurshovski does not mention it.

### **The song *Tseydo ladorekh*: the performance practice**

Moshe Beregovsky<sup>62</sup> classified folk singers according to three types:

- 1) moderate tempo, mezzo forte, minimal ornamentation;
- 2) “considerable rubato, quasi-dramatization of the text through musical gestures, and more frequent” ornamentation;
- 3) “collectors” who always sing a song the same way.

According to this schema, one might characterize Moti Friedman's singing as Beregovski's type #1. He uses very little rubato or gliding and swooping. The vocal style is open with just a hint of nasality and little vibrato. One can't help but be reminded of his familiarity with the “Golden Age” of hazzanut on recordings, for that is the sound his singing most resembles. It also employs a vocal quality much more typical of pre-war East European Jewry than of the post-war American and Israeli Orthodox, whose preferred vocal timbre is thinner and more nasal.

Most noticeable is the unvarying phrasing and ornamentation on all four versions of the song (he recorded it three times in the Gottesman interview). How to explain the remarkable sameness of every musical rendition? After all, he did not acquire the song from a printed score, nor from a recording that could be listened to repeatedly. My hunch is that for Friedman the song is a very strong symbol of his father, and so he tries to sing it in the way he remembers his father singing it.

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62 Mark Slobin, “Studying the Yiddish Folk Song,” 1983-84: 11.



In the Gottesman interview he prefaces his singing with the words, “I didn’t sing it for a long time.” This implies that he has no ongoing life-context of his own in which to sing the song, even though as a Modern Orthodox Jew he sings Shabbat *z’mirot* regularly. It is also possible that Friedman falls into Beregovsky’s category #3 (if one accepts this schema); he is a collector—at a distance from the folk tradition—who never varies in his treatment of it.

During the course of my interview with him, Friedman talks of his Orthodox upbringing and his study at a yeshiva in B’nei B’rak, and he contrasts it with his current hatred of the *Hareidim* (ultra-Orthodox). Even though he loves their music, he says, “they have made me hate them.” This revealing statement illustrates the same “cognitive dissonance” experienced by countless numbers of people throughout the centuries who love, perform and are entertained by the music of particular ethnic groups in their societies, and whose own music derives from it, while disliking the group itself. This phenomenon has always been true of Jews and is evident among today’s Orthodox, in their desire for American Pop arrangements.

## Epilogue

In recent years, Dr. Walter Zev Feldman—now Professor of Music at New York University in Abu Dhabi and a researcher with The Hebrew University’s Jewish Music Research Centre—has placed the thesis from which this article derives in the library of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has used it in classes on Ashkenazic music which he taught at Bar Ilan University and at the Rubin Academy. He has also used our 2001 recording of “Tseydo ladorekh” from a concert in New York, featuring me on vocals and him on the tsimbl. I, too, have successfully incorporated some of the researched material—at least one “rescued” tune—into the regular High Holiday and Festival repertoire of my congregation, which they now sing with gusto. It is a melody to the Amidah text *Atah v’hartanu* (“You have chosen us”), that I found in the Stonehill field recording collection in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research sound archives.

Moreover, since I wrote the thesis, important new efforts in research and documentation of Yiddish song have been made in the Americas, Europe (including the former USSR) and Israel. Even some Hasidim are themselves collecting and performing this older repertoire. A few seminal academic works have been published (e.g., Itzik Nakhmen Gottesman, *Defining the Yiddish Nation: The Jewish Folklorists of Poland*, Wayne State University Press, 2004) and documentary CDs released (e.g., “The Hasidic Niggun as Sung by the

Hasidim,” *Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel*, #17, Edwin Seroussi, ed. (Jerusalem: The Jewish Music Research Center, Hebrew University, 2004). The *Zmires Yisrael* cassette series is now also available on CD. Lorin Sklamberg and Frank London of the Klezmatics released three CDs of East Ashkenazic religious music (*Nigunim* in 1998, *The Zmiros Project* in 2001, and *Tsuker-Zis* in 2009) that include a number of these Yiddish religious songs together with similar songs in Hebrew, thus placing both language types in their proper Ashkenazic cultural continuum. The above listed efforts have brought these gems to a far wider—and arguably **primarily**—gentile world-music audience interested in “spiritual” music.

Still, I believe the central argument of the thesis is still valid: the preservation and dissemination of “religious” songs with a Yiddish component has always and continues to be greatly influenced by ideology and by the radical disruption and cultural loss occasioned by the Holocaust (“*khurbn*” in Yiddish). It is heartening that these neglected gems are increasingly seeing the light of day.

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# Why Sidor Belarsky Was Popular among American Jewry

*by Joel Colman*

Sidor Belarsky (1898-1975) emigrated from Russia in the year 1930. He therefore belonged to the wave of Jewish immigration that has since been labeled the East European immigration of Jews to America. Although there were Jews who arrived in America from other parts of the world, the overwhelming number at the turn of the twentieth century hailed specifically from Eastern Europe. It is important to note that Belarsky's life in Europe was far different from that of the the average East European Jew. Most Russian-Polish Jews had been employed in trade, tavern keeping, brokerage, makeshift occupations, as rabbis and other religious functionaries—about twenty-five percent artisans—and the rest were servants, beggars and paupers.

In contrast, Belarsky devoted himself to studying music and singing. His experience differed from those of most East European Jews, especially those who lived in the small towns of the Pale of Settlement, because Belarsky gravitated to the cities that offered gifted Jews like him opportunities for musical training. Belarsky, whose hometown of Kreshopol in the Ukraine was not far from the Black Sea, found ample training ground for his talents in Odessa. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Odessa had a population of approximately 200,000 and constituted a center of intellectual and cultural life. That is where Belarsky learned to sing with such skill and musicality.

## Belarsky's Contribution I

### **Significance of the Yiddish Language to American-Jewish Audiences**

Although Belarsky performed in many concerts and operas throughout his career for the general American public, it was his connection to American Jewry in particular that was central to his success. The majority of his records are of a Jewish nature, that is either Yiddish or Hebrew music, and his popularity was rooted in singing such music to Jewish audiences throughout the United States and abroad. It is important to note that Belarsky did not sing the Yiddish theater music that was so popular with Jewish audiences in New York. Belarsky's daughter Isabel claims that her father was not comfortable singing this genre of Jewish music, though he was no doubt capable of doing so, if one were to judge by his operatic repertoire. Moreover, by the time Belarsky was establishing himself as a performer in America in the mid-1930s, the heyday of Yiddish theaters on Second Avenue had passed. Their number shrank from approximately twenty in 1920 to no more than four or five in

1940. Rather, Belarsky was best known for singing Yiddish folk songs with simplicity and pathos.

Every artist needs an audience, and Belarsky needed an audience that could understand what he was singing. He found such an audience in America. By the time he arrived in the United States in January 1930, immigrants from Eastern Europe had swelled the overall Jewish population in America to three and a half million.



Sidor Belarsky and daughter Isabel at Pine Lake Park Bungalow Colony, Montrose, New York, summer of 1931

Belarsky's popularity among these Yiddish-speaking Jews did not wane over time. In fact, as the Yiddish language diminished in importance during

the second half of the 20th century, those Jews who had been raised on the Mother Tongue clung more tenaciously to it. They wanted to be recognized as a group that continued to retain its roots, and that was done through the Yiddish language. Belarsky's prominence gave an effective boost to maintaining their heritage, for he sang Yiddish songs that reminded them of the Old Country. As the historian Irving Howe so eloquently put it: "Yiddish had served as a kind of secret sign, a gleeful or desperate wave to the folks back home by a performer who liked it to be known that he was still a Jewish boy." Howe goes on to explain how local politicians of the time deliberately peppered their speeches with Yiddish to win over Jews. Belarsky did not need to do the same. Being secure in his knowledge of music and the Yiddish language, he brought Jews toward him naturally. He sang to an audience that understood every nuance of the language as it was articulated through the music.

Despite his connection to the Old World, Belarsky was not one to remain solely in the past. He constantly studied new music. In the early 1950s he recorded Songs of the Holocaust, for he wanted to represent musically the grief of that horrific event. When Belarsky concertized he could thus evoke both sadness and joy from his audiences by singing Yiddish folk songs, Hasidic songs or Holocaust songs. As Chana Mlotek suggests, "Much scholarship and aesthetic taste were contained in his compilations of songs devoted to specific themes, notably the songs of the Holocaust, songs of Soviet-Jewish poets, the immigrant experience, Hasidim, holidays, etc."

Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum expands on this theme:

The songs of Israel, and the songs of the Jews of the Soviet Union (who can forget his early recordings of V'ulai and Kakha Kakh, or his album of songs of the Jewish-Russian underground?); all of these responded to his special genius. But to me he will always remain the spirit and the substance of those little towns that were caught in the web of love and artistry of Sholom Aleichem and I. L. Peretz and Mordechai Gebirtig and Itzik Manger. I contend that Belarsky's popularity with the people stemmed not only from his knowledge of the Yiddish song, but also from the fact that he succeeded as a musician in the non-Jewish world. Jews in America, I believe, took delight in a fellow Jew fitting into the secular world as well as the Jewish one. It was a source of pride to his fans to hear Belarsky sing opera both at the New York City Opera and on the radio.

It is important to add that many who remember hearing Sidor Belarsky sing did not belong to the first waves of immigrants from Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, numbers of Belarsky's fans belong to the second and third generation of American Jews who grew up hearing Yiddish being

spoken by parents and grandparents. They, too, have an emotional bond with Yiddish, but do not identify with the Yiddish folk song in quite the same way as their parents or grandparents. For some of these people Yiddish is not their mother tongue. Yet as the linguist Joshua Fishman explains, although their “Yiddish is quite limited, their comprehension level is still substantial.” Moreover, many wish to sustain their East European heritage through song and language. Historian Jack Kugelmass, describing the current upsurge of interest in Yiddish language and culture claims: “For others, the East European Jewish past has reemerged as the bulwark against assimilation, as evidenced by the recent revival of klezmer music and current attitudes towards Yiddish.”

Belarsky’s language skills certainly helped him when he sang to Jewish-American audiences. His Yiddish skills enabled him to engage the audience, not only through song, but when he would speak to the audience. However, there are many types of songs that can be sung in Yiddish. Knowing what they wanted to hear, Belarsky carefully chose the songs he sang to Jewish Americans. The next section surveys the lyrics of eight of Belarsky’s songs in an attempt to understand the connection between the words and Belarsky’s audience.

## Belarsky’s Contribution II

### What the Songs Actually Said to American-Jewish Audiences

Although Belarsky was capable of singing more sophisticated music—as both his musical training in Russia and his ability to sing challenging operatic roles would suggest—he was popular among Jewish audiences primarily as a result of his eloquent presentation of the Yiddish folk song. During a career that spanned over forty-five years, Belarsky produced over 350 recordings, the majority of which are in Yiddish. His daughter Isabel has been actively preserving many of her father’s Yiddish, Hebrew and Hasidic recordings and has had them transferred first to cassettes, later CDs, and more recently online (see note at end of article). Additionally, two song books are still available in bookstores: *My Favorite Songs*—arranged by Sidor Belarsky (1951) reprinted by Tara Publications, Cedarhurst, NY; and *Sidor Belarsky Songbook* (1970), published by Ethnic Music, NY.

Let us now explore why the lyrics of these two collections containing his most popular songs captured the hearts of generations of American Jews.

The first song to be analyzed is *Der kremer* (“The Grocer”) by A. Liesin. It begins:

There is a poor and modest grocer, among hundreds more on the street. He sits and he waits for a customer, it is dark and the rain is like sleet. As he sits he thinks about how much better things would be if there were a Jewish State. While his fantasy is wondrous and sweet, a government run by our people, a Jewish one, you understand.

While he dreams about a Jewish state a short man comes in and asks to purchase a very tiny portion of fish, which immediately ends the grocer's dream and brings him back to reality. The lyrics continue:

All of a sudden a customer, as big as a peanut, comes in. He asks for a penny's worth of herring and knocks every dream out of him.

Typical of many of these songs are the visual images that the words paint: a vivid picture of the poor merchant on the main street of some backwater shtetl (hamlet) in Poland or Russia. The listener's imagination will then provide a sense of the onerous burden carried by the Jewish people living under Tsarist rule.

The second song is *Dem milners trern* ("The Miller's Tears"), with words and melody by Mark Warshavsky. As in *Der Kremer*, this song describes a working-class Jew, an old man thinking about a bygone time when he was a miller, wondering if he had had any joy at all in his life:

While passing by me, the years did try me, I was a miller long ago.

Remembering those who wanted to drive him away from his town and his work; he laments how the years pass

without an end and without a goal.

This song depicts not only the pogroms that occurred,

The rumors try me, they want to drive me from out the village and the mill,

but like the previous song, this one indicates the desperate financial conditions of Russian Jews:

The days will never come back as ever, when I could claim a little luck.

The third song, *Dem zaidns brokhe* ("Grandfather's Blessing"), written by Mark Warshavsky, also dwells on the theme of poverty. It tells of a man recalling the eve of Yom Kippur when, before the last pre-fast meal was eaten, his grandfather would bless him and ask him to go to shul with him. He pleaded with him, saying:

Come—my child—to shul with me, God will be most merciful toward you.



Now, however, the grandson bemoans the fact that he never joined his grandfather in shul. For this misdeed he has suffered, his years have been filled with suffering.

You meant well, Grandfather dearest, but your prayers for me were no blessing. Instead, my years were filled with sorrows, every day brings new misfortune.

Thus a young man with initial hopes for achieving success in Eastern Europe—even with the blessings of his pious grandfather—still grows up with difficulty and sadness. The song explains why so many young men would venture alone from their homeland to America, bringing the rest of the family only once some money had been earned. There was little hope for any kind of a future in Eastern Europe.

The fourth song, in addition to portraying community life in the shtetl, discusses personal relationships. *Reizele*, with words by Mordechai Gebirtig, is one of Belarsky's signature songs. Although this song does not speak directly of poverty, the listener can imagine love overwhelming any concern over it. The song speaks of a young man who is thinking only about his love.

Reizele, I love you so much. I love your mama. I love the streets. I love the old house. I love the stones next to the house, because you walk on them.

This song differs from the previous three in that instead of singing about poor old men we now hear about the all-consuming feeling of love that a young man has for his beloved. All four songs cited describe a time when Jews lived in small towns and for the most part in poverty. For many first-generation American Jews these scenes would not have been difficult to imagine. Even second-generation American Jews might have been attracted to the songs because they could conjure up the image of immediate relatives such as a parent or grandparent living in such circumstances.

The songs Belarsky sang touched the hearts of many people because they speak of harsh times in Eastern Europe. But many Jews in America continued to have financial difficulties at first. Almost two thirds of the new immigrants settled down in the big cities of the Northeast, especially in crowded downtown neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side of New York City. There they found employment in manual labor of various kinds. Over half entered the ready-made clothing industry in which entrepreneurs, contractors, tailors, and seamstresses were mainly Jews. Wages were low, hours were long, and working conditions poor in the small, unventilated and dirty sweatshops.



It would seem that to some degree Belarsky was consoling his listeners by reminding them of a time when life was even more difficult; as arduous as life was in America, the hope persisted that eventually conditions would improve (and in fact, for most they did). It is important to add that Belarsky did not sing to Jewish Americans when they were new to the country at the turn of the century, but during the 1930s when they had already established themselves in the United States. By 1951 when Belarsky's book of *Favorite Songs* was published, singing about troublesome times in Russia may have been easier, considering the more comfortable circumstances of Jewish Americans at mid-century.

Sociologist Marshall Sklare observes that at that time American Jewry seemed optimistic about its future. Older Jews will recall the celebration of the American-Jewish Tercentenary in 1954, honoring the 300th anniversary of the arrival in New Amsterdam of a small band of Jewish refugees from Brazil as a bright and joyous occasion. The reason for the festivities is easy to locate: Nazism had been destroyed, the State of Israel had been established, and the enemies of Israel did not seem to pose any immediate threat to its survival. Also, while the main outlines of the tragedy of the Holocaust were known, American Jewry's illusions had not yet been shattered by revelations about the Roosevelt Administration's lack of resolve to rescue Jews—first from persecution and later from annihilation.

Another common theme in Belarsky's repertoire is the desire to go to Palestine, a popular topic in the East European Jewish press in the 1880s. One historian observes that when East European Jewish emigration increased, the Jewish press debated whether it should be directed to America or to Palestine. Most of the emigrants opted for the United States, but the idea of re-establishing the land of Israel as the center of Jewish life took hold among many of the intelligentsia (*maskilim*) and Russified Jews. Zionist ideology played a central role in Belarsky's life. He visited Israel eight times, including a concert he performed the very evening that Israel was declared a State. He played an important role in the Histadrut Israel Foundation for many years.

In the song *Yerushalayim*, with words by Avigdor Hameiri, the Zionist theme is unmistakable:

From generation to generation we dreamed and hoped to be a nation,  
as well as the importance of Jerusalem to the Jewish people:  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, rebuilt by our strength and our joy;  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Oh city that none can destroy.  
Oh holy city, great is your praise!  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I never shall wander from you;  
Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the Messiah will surely appear.

*Olim* (“Song of the Advancing Brave”) with words by I. Shenberg, bears an even stronger Zionist message than does *Yerushalayim*:

To the land my fathers knew, my brothers are all coming;  
and they hear a secret humming: “Only this land will do.”

Though Belarsky did not make aliyah to Israel, he still sang about the importance of going there. Given his strong relationships with Labor Zionist organizations, it is no wonder that his repertoire included a number of songs with a powerful Zionist theme.

Belarsky’s musical selections take us to the cold and barren land of Siberia, about which he sings in *Ergetz vayt* (“In the Distant Land”), with words by H. Leivik and music by Lazar Weiner. It tells the story of one man who was exiled there:

Somewhere far away lies the land forbidden, somewhere  
lies a prisoner, alone. . . one cannot even find a way to  
this forbidden land.

It is important to mention that this is not a simple folk song, for Weiner’s music plays on the lyrics with jarring dissonance, leaving the listener with a sense of bleak emptiness. A song like this gave Belarsky an opportunity to paint a vivid tableau for his audience.

The last song, *Moyshelakh shloymelakh* with words by J. Papernikoff and music by Israel Alter, portrays the aftereffect of the Holocaust on a town in Poland.

Under the green Polish trees, little Moses and little Solomon  
do not play anymore, no little Sarahs and little Leahs,  
not on the grass and not on the snow.

And now this Polish town has no Jewish homes or streets,

Dead are the Jewish homes, dead are the streets,  
destroyed are the homes, where children,  
sticking their heads out like little mice with their  
big dark eyes, used to play.

Isabel Belarsky mentioned on several occasions how people would react when Belarsky sang this song. She told me of people sobbing, and sometimes fainting.

Belarsky knew that these songs would be meaningful for his audience. Singing in Yiddish was not just a symbolic gesture, for he knew that his audiences could understand the stories he was telling. Belarsky’s songs were significant not only to first-generation Jewish Americans, but also to those

who had been born in this country during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many were raised in areas that were primarily Jewish and where Yiddish was spoken at home. So for many second-generation Jewish Americans as well, there was a strong emotional attachment to what he sang.

In choosing his programs—including Yiddish folk material, Hasidic niggunim and Yiddish art songs—Sidor Belarsky was ever careful to pick items that meant something special to Jewish Americans. Whether to conjure up images of the Old Country or to evoke the desire for a return to Zion, he was extremely aware of the texts that he sang and how they affected his audiences. We know this because Yiddish songs were included in his programs year after year. Belarsky's use of Yiddish texts made for a powerful combination that usually evoked a strong emotional reaction from the audience. However, there is still another element of Belarsky's popularity among American Jews: the melodies to which these texts were set, folk-like and often based on synagogue motifs, which signaled to the audience that this was Jewish music.

Belarsky employed his musical artistry to relate many folk tales—through Yiddish songs—about Jewish life in Eastern Europe. American Jews wanted to assimilate into the American landscape, but they did not wholly reject certain ethnic expressions, such as music. Yiddish folk song gave Belarsky the opportunity to musically transport this socially and culturally mobile audience—beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1970s—back to a time that reflected many different events, both sad and happy, in the lives of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

## Belarsky's Contribution III

### **The lesson for today's cantors**

The singing of simple Yiddish folk songs to Jewish audiences can be a highly moving experience for performers as well as listeners. Belarsky was able to touch his audiences because they understood the language, the music, and related to the meaning of the text. Why shouldn't contemporary Jewish American audiences have the opportunity to hear Jewish music sung that meets them on the three levels where they are at: the English language, music that's recognizably Jewish, and the song's meaning?

Although some of the American Jewish folk-style music being written today is not as sophisticated as Lazar Weiner's, it nevertheless has a right to be sung with pride, elegance and musical quality, just as Belarsky would sing them. It must also be remembered that Belarsky did not only sing simple Yiddish folk

songs. He sang difficult and dissonant art music (Weiner's compositions) as well as operatic arias.

As a teacher, Belarsky taught his students how to interpret Yiddish song. Besides his important legacy in the musical life of Jewish America during his career, he also left an important message: that Jewish music—whether simple or complex—can be meaningful for the listening audience. But to touch audiences fully one must be able to convey the subtle nuances imparted by the music. Jewish Americans, who live farther and farther from the language of Eastern Europe and the immigrant experience, deserve to have music sung that will also connect to them, just like the Yiddish folk song and lyrics did for Belarsky's audiences. That is why the folk-like music of a composer like Debbie Friedman is so popular today. Not only does it offer melodies to which modern audiences relate, it often combines Hebrew and English versions of selected liturgical texts into one song. This insures that the audience will be able to relate to the music on three levels: the language, the text and the melody.

It becomes the responsibility of each generation to try and learn about the Jewish traditions of preceding generations. Today's and tomorrow's generation must be able to make an attempt to learn what moved previous Jewish generations. Though these songs may never touch audiences the way they did seventy or eighty years ago, they can still tug at us emotionally and still be meaningful to us, though in a different way. I believe this coincides with Belarsky's wishes. As he so eloquently put it in the introduction to his 1970 *Songbook*,

My life has been and continues to be devoted to discovering, reviving, and presenting our exciting heritage of songs, bringing them to the attention of those who wish to pass them on to succeeding generations.

*When the Masters* essay from which this article is excerpted first appeared in the **Journal of Synagogue Music** in December 1995 (Vol. 24, No. 2), Joel Colman was cantor and music director of Greenwich Reform Synagogue in Greenwich, CT. He graduated from the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in May of 1995 and later served as a cantor in New Orleans.

To hear Sidor Belarsky's artistry on records, visit the Jewish Sound Archive at Florida Atlantic University ([www.fau.edu/jsa](http://www.fau.edu/jsa)).

# “She Who Seeks Shall Find”: The Role of Song in a Hasidic Woman’s Life Cycle

By Ester-Basya (Asya) Vaisman

But you’re not going to find [commercial recordings of the songs] of *khasidische* [Hasidic] girls, there is no such thing, they will not give out such a tape, you won’t see it on a shelf. They won’t sell it in the stores. There will only be hundreds and hundreds of them by girls, hundreds of them, from this camp and that camp, CDs, records, “do you have this play?” “do you have that play?” between them. But it’s not on the market, you won’t find it, you won’t see it, you won’t hear it. You won’t even know it exists. It’s amazing, you go to camps, every single summer, I can’t tell you how many songs are produced and sung, and plays. Every year. I would say hundreds of songs. And they just don’t make the market. And they’re all beautiful, they really are. They’re really beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

“You won’t even know it exists”—these telling words, spoken by Suri Gold, a young Hasidic woman who lives in Borough Park, are indicative of the private status of contemporary Hasidic women’s songs. I met Suri while I was doing fieldwork for my dissertation on the Yiddish songs and singing practices of contemporary Hasidic women. *Kol b’ishah*, a Jewish religious regulation on a woman’s voice, prevents Hasidic women from publicly performing or commercially recording songs, as the law stipulates that their voices may be sensually attractive to men.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while Hasidic men’s music has been collected, published, and analyzed to an extent, virtually no research exists outside of the community on the enormous repertoire of the Hasidic women’s songs.<sup>3</sup> Due to the insular nature of Yiddish-speaking Hasidic communities,

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1 Suri Gold, a 25-year-old Tosh Hasidic woman, interview with the author, April 2007. The names of all informants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

2 The *Kol b’Ishah* prohibition can be traced to the Babylonian Talmud, Bera-  
chot 24a, which states “A woman’s voice is *ervah* (an erotic stimulus), as it is written, ‘For your voice is pleasing and your appearance attractive’ (Song of Songs 2:14).” This line has been interpreted to mean that a woman’s voice could lead a man to engage in impure thoughts and possibly actions, and thus it is prohibited to him; it is generally accepted that this prohibition applies only to a woman’s singing voice, and not to her speaking voice. *Kol b’Ishah* usually does not apply to a woman’s immediate relatives, such as her husband, brother, father, or son, except when the man is praying or when the woman is menstruating, though in Hasidic circles there are restrictions even on family members.

3 The studies most relevant to this paper include Mark Kligman, “The Media and the Message: The Recorded Music of Brooklyn’s Orthodox Jews,” *Jewish Folklore*

information on this subject can be obtained only through fieldwork, which consists of identifying the Yiddish-speaking informants, approaching women directly, and conducting interviews.

I established contact with informants in several ways. In some cases, I approached individual women on the street and asked, in Yiddish, if they knew any Yiddish songs and if they had time to meet in order to discuss and sing these songs. My ability to speak Yiddish often sparked the woman's curiosity sufficiently for her to agree to a later meeting. Once contact with one woman was established, it became easier to interview her family members. On occasion, the woman introduced me to her neighbors or friends, but often, especially in the Satmar community, women refused, claiming that no one else in the community would agree to be interviewed. In other cases, I established contact through common acquaintances. I also visited several Hasidic girls' schools and observed school performances and rehearsals, graduations, and classes in which teachers taught songs. My observations in this paper are based on fieldwork I conducted over the past four years in Brooklyn, Jerusalem, Rehovot, London, and Antwerp with Hasidic women from the Satmar, Bobov, Pappa, Vizhnits, Tosh, Belz and other communities.<sup>4</sup>

Not only are outsiders to the community unaware of events at which female singing takes place among Hasidim, but many Hasidic men are not even conscious that singing plays a role in the lives of their mothers, wives, sisters, and even daughters. Because of the lack of emphasis placed on engagement in activities outside of the religious and home spheres, the women themselves

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*and Ethnology Review* 16, no. 1 (1994): 9-11; Mark Kligman, "On the Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music in Brooklyn," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 23 (1996): 259-93; and Velvel Pasternak, *Songs of the Chassidim: An Anthology* (New York: Bloch Pub. Co, 1970-1971). Two significant works on Lubavitch women's music do exist, Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) and Ruth Rosenfelder, "Hidden Voices: Women's Music in London's Lubavitch and Satmar Hasidic Communities" (PhD diss., City University, 2003), but my research concerns non-Lubavitch Hasidic women, as explained below. My work also differs significantly from Ruth Rosenfelder's in that she analyzes women's song only in London Hasidic communities, whereas I conducted research in the United States, Israel, and Belgium, as well.

4 My research excludes Lubavitch Hasidim, because this group differs significantly from the other Hasidic groups. An important aspect of Lubavitch philosophy is *kiruv* (outreach to non-religious Jews). Because of outreach activities, Lubavitch Hasidim engage in much more contact with the world outside their community, and a much higher percentage of this community's members come from non-Hasidic families. As a result, Yiddish is not the primary language of Lubavitch Hasidim, and their music is much more heavily influenced by non-Hasidic sources.

sometimes do not realize that they know songs and engage in singing until prodded with specific questions.

Yet singing does indeed occur among women and especially girls. This paper will explore the role that singing plays in the lives of Hasidic women and girls at different stages of their life cycles. Varying with a woman's age and Hasidic group, the opportunities for listening to and engaging in singing are numerous and diverse, ranging from simply listening and singing along to tapes while doing housework to writing songs and directing choirs for elaborate school productions.

I observed three kinds of singing events at schools—singing used as an educational tool in the classroom, practicing singing at graduation rehearsals, and singing at school performances. I also attended charity events at which singing took place. Because of the private nature of many of the other occasions at which female singing occurs, however, I was unable to personally observe many of the events that I will describe. Fortunately, the in-depth interviews that I conducted with women of different ages provided much information about the way Hasidic women use song in everyday life.

During my interviews, I noticed that women gave very similar answers when asked about singing contexts; it seems that both within and across Hasidic groups, the venues for listening to and participating in song are fairly consistent within each age group. Because of these similarities and because of my inability to observe events firsthand, I found that the most efficient method of describing my findings is to offer a composite picture of the role of song in a typical Hasidic woman's life cycle using the device of a fictional family. This approach offers a more complete look at the various occasions when singing occurs. I extend the composite device only through the first half of the paper, subsequently moving on to a more conventional, documented discussion of provenance, authorship, and perceptions of singing.

Current trends in anthropology prescribe using an ethnographic approach to describe findings (depicting events observed first-hand) and underscore writing reflexively to account for the subjectivity of the ethnographer's perspective (see works by Ellen Koskoff, Michelle Kisliuk, Clifford Geertz, and Jean-Paul Dumont, for example).<sup>5</sup> The composite approach is often criticized

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5 See for example, Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, eds. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Ellen Koskoff, ed. *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Michelle Kisliuk, "(Un)doing Fieldwork: Sharing Songs, Sharing Lives," in *Shadows in the Field*, eds. G. F. Barz and T. J. Cooley, 183-205; Jean-Paul Dumont, *The Headman and I: Ambiguity and Ambivalence in the Fieldworking Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).



for neglecting regional and individual differences. A work in Jewish Studies that is famously critiqued for misrepresentation through this approach is Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's *Life is with People*.<sup>6</sup> The erasure of geographic and class differentiation of the communities described in the book creates an overly simplified picture of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

Precedents for successfully presenting a community with the usage of composite informants do exist, however, and have been seen as especially useful in describing "the life cycle or the developmental cycle of domestic groups."<sup>7</sup> Both studies of Hasidic communities and works of anthropology in other areas use this method. Rhonda Berger-Sofer's dissertation uses a composite family to describe a typical Hasidic woman's daily routine in the neighborhood of Meah She'arim, Jerusalem;<sup>8</sup> Jay Mechling's *On My Honor* describes two typical weeks in a boy scout camp based on the author's experiences of attending the camp over twenty years;<sup>9</sup> Renato Rosaldo's *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History* describes the life cycle of Ilongot males (a tribe in the Philippines) in a composite biography based on his knowledge of a number of men at various phases of their lives;<sup>10</sup> and Bruce Macleod's *Club Date Musicians: Playing the New York Party Circuit* discusses the typical experiences of musicians in New York who play "Club Dates," based on interviews and conversations with more than 100 musicians.<sup>11</sup>

With an awareness of the potential problems inherent to this approach, I have tried to guard against making generalizations and have tried to paint as representative a picture as possible. In those cases where experiences of informants diverged, I have tried to indicate the differences in the text. Furthermore, I am using a family consisting of several female members rather than a single woman in my description to ensure that I present the role of song only in contemporary times rather than longitudinally. Each family member

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6 See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Introduction," in *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog (New York: Schocken, 1995), ix-xxviii.

7 Renato Rosaldo, "Reflections on Interdisciplinarity," in *Schools of Thought: Twenty-Five Years of Interpretive Social Science*, eds. J. W. Scott and D. Keates (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

8 Rhonda Berger-Sofer, "Pious Women: a Study of the Women's Roles in a Hasidic and Pious Community, Meah She'arim" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1979).

9 Jay Mechling, *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

10 Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

11 Bruce Macleod, *Club Date Musicians: Playing the New York Party Circuit* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).



thus represents one stage of the life cycle. Now I am pleased to introduce to the reader to the Berenboim family.

## II. The Berenboims—A Composite Life Cycle

From the time Rivky Berenboim is born, her mother rocks her to sleep in the evenings with a lullaby.<sup>12</sup> “Shluf shoyrn, mayn tayere sheyfele, makh shoyrn tsi dayne zise oygelekh, shluf shoyrn, shluf, in a zise shluf, ay-li-liu-li-liu” (Sleep already, my dear lamb, close already your sweet eyes, sleep already, sleep, in a sweet sleep, rock a bye).<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Berenboim, a Satmar woman in her late 30s living in Williamsburg, had sung this same lullaby to her two older daughters, Gitty and Suri.

As Rivky grows older, she starts to pick up words and phrases from the children’s songs her mother sings with her, often accompanied by related motions: “Ikh hob tsvay fiselekh tsi kenen gayn, ikh hob a zise kepele tsi far-shtayn” (I have two legs to be able to walk, I have a sweet head to be able to understand).<sup>14</sup> Even from the early age of two or three years, the songs Rivky hears and sings teach her important lessons about faith in G-d.<sup>15</sup> “Vus zugt men far dem alemen?” (What do we say for all these things?) asks the next line in the body-part song; “Burekh hashem!” (Thank G-d!) is the emphatic answer.

Rivky’s little brother, Moishy, less than a year younger, hears and sings most of the same songs as Rivky until they start kindergarten at the age of six. Mrs. Berenboim, like many other Williamsburg mothers, gets many of these songs from Yiddish children’s tapes, which are readily available in the local neighborhood bookstore. Rivky’s favorites are the *Kinder Classics* (Children’s Classics) albums, which teach her about giving charity and honoring

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12 Rivky and her family are imagined composite characters based on information about contexts for singing in a Hasidic woman’s life provided by a number of informants.

13 Song: *Shluf shoyrn*, Sleep, already. Note on Yiddish: Yiddish text, as quoted in the speech of Hasidic women and in song lyrics, is transcribed in Hassidic Yiddish, a mixture of Polish and Hungarian dialects (using a modified YIVO system). Yiddish words that appear individually within the text are transcribed using Yivo orthography with an English translation (as it appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*) where applicable. Titles of albums are spelled the way they appear on the album cover.

14 Song: *Ikh hob a matuneh*, I have a present.

15 In keeping with Hasidic avoidance of committing to written form any name that can be construed as a direct reference to the Holy One, I have used the incomplete spelling: “G-d.”

her mother and father. The tapes (or CDs), recorded by male singers or boys' choirs, are often playing in the background when the children play, keeping them occupied while their mother tends to her chores.

On Fridays, Rivky and Moishy sing along to the *Heyliger Shabbos* (Holy Sabbath) album from the *Momme Lushen* (Mother Tongue) series, learning through song about preparing for the Sabbath by putting away their clothes and toys and helping their mother set the table. After their father comes home from *shul* (synagogue) on Friday night, the family sits down to a festive *Shabbos* meal, throughout which they sing *zmires* (traditional Sabbath songs in Hebrew), led by the father. By age three, Rivky already knows that it is forbidden to use electricity on *Shabbos*, and when Moishy crawls to the tape player on Saturday and tries to turn it on, Rivky runs over to stop him.

After Rivky starts kindergarten at age six, she learns many new songs from her teacher. The lyrics to most of these songs are made up by the teacher or the principal of the kindergarten and are printed in newsletters that Rivky brings home every week to share with her mother.<sup>16</sup> The melodies of the songs are usually borrowed from old *niggunim* (tunes traditionally composed and sung by Hasidic men) or other well-known songs, which makes it very easy for Mrs. Berenboim to learn the new songs.<sup>17</sup>

The songs taught in kindergarten and elementary school are on a wide variety of topics, and they are generally short and simple, consisting of one or two stanzas. Many of these songs teach Rivky and her classmates about the stories in the Torah with simplified rhyming vignettes, like

A kalle zolsti zikh'n far Yitskhok mayn zin,      (You must find a bride for my son Isaac,  
Nisht kayn fremde maydl, nor a yiddish kind.      Not a foreign girl, but a Jewish child.  
Vaser far di kemlekh hot Rivke gegeybn,      Rebecca was watering the camels,  
Tsi tin a toyve iz geven ir shtreybn.      She yearned to do a good deed.)<sup>18</sup>

There are also songs associated with rituals and with activities for the day. As one teacher (a Belz woman) said about the varieties of children's songs, "Every subject has a song. If it's cleanliness, it's a cleanliness song, if it's days of the week, what month, when the moon is small, the moon is full, all that is in Yiddish [children's] songs."<sup>19</sup> Here's one about the Penitential season.

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16 Dvoyre Horowitz, interview with the author, March 2007.

17 Horowitz 2007, and Esty Kahan, interview with the author, March 2007.

18 This story is based on Genesis 24, in which Abraham asks his servant to go back to his home to find a wife for his son Isaac. The servant finds Rebecca, who demonstrates her worthiness by offering to water the servant's camels after he asks her for a drink.

19 Rokhl Steiner, interview with the author, November 2004.

Roysh hashuneh iz gekimen,  
Me bluzt shoyfer: tu tu tu!  
Tatte, momme, shvester, brider,  
Zayt mir moykhl, ikh ti tshiveh.

(Rosh Hashanah has arrived,  
We blow the shofar: tu tu tu!  
Father, mother, sister, brother,  
Please forgive me, I repent.)

In the spring, with Passover approaching, Rivky practices the four questions that she will recite during the Passover Seder. The teacher teaches them line by line, each Hebrew phrase followed by the Yiddish translation. While they are learning, the girls yell out the questions together as loudly as they can, encouraging enthusiasm and participation. After much practicing, the teacher calls up the girls, one at a time, to sing a verse in front of the class to demonstrate their knowledge. Each girl gets a star sticker for successfully passing the challenge. Rivky proudly brings her lyric sheet home, the shiny star next to each verse signifying that the whole song is memorized.<sup>20</sup>

As the school year draws to a close, Rivky prepares for the pre-one graduation, a festive event marking the completion of preschool. There are many songs to learn and stage directions to memorize from the script prepared by the principal. Mrs. Berenboim helps out by sewing some of the colorful costumes to be used in the performance. Since there are only girls in the class, Rivky will be playing the role of a little schoolboy, and the skirt of her costume has to be gathered at the bottom to make it look like trousers.<sup>21</sup>

The graduation is not the only performance in which Rivky participates. Halfway through first grade, there is a party to honor the fact that the girls have begun praying from the *siddur* (prayer book), after having learned the alphabet. Mothers, grandmothers, and even great-grandmothers attend this celebration, at which there is much singing.<sup>22</sup> In the winter, there is a big party and auction to raise money for *tzedakah* (charity), at which Rivky sings in a choir.

Rivky's older sister, Gitty, is 12 years old and already in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The songs she learns in school and summer camp are much longer and more complex than the ones Rivky knows, ranging from two to ten stanzas. The songs fall into several categories. There are songs that teach Gitty about her responsibilities as a Hasidic woman, particularly her future role as a mother and preserver of tradition in her family: *Shtayt a boym* ("There Stands a Tree"). These songs often overlap with the *Shabbos* songs, which describe the mother

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20 This episode is based on the author's observation of a Satmar preschool class in Williamsburg, April 2007.

21 For more about this method of getting around the prohibition for women and girls to wear men's clothing in school plays, see Ruth Rosenfelder, "Hidden Voices: Women's Music in London's Lubavitch and Satmar Hasidic Communities" (PhD diss., City University 2003), 155.

22 Khane Feldman, interview with the author, January 2005.

lighting candles and praying for her family: *A Haylike Shtilkayt* (“A Sacred Silence”). Other Sabbath songs emphasize the festive yet soothing atmosphere and review the commandments for the day, much like the Hebrew *Shabbos zmires* that the men sing: *Oy shabbos koydesh* (“Oh Holy Sabbath”).

Songs about faith and trust in G-d belong to another significant category in Gitty’s repertoire. They teach Gitty and her classmates that they are never alone—in every hardship, through all troubles, G-d is with them, and everything happens according to His will: *Dertsayl ikh* (“I Tell You”). Related to these are songs about *golus* (exile) and *geulah* (redemption). Sung year-round, but particularly around the time of *Tisha B’Av* (the Ninth of Av, a midsummer fast day commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples), these songs remind the girls that however comfortable their lives may seem, they are perpetually in danger until the coming of *Moshiakh* (the Messiah) *Bi-yerusholayim* (“In Jerusalem”). The perils of exile are illustrated most forcefully in the final major category of teenage girls’ songs—Holocaust songs: *Di Dray in nayntsik kadoyshes* (“The 93 Martyred Young Women”).

In school, Gitty’s day is split up into two halves: “Yiddish”—or Jewish—subjects in the morning with one teacher, and “English”—or secular—subjects in the afternoon with another teacher. It is the “Yiddish” teacher who teaches Gitty the songs mentioned above. She hands out lyric sheets to all the girls and teaches them the melody by ear, line by line.<sup>23</sup> Gitty’s 55-year-old aunt remembers that when she was growing up, before photocopying was available, the teacher would have to dictate the songs to the girls, who wrote them down in their notebooks.<sup>24</sup> Sheet music is not used for singing by girls in the Hasidic community.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes the girls bring a tape recorder to class and record the teacher singing, so that they can practice the melody at home by listening to the tape.<sup>26</sup>

In Gitty’s class, her “Yiddish” teacher brings in a new song every week to teach the girls, but in other classes, songs are taught more sporadically, or in preparation for an upcoming school play.<sup>27</sup> While in the Satmar school there is not a specific subject with which singing is associated, at the Pupa school a few blocks away, the fifth-grade English teacher teaches a separate subject

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23 Leye Levinson’s daughter, interview with the author, April 2007.

24 Khave Bernstein, interview with the author, November 2007.

25 Several informants have told me that only the girls who learn how to play an instrument know how to read sheet music, and even within that group, not everyone learns notation, since many girls learn by ear or experimentation (interviews with Khave Bernstein, Dvoyre Horowitz, Suri Gold, and Leye Grinberg). Also see Ruth Rosenfelder, “Hidden Voices”, 140.

26 Leye Levinson’s daughter 2007.

27 Simi Spitzer, interview with the author, May 2008, and Gold 2007.

of poetry and songs.<sup>28</sup> The school plays always include much singing. Some songs are sung by a choir of 20-30 girls, with several girls soloing, while others are sung entirely by one soloist, usually in place of a monologue.

Gitty also learns songs in the choir she sings in, after school. Sixth grade is the last year when Gitty's choir can perform at all-women's charity evenings, since Satmar girls are not allowed to sing outside of the school or camp setting after age twelve.<sup>29</sup> The charity evenings are for a variety of causes and usually involve an auction and a slide show with singing.<sup>30</sup> For instance, when the grandfather of one of Gitty's friends passed away, the choir performed at a charity evening in honor of the grandfather, singing songs about him in his memory.<sup>31</sup> At another party with singing, money was raised to help out a mother of a newborn baby.<sup>32</sup>

After age 12, Gitty is still able to perform songs at summer camp, for a "*haymish*" audience (usually used to mean "Hasidic", the term in this case also implies a closed audience of other camp attendees and sometimes close family members, at events where tickets are not sold to outsiders).<sup>33</sup> Every Friday night, the girls gather together after the Sabbath meal to sing. At Gitty's camp, there are two heads of singing, and there are four singing counselors who help them. These six (older) girls are usually considered to be good singers, and they sing together for a little while in front of the other campers. After this portion of the evening, song booklets are distributed, and everyone sings together from the booklets, led by the counselors. Some of these songs are written by the counselors themselves each year, while others are older songs from previous years of camp. Every week, the singing heads prepare new song booklets. Gitty's mother, Mrs. Berenboim, remembers that when she was young, there was only one booklet for the whole summer, and the same songs were sung every week.<sup>34</sup>

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28 Kahan 2007.

29 Leye Levinson, interview with the author, April 2007, and Leye Grinberg, interview with the author, June 2008. For more on this prohibition, see Ruth Rosenfelder, "Hidden Voices", 147-148. In London, Belz Hasidic girls are allowed to act until age 16 (interview with Belz woman, March 2008).

30 Simi Spitzer, interview with the author, May 2008.

31 Horowitz 2007.

32 Levinson 2007.

33 In an interview, Leye Grinberg, said "In camp for example they can be older than 12 years old [when they] go on stage and sing. But not for strangers. Only for their own camp. For example, Satmar makes beautiful, really nice color wars (explained in the paragraph below) and all those things, they could make a lot of money [by selling tickets to outsiders]. But the Rebbe didn't allow. Only amongst themselves" (June 2008).

34 Interviews with Leye Grinberg (June 2008), Simi Spitzer (May 2008), Dvoyre

Singing is also a big part of the camp-wide “color war”. For this activity, each bunk in the camp is assigned a color, and it competes with the other bunks at ball games, making a banner, and making a song.<sup>35</sup> Each event can earn points for the bunk, and Gitty is very excited when the song she helped to write wins in color war. In addition to color war and Friday night gatherings, singing is part of camp assemblies and plays, which are very similar to the ones done at school. When Gitty returns from camp and shares the new songs she learned and helped write that year with her mother, Mrs. Berenboim laughs, exasperated, at the complicated melodies. During the school year, Gitty often gets together with friends to talk and sing, repeating the songs from camp and school.

At the end of eighth grade, Gitty spends several weeks preparing for her graduation, which will mark the transition to high school the following year. She learns two new songs for the graduation—a song thanking her mother and asking G-d to heed her prayers, and a song about the Satmar Rebbe.

As the day draws nearer, the girls go to the auditorium to rehearse. They sit around the stage in assigned chairs, and three head teachers give instructions into microphones. Gitty is in the first group of girls to come up to the front of the auditorium to sing. “Sing loudly, on the beat,” says a teacher. She directs the singing by using her fingers to count off the beats and moving her hand up and down to keep the rhythm. She addresses some of her remarks to the “*harmony maydelekh*” (harmony girls), telling them to sing faster or slower. Male construction workers pass through the auditorium, but the singing continues.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the song, a different group of girls comes up to the front. As they sing, the teacher instructs them on ways to sing different parts of the song: “Shtark!” (Strong!), “Ruik!” (Peaceful!), “Es zol zayn hartsik!” (It should be heartfelt!). One line of the song is particularly difficult. “Di pauzes zaynen nisht genig shtark” (the pauses are not strong enough), she tries to explain.<sup>37</sup>

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Horowitz (March 2007), Leye Levinson (April 2007), and Suri Gold (April 2007).

35 Gold 2007.

36 Ruth Rosenfelder (“Hidden Voices”) observed similar occurrences at Satmar and Lubavitch performances that she attended. Men assisted with changing scenes at the Satmar girls’ production, and a male camera operator was present at the Lubavitch one. Rosenfelder writes that her informants justified the presence of men by saying that they are “strangers to the community,” so the same rules do not apply to them. Another explanation was that “a man’s presence among women is tolerated as long as there is no alternative” (149).

37 This episode is based on the author’s observation of a Satmar eighth grade graduation rehearsal in Williamsburg, May 2007.



On graduation day, the auditorium is filled with mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. Paper packets in clear plastic sheathes, containing the program, a booklet the students made to thank their teachers, and a booklet of texts to be read, are distributed to everyone in the audience. Women take pictures throughout the event. Chairs are moved around and squeezed into tight spaces to allow families to sit together, or to afford an older grandmother a better view of the stage. One side of the auditorium is occupied by long tables covered with refreshments: cookies, cakes, and soda await the end of the formal part of the afternoon.

About fifteen minutes after the scheduled start time, the ceremony begins. A teacher gives an introductory speech, after which the graduating girls come out dressed in matching white blouses and black skirts. As they take their positions, standing and sitting in two rows on the stage, several of the girls come up to the microphones at the front of the stage. The microphones unfortunately do not work, and several minutes go by as teachers come up to the stage to try to fix them. Finally, the girls end up reciting a poem as loudly as they can without the assistance of sound equipment. They take turns, two girls coming to the front at a time to recite one line each. A second teacher then speaks, introducing the class speaker. The girl gives a speech, thanking the teachers and principal on behalf of the class.

Next on the order of the day are the songs. In addition to the two new songs the girls learned, they also sing their school theme song, proclaiming the importance of their education. Finally, the *rebbetzin* (wife of the *rebbe*) comes to the stage to distribute the presents to the girls. As the singing continues in the background, the *rebbetzin* calls out the name of each girl, who comes up to receive her present—a *siddur* and a diploma. When all presents have been handed out, women and girls line up by the refreshment tables, chatting about the afternoon's festivity.<sup>38</sup>

Rivky and Gitty's sister Suri is 18 years old. She has just finished school and is engaged to be married. The Saturday before her wedding, there is a party called the "*Shabbos kalleh*" ("the Sabbath bride"). Suri's girlfriends come together for *shalosh seudos* (the third meal of the Sabbath), and there is much singing, both of Yiddish songs and of *zmires* such as *Mizmor l'dovid*. (Psalm 29).<sup>39</sup> On the day of the wedding, before the ceremony, while the bride

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38 This episode is based on the author's observation of a Satmar eighth grade graduation in Williamsburg, June 2007. While the eighth grade graduation is generally the last major school performance for Satmar girls, the Pupa school puts on a play with singing in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and Bobov also stages productions with high school girls.

39 Interviews with Rokhi Davidon (August 2005), Esty Kahan (March 2007), Leye Levinson (April 2007), and Khavé Bernstein (November 2007). Esty Kahan mentioned that the amount of singing at a *shabbos kalleh* varies from class to class, noting

is being prepared to go to the *khupah* (wedding canopy), several girls take turns singing to her. One of Suri's friends even composes a new text to be sung to Suri for this momentous occasion.<sup>40</sup> In the three sections of this song, the narrator asks the bride, on this important day, to pray for her own well-being, her parents, and the Jewish people, since G-d pays special attention to the bride on the day of her wedding. The melody of the song is in a style similar to recitative, evoking the male *badkhn* (traditional wedding jester and master of ceremonies) style. At the wedding itself, there are male musicians entertaining the audience with vocal and instrumental pieces.

For the year after her wedding, before her first child is born, Suri works as a teacher in a preschool. She sings with and to her students, teaching them many children's songs. On holidays such as Hanukkah and Purim, when the men are away in the synagogue, Suri gets together with her female friends and relatives and sings holiday songs. She also sings to herself on Friday night, before her husband comes back from synagogue. Soon, Suri gives birth to Malky, a healthy baby girl. After Malky is born, Suri goes to Lakeshore,<sup>41</sup> a recovery home for new mothers, to rest for several weeks. On Friday nights, the young women at the home gather together and sing.<sup>42</sup> When Suri returns home, she sings to her baby in the evenings, as she rocks Malky to sleep.

For the next three to four years, Suri's participation in singing revolves around Malky and Malky's younger siblings, who arrive at one-to-two-year intervals. Most of Suri's school friends sing with their children until the children start preschool, and the young women generally associate singing at this stage of their lives with this context. As the children grow older, Suri's involvement with singing increasingly becomes that of a listener rather than of a performer. She attends musical communal gatherings, such as charity events and the graduations and performances of her relatives, and listens to tapes with her children, but she discovers that it is progressively more difficult to find time to sing. When Suri runs into a friend at the grocery store, each pushing a stroller and holding a small child's hand, they reminisce about their school years, when friends would get together to sing.

Mrs. Berenboim remembers fondly singing with Suri and her younger brothers when Suri was still Malky's age. Despite her busy schedule, Mrs. Berenboim loves to sing even now. She sings while working around the house, while cooking, and even at night, if she cannot fall asleep.<sup>43</sup> Often when she

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that when her classmates gathered at a *shabbos kalleh*, there was a lot of singing.

40 Grinberg 2008.

41 The name of the home has been changed.

42 Spitzer 2008. Simi noted that it is fairly common for new mothers to go away to such a home.

43 Mrs. Berenboim is modeled after Khave Bernstein (interview, November



is home alone, she has a tape playing on the stereo, and she sings along to it. Once a week, Mrs. Berenboim gets together with some other women to sing and say psalms.

Mrs. Berenboim's singing activity is somewhat unusual for her community. Many other women her age feel that they have no time to sing, as they are busy taking care of their large families and often working on the side. By the time women are grandmothers (usually from the age of 40), they think of singing as something that happens mostly in schools and camps or that can be found on tapes. When asked about the role of singing in their lives, women in their 40s, 50s, and 60s respond with statements like "I'm too old for singing," "ask the younger women; I cook and I bake,"<sup>44</sup> "I don't remember any songs,"<sup>45</sup> and "I'm too busy with my 12 kids to sing."<sup>46</sup> Older women sometimes sing along quietly in synagogue or at other men's gatherings when they are sufficiently far away from the men not to be heard, a practice seen by younger women as "*bobbedik*" ("grandmotherly").

Some limited opportunities for singing do exist, and a woman's willingness to find them depends on her affinity to song. One 32-year-old mother of five said that she is too busy on the phone and with other things when she is home alone to have time to sing, so she usually sings only on Friday nights, after lighting candles. She finds that she has more time to sing, however, when she goes to the country during the summer. Many women and children from the community go to the Catskills when the kids have summer vacation, and there women can sometimes get together and sing if they are in the mood.<sup>47</sup>

A 25-year-old woman with only one child, in contrast, finds time to get together with a cousin occasionally to sing together. She feels that singing is her expression, noting that "If I want to comfort myself, I sing. If I want to laugh, I sing... That is, I really love to sing." Though she has less time now that she is married, she sometimes sings with her sister-in-law, and every once in

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2007), who said in an interview, "When I work, I sing, when I cook [I sing], and a lot of times I sing in my sleep! [Laughs.] When I can't fall asleep, I sing a little."

44 Statement from a Satmar woman in her 50s.

45 Statement from a Satmar woman in her 60s.

46 Statement from a 37-year-old Vizhnits woman.

47 Levinson 2007. In her dissertation, Hella Winston notes that vacations at bungalow colonies can provide an opportunity for women "to indulge in their relative freedom.... In the absence of men [who come up only on the weekends], Hasidic women do not need to concern themselves with modesty issues [as much as usual] and often do not." Hella Winston, "Edgework: Boundary crossing among the Hasidim" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2006), 191. Since modesty (in the form of *kol b'isha*) is a central constraint on singing, relaxed modesty facilitates singing opportunities.

a while she even sings with her friends over the telephone. Every Tuesday, her father's sick unmarried sister comes over to visit, and they sing old songs.<sup>48</sup>

While active singing involvement dwindles with age, older women still find enjoyment in listening to vocal music. Mrs. Berenboim attends girls' performances on *khol hamoed* (the semi-festive intermediate days of a festival) and on Saturday evenings, paying \$15 to \$20 for tickets to shows that raise money for the school. A widowed friend of Mrs. Berenboim's who lives in Borough Park describes one evening gathering of widowed women at which a female performer, herself a widow, came to sing some songs in English and Hebrew with her daughter.<sup>49</sup> Some of Mrs. Berenboim's cousins, who are not Satmar, attend English performances produced by Beis Yaakov (ultra-Orthodox non-Hasidic) schools and musical evenings at which adult women sing in Yiddish, English, and Hebrew, called "Taste of Music."<sup>50</sup> Women in their 80s and 90s who live in nursing homes are able to hear songs from girls' choirs that come every week to sing at the home.

Mrs. Berenboim stands in the doorway of her guest bedroom, watching her oldest daughter Suri, who is visiting for the weekend, put her daughter Malky to bed. "Shluf shoy'n, mayn tayere sheyfele," sings Suri, remembering the lullaby of her childhood. Mrs. Berenboim walks back to the kitchen, smiling and humming quietly to herself.

### III. Provenance and Authorship

"Where do the songs come from? Some are older, some are newer," said Esty Kahan when I asked her if she knows the authors of any of the songs that she sings.<sup>51</sup> In the Hasidic community, unless a song was written and recorded by a popular Hasidic musician, or the author was a *Rebbe* or another important spiritual or religious figure, songs are almost never associated with an author. It is thus very difficult to track down the exact origins of a song, though general information, such as "it was written by a teacher" or "it was written in camp" is sometimes available. This section will describe the provenance of the songs sung and listened to by women on the occasions described in the previous section, such as lullabies, children's songs, and camp songs. Most commonly, the songs are either written by Hasidic women and girls or by Hasidic male songwriters, or they originate from outside of the contempo-

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48 Grinberg 2008.

49 Bernstein 2007.

50 Interviews with Esty Kahan (March 2007) and Dvoyre Horowitz (March 2007).

51 Kahan 2007.

rary Hasidic community. The attitude of Hasidic women to the question of authorship will also be addressed.

The lullabies that mothers sing to their babies come primarily from two sources. Some are folk lullabies that are passed down through the generations from mother to daughter and can be traced back to Eastern Europe (such as *Unter soreles vigele*).<sup>52</sup> Lullabies are often the only songs that women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s remember hearing from their mothers and grandmothers, insisting that all of the other songs that they know were learned in school and camp or from tapes. Other lullabies are newer, with more religious content, composed by male and female Hasidic songwriters and learned by mothers from tapes and CDs recorded by men and boys (such as *Shlofn kinder shlofn*, by Yom Tov Ehrlich).<sup>53</sup> In some rare cases, women make up lullabies for their children on the spot; one informant said, “I sing for my daughter songs I make up myself. I have no idea the next minute what I sang, but I do it.”<sup>54</sup>

As mentioned above, children’s songs are learned from tapes and CDs that the mother plays at home and from teachers at school. The recorded children’s songs are written by both male and female Hasidic authors. In the liner notes of these recordings, male authors generally use their full names. Female authors, however, are inclined to use only their first initial, purposefully making it difficult to determine the gender of the author on some CDs. The melodies of the songs can be original, borrowed from other Hasidic songs, or borrowed from non-Jewish children’s songs (such as *Frère Jacques* and *Oh My Darling Clementine*). In the latter two cases, the original song and composer are almost never referenced or credited. In the case of original compositions, it is not always possible to tell from the liner notes who the composer is, if different from the lyricist.

Similarly, the melodies of songs learned in school are often borrowed from other Hasidic or non-Jewish songs without any indication of this on the distributed lyric sheets, except when the melody is a popular *nign* (singular from *niggunim*) that the parents are familiar with and able to apply to the new words. The words of children’s school songs are usually written by the teacher or principal. One teacher, when I asked where she got the songs that she taught to her students, responded, “Where did I get the songs? From

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52 First published in S. M. Ginzburg and P. S. Marek, *Evreiskie narodnye pesni v Rossii (Jewish Folk Songs in Russia)* (St. Petersburg: Voskhod, 1901).

53 This lullaby describes how little children go to sleep in the evening after putting their clothes away neatly and saying the *Sh’ma* bedtime prayer. Yom Tov Ehrlich, a Stoliner Hasid, was an extremely prolific singer and songwriter whose moralistic songs are still very popular among women, despite the growing trendiness of “pop”-style musicians such as Michael Schnitzler and Mordechai ben David.

54 Grinberg 2008.

here, from there. What I was taught; from other teachers.”<sup>55</sup> Another teacher said, “The songs that I taught my students at school, I didn’t make them, the principal made them.”<sup>56</sup> The same woman later added that during her first year of teaching, she made up some of the songs herself.

Songs sung by teenage girls in middle school and high school are for the most part original works set to borrowed melodies, although this seems to be changing. Leye Grinberg told me that a lot more of the songs (lyrics and melodies) that girls sing in camps today come from tapes than when she was in camp. She explained, “Today is already a more sophisticated world... [At camp gatherings], first there’s a [small] choir with songs made by girls, and afterwards the whole camp [sings together], songs that everyone knows, and everyone knows tapes.”<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, new songs are being created all the time. At camp, counselors and older girls are involved in writing lyrics. Music is almost always taken from other sources.

One teacher, Suri Gold, described how she created a song for one of her classes: “[This is] a song I wrote myself. I made it for my class for before *davening* [prayer]. I took a tune of the *Yerushalayim* song, a song that I remember singing as a kid, [and wrote new words].”<sup>58</sup> She also explained that in general, when women and girls create songs in school and camp, “tunes are written probably less often. They’ll probably take it from interesting places, a tune, like from not common tunes, not common tapes.... They’ll take an old, old, old song like from Modzits or from Bobov, like an old *zmires* song they would sing on *Shabbos*... I mean there are hundreds and hundreds, thousands of songs, *khasidische* songs, that people don’t sing.”

What Suri did not initially mention is that girls also often take melodies from non-Hasidic songs and instrumental pieces. While this practice is officially frowned-upon by teachers and principals, it often goes unpunished or unnoticed, since authorship is almost never attributed to musical pieces.<sup>59</sup> If the teacher or principal in charge is not familiar with the non-Jewish or non-Hasidic melody, she will not be able to recognize its appearance in a Hasidic girl’s song and prevent its performance.

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55 Levinson 2007.

56 Grinberg 2008.

57 Ibid.

58 Gold 2007. The *Yerushalayim* song that she is referring to is a song with a new Yiddish text about the destruction of the Temple, set to a melody that comes from Tisha B’Av liturgy; the original text is in Biblical Hebrew.

59 For more about the prohibition against listening to and singing non-Hasidic music, see Ruth Rosenfelder, “Hidden Voices,” 143, 156.

Girls take these prohibited melodies from various sources. Most commonly, they use melodies that come pre-programmed into the Yamaha or Casio keyboards that they sometimes use for musical accompaniment. These demo tunes are also very frequently used as musical accompaniment to choreographed interpretive dances that form a large part of school and camp performances. When I asked Suri about the usage of these melodies, she responded, “I’m opposed to that [using non-Jewish music for dances in Hasidic girls’ plays]. A lot of times it looks ugly, it looks very bad; the message they’re trying to bring across with the play will not match, like, what’s the point of that music?” Because girls do not often compose music themselves, however, it is hard for them to find suitable music to use. Suri explained, “They do want something good, so they’ll either take it from the demos on the Casio, or I think there are just tapes floating around from camp to camp, from girl to girl, someone who had access got a bunch of them and they would use them. Maybe a course on a tape, a tape without words, stuff like that.”

Practices also vary between Hasidic groups. A Belz woman in London told me that her daughter was “naughty” once and used songs by the musical group ABBA for the melodies in one Hasidic production.<sup>60</sup> Because the headmistress was not familiar with the group’s songs, she did not question the provenance of the melodies and approved their use. The mother did not mention where she and her daughter had learned the songs. A 57-year-old Bobov woman, Khave Bernstein, used to teach in a kindergarten and told me that she sang “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and “You Are My Sunshine” with her students.<sup>61</sup> When she was young, the attitudes towards music from outside the community were much more lenient, and she grew up listening to non-Hasidic tapes and records. It is thus possible that another source for non-Jewish melodies used by Hasidic girls today is melodies taken from songs taught by teachers such as Khave.

In a later part of my interview with Suri Gold, outside music sourcing came up again. We were discussing the fact that Yiddish theater and folk songs, which had been popular before World War II even among Hasidic women, are no longer sung by Hasidim today, with a few exceptions. Suri was explaining that before the popularity of commercial recordings, Hasidic music was not widely available for people to listen to, whereas Yiddish theater songs were, as they were broadcast on Yiddish radio. Suri’s view is that once tapes and records of Hasidic music started being produced, however, such as those

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60 ABBA was a Swedish pop music group, internationally popular from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. Their albums continue to be sold and played on the radio to this day.

61 “You Are My Sunshine” is a popular song credited to Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchell. It was first recorded for Bluebird Records in 1939 by The Pine Ridge Boys.

of Yom Tov Ehrlich, people stopped listening to the secular Yiddish music. Today, Suri believes, no one would use non-Hasidic songs in a production; however, “The music they might yes take without the words, not everybody is so careful. Some people would take the music off a non-religious Jew, write different words to it, and use it. Like in camps.”

Occasionally, girls and women who are particularly talented do write music for the Hasidic songs. As Suri noted, “[There are] very selected people who really sit down and work on a tune... The professionals will make tunes. And sometimes talented girls will too.” This work is almost never acknowledged, however. Both for lyricists and composers, the emphasis placed on humility in the Hasidic community proscribes pride in creative accomplishments. Thus, on the vast majority of lyric sheets for songs, neither author nor composer is indicated. Dvoyre Horowitz, a 24-year-old Satmar woman, said, “The teacher could say where a song comes from if she knows, but she usually doesn’t know. It’s not important. In the English/*Goyish* [non-Jewish] world the ‘author’ is very important, but not for us.” Most interviewees agreed.<sup>62</sup>

Simi Spitzer, a 22-year-old Satmar woman, elaborated:

The teacher doesn’t really say who wrote the song. Unless if it’s something special, for example, have you already heard of Yom Tov Ehrlich’s tapes? If there is something of a special background, she says; otherwise not. Generally people don’t know where songs come from. Sometimes a name can be written on the lyric sheet, but I have no idea who it is.<sup>63</sup>

Leye Grinberg, a 25-year-old Satmar woman, said that if a teacher doesn’t know the provenance of a song, it generally means that the song was *aygene gemakhte*, which literally means “made on one’s own,” here implying that it comes from a girl or woman in the school or in the community, not from a recording or an important religious figure.

Leye also shared with me two songs that she wrote herself: a song that she wrote for a friend who was getting married, and a song she wrote in memory of a young cousin who had passed away. She gave me permission to publish the texts of her songs in my dissertation. When I asked her if I should use her real name to give her credit for the songs, she replied, “I don’t care whether or not you use my name. I mean... however you want. I don’t care. I’m not this type.” This telling example indicates that not only is the community not interested in giving credit to authors, but the authors themselves are also generally not concerned with claiming their rights to a song.

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62 Interviews with Leye Grinberg (June 2008), Simi Spitzer (May 2008), Dvoyre Horowitz (March 2007), Leye Levinson (April 2007), Suri Gold (April 2007), and Esty Kahan (March 2007).

63 Spitzer 2008.



Even when the author of a song is initially known to her friends and classmates, as in Leye's case, once the song is distributed outside of her immediate circle of friends, the link to the author is usually lost. Suri Gold gave an example of how song lyrics get distributed. In order to teach her class a song, she needed to create sheets with the lyrics for the students to look at as they learned the words together. She said, "I probably saw [this song] in a song booklet and just copied it out of there, and I just changed the border, put on the graphics, stuff like that. But the original print, being that they're all identical, if I don't find it in print, I would type it or write it."<sup>64</sup> With such informal methods of distribution, any additional information that may be associated with a song, such as the author, can easily get lost.

Suri also provided much insight into the way teenage girls think of song-writing and the reasons that authorship is not stressed:

The kids in camp, they're not even doing it for anything, they have a knack to it and they just do it. They're so into winning the games and winning the color war... [They want the song to] become a popular hit and for the summer to be great, [rather than being recognized]... Because it's not going to be a future for them, unless they're really into it, and then they'll get into it much, much later. They're just doing it now because it's camp. They don't even [make a big deal about it], "Oh, I made that song." It's like, "Oh, I made it, and next." If someone's great at it, then everyone knows, oh she's great, she makes songs in seconds... she can make songs out of... you know, just standing on the street. But people who would work a whole night and then they'd make a song for color war, it's like three kids working together: one kid, "oh I have a paragraph," "I have this or that, let's compose our own tune." But when they make major plays, they'll hire real gifted girls, and they'll compose, and they'll work with music and they'll stay up nights, but then again it's also for the whole performance, they don't concentrate on the song alone.

Suri's comments indicate that when girls create songs to share with their friends and classmates, their main motivation is the good of their community rather than self-promotion. They are thus not focused on acquiring recognition or associating their names with the songs they create. Sociolinguist Miriam Isaacs observed this phenomenon in her research on Hasidic creativity, as well; she writes, "Conscious artistry for its own sake is discouraged. Piety, and not artistic virtuosity, is the motivation for music or the shaping of words. Thus 'Art' for the glory of the artist... is peripheral to cultural norms."<sup>65</sup>

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64 Gold 2007.

65 Miriam Isaacs, "Creativity in Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish," in *Yiddish Language and Culture Then and Now - Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Symposium of the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization*, ed. L. J. Greenspoon (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1998), 178.

The situation is markedly different in the case of songs with male authors and songs from outside of the community. Songs that appear on commercial recordings are generally attributed to the singer, whether or not he is also the actual author. Most women can identify which of the songs that they sing were written by artists such as Yom Tov Ehrlich, Yonasan Schwartz, and Michael Schnitzler. When lyric sheets of these songs are distributed, however, the name of the author is still often omitted. I asked Suri Gold how she knows who the author of the songs is in those cases, and she responded, “I think of the song, of how it sings on the tape, and I recognize the voice. And then again I keep on hearing the same songs over and over again.”<sup>66</sup>

Occasionally, women misattribute the author of a song, especially for older songs or songs that were not written by Hasidim. The most notable example of this that I have found appears in a book of Yiddish songs published in the Hasidic community, *Dos flam fun amol: niggune yisroel*.<sup>67</sup> “G. Engel,” the book’s compiler, included the names of some of the songs’ authors, but many songs were unattributed. Based on the book’s contents and the fact that only the first initial was used, I believe that G. Engel is a woman, though this fact is difficult to confirm.<sup>68</sup> Among the songs in the book that appear with an author are several songs attributed to “Reb Yossele Rosenblatt, z’l,” including *Vos vet zayn az moshiakh vet kumen* (“What will happen when the Messiah comes”) and *Mayn yiddishe momme* (“My Jewish mother”). Yossele Rosenblatt (1882-1933) was a very well-known Russian-born cantor who flourished in Hungary, Germany, and the United States.<sup>69</sup> Although he wrote many original

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66 Ibid.

67 G. Engel, ed. *Dos Flam fun amol: niggune Yisroel* (The Flame of the Past: the Melodies of Israel) (Brooklyn: G. Engel, 2007).

68 *Dos Flam* reprints some of the songs that appeared in another Hasidic songbook published a year earlier, *Anim Zemiros VeShirim E'erog* (Brooklyn: Zalman Leib Blau, 2006.) This earlier publication (compiled by a male author, Zalman Leib Blau) consisted of two sections: liturgical texts in Hebrew and songs in Yiddish. The Yiddish songs were for the most part attributed to male authors, both Hasidic leaders (such as the Rebbe of Berdichev) and contemporary songwriters (such as Yonasan Schwartz). *Dos Flam*, in addition to selections copied verbatim from *Anim Zemiros*, also contained songs with no authorial attribution that are not found on any recordings. Unlike the songs in *Anim Zemiros*, which may be considered “men’s songs,” many of these latter songs are sung frequently by my female informants during interviews and appear in school and camp song booklets. In contrast to the men’s songs, the unattributed songs often feature female characters (most commonly the mother) and gender-specific subject matter (such as raising children).

69 For more on Rosenblatt, see Jeffrey Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape: Religion and Media in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), pages 26-35.



compositions and performed both Jewish and secular music, he did not write either of the aforementioned songs.

While *Vos vet zayn az moshiakh vet kumen* originated as a folk song from Eastern Europe about the coming of the Messiah,<sup>70</sup> *My Yiddishe Momme* (in English) was written by Jack Yellen (1892-1991) in 1925 in the United States.<sup>71</sup> An instant hit popularized by Sophie Tucker, the song describes a mother as a valuable gift from G-d and declares the importance of appreciating one's mother for her unconditional love. Jack Yellen had been born in Poland and came to America with his family at the age of five. Although Jewish, Yellen was neither Hasidic nor religiously observant. As an extremely prolific lyricist and screenwriter, most of his works were secular, written for an English-speaking popular American audience.

Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt, on the other hand, was an Orthodox Jew who came from a family of Ruzhiner Hasidim. Despite numerous offers of lucrative jobs at the opera, he stayed true to his observance and refrained from accepting engagements that would have required him to break the Sabbath. Rosenblatt did perform and record Yellen's *Mayn yiddishe momme* (in Yiddish), popularizing it for a religious Jewish audience. The fact that the compiler of *Dos flam* attributed the song to the performer is thus not entirely surprising. *Mayn yiddishe momme* appears on two of Rosenblatt's record albums: *Songs of my People* and *The Incomparable*. Notably, neither album cover indicates the authors of the songs on the record, but *Songs* does state: "With very few exceptions, the Yiddish songs sung by Cantor Rosenblatt were not his own compositions." The recording itself has Yellen's name next to the song title in parentheses, but it does not explicitly state that he is the lyricist.

Whether or not G. Engel was aware that Yossele Rosenblatt did not write *Mayn Yiddishe Momme*, the reasons for attributing the song to the cantor are fairly clear. Including a song by a non-religious author in an anthology published by and for Hasidim would be unacceptable in the community. The fact that a respected and well-loved religious performer had the song in his repertoire, however, legitimizes it in this context. Attributing the popular song to an acceptable source allowed for its inclusion in the book.

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70 First published in 1911 by Susman Kisselgof, ed. *Song Collection for the Jewish School and Family* (St. Petersburg, 1911). The editors of a Leo Zeitlin anthology add, "Although it looks as if it could be a Hasidic song, Chana Mlotek... thinks that it is not, and Idelsohn labels it as parodic." Leo Zeitlin, *Chamber Music*, eds. P. Eisenstein Baker and R. S. Nelson (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, Inc., 2008).

71 Jack Gottlieb, *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood*. SUNY Series in Modern Jewish Literature and Culture (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 253.

I observed similar cases of misattribution in my fieldwork. Leye Grinberg sang a song for me in Yiddish that she called *Toyre hakdoyshe* (“The Holy Torah”). She said that the song was by Yom Tov Ehrlich, and that someone had translated it into English. After some research, I discovered that the song was actually originally written in English by Abie Rotenberg, an Orthodox Jewish singer/songwriter who writes in English and Hebrew, and whose songs are not commonly listened to in the Hasidic community.<sup>72</sup> The song is called “The Place Where I Belong,” and it appears on Rotenberg’s album *Journeys Volume 1*.<sup>73</sup> I was unable to find a recording of the Yiddish translation; it is possible that the translation was done by a woman in the Hasidic community.<sup>74</sup> The lyrics of Rotenberg’s song do resemble works by Yom Tov Ehrlich both in style and subject matter, so it is fairly easy to see how one could have been mistaken for the other.

The same informant, Leye Grinberg, sang *Mayn shtetele belz* (My Town Belz), a song of the American Yiddish theater, written by composer Alexander Olshanetsky (1892-1944) and lyricist Jacob Jacobs (1890-1977) for the 1932 play *Dos Lid fun Getto*. Leye thought that this song, too, was written by Yom Tov Ehrlich. *Mayn shtetele belz* belongs to the same genre and category of songs as *Mayn yiddishe momme*, and although Leye’s mistake was unconscious, it occurred for similar reasons. Because songs by non-Hasidic authors are not accepted, *Belz* is usually seen as being a folk song from the “old country”—i.e., Eastern Europe—though it was actually written in America. Since the real author is never associated with the song and his name not written on the lyric sheets, it is understandable that Leye could have assumed the song is by the prolific Hasidic songwriter.

As all of these examples illustrate, the attitude toward authorship in the Hasidic community is quite complicated, particularly in the case of women’s songs. Because of the expectation that women engage in creative processes

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72 Rosenfelder notes, “Abie Rotenberg is a composer who qualifies for Satmar disapproval, given the sect’s uncompromising rejection of Hasidic-pop.” She relates a story, however, of another of Rotenberg’s songs, which became very famous and is regularly performed professionally by Hasidic artists: *Hamalakh* from the *Dveykus IV* album. She writes that none of her informants could identify the song as being by Rotenberg. “Rotenberg’s melody appears to have achieved folk status thereby discarding its ‘pop’ associations. Regarding the omission of attribution Rotenberg stated, ‘Not only would I not be pleased for not receiving credit, I would be disappointed that a song of mine was used without permission’” (Ruth Rosenfelder, “Hidden Voices”, 116).

73 Rotenberg composed only the original lyrics of the song; the melody is an old *nign* from Israel (Binyomin Ginzberg, personal communication, May 2009).

74 An anonymous informant mentioned that this song was performed in a Satmar camp in 1993. She does not know the source of the translation, but she suggested that it could have been done by the camp heads.

solely for the educational or spiritual enrichment of the community and not for personal advancement, women and girls almost never seek to attach their names to their works, unless they earn their livelihood from commercially selling recordings of their pieces. Furthermore, the most common method of distributing songs among girls in the community is on lyric sheets that provide no additional information; thus, any association a song initially had with an author easily becomes lost. The resulting lack of attention to provenance nurtures a tradition of freely borrowing melodies and occasionally even songs from sources from both within and without the Hasidic community. As the outside pieces are incorporated into the Hasidic female repertoire, they undergo the process of acquiring “kosher” Yiddish lyrics and a “folk” status with no connection to the original objectionable author. Those songs in the Hasidic women’s repertoire that are recorded by male Hasidic artists, however, usually are associated with their apparent author.

#### IV. Perceptions of Singing

“Er zingt zeyer hartsik” (the way he sings is very heartfelt) thus answered almost all of my informants when asked how they would describe a good singer. The perceptions that Hasidic women have of singing reveal much about the values of Hasidic society and about the role of *Kol b’ishah*. This section of the article will explore what Hasidic women value in the singing of others, how they perceive their own singing, and how *Kol b’ishah* affects their singing.

During interviews, I asked Hasidic women, “What words would you use to describe someone who sings well?” The answers are revealing: “The way he sings is very *hartsik* [heartfelt], *hartsik* is very good.” “Sometimes someone will have a nice voice, or he sings *hartsik*.” “He sings so that it reaches your soul.” “He sings *hartsik*, he makes someone happy or makes someone cry.” “He sings with heart, naturally, not forced, warm, lively.” “I would say he sings so heartfelt... When you hear him singing, your heart is captured.”

The pattern that emerges from these answers is that importance is placed primarily on the emotive quality of the performance. Although a few of the women mentioned the value of “carrying a tune” or “singing like a bird,” most of them spoke little, if at all, about pitch, volume, vocal range, arrangement, or ornamentation. It appears that listening to singing is perceived as more of a spiritual experience rather than an aesthetic one. Since the Hasidim feel that “music can affect your soul,” the effectiveness of a singer depends on his or her ability to successfully touch the listener’s heart or soul. Suri Gold elaborated:

What makes a voice good? I guess the heart, a big heart. Devotion, a love for songs and singing, wanting to inspire other people, make people's lives happy... Some people can go very high, some people just carry a tune very well, some people sing very heartwarming.

Analogous to the preference for heartfelt singing over pitch or vocal range, when I asked informants what kind of music they like and whom they enjoyed listening to, they emphasized song content over singing ability. "I don't look up to someone just because they can sing nicely. It's really not important. If someone makes a nice song, then I'll be impressed. But singing nicely is not important," said Dvoyre Horowitz. Esty Kahan declared, "For me, content is important, not the voice." Because singing plays the most active role in a woman's life during her school years, women tend to think of songs as vehicles for education and carriers of moral messages. They are thus used to identifying more with the song's content than performance, looking for meaning in the words: "I like [songs] with words, I like when words have a meaning, I like more with [words] than not," said Suri Gold.

My observations of girls' performances confirm the relative insignificance of pitch and vocal range in singing. In most performances, girls perform in choirs, with occasional solos. In performances that are based on a play, the main characters of the play have some solo numbers. I have found that in most cases, the girls chosen to have the solos and lead parts generally do not have the best pitch or vocal range; they often sing off key, sometimes so tunelessly that it is difficult to discern the melody. What does seem to be valued, albeit not consciously, is volume. Women who can sing loudly identify themselves as having good voices, while women who maintain pitch better but sing softly insist that they are not good singers.

There are several possible explanations for this phenomenon. One of the fundamental tenets of Hasidism is the necessity for *kavoneh*, or intent, during prayer. Among men, *kavoneh* may manifest itself in increased volume, singing, and/or dancing to reach higher spiritual levels. Because the vast majority of the songs that women sing are religious or spiritual in nature, I asked several informants if the emphasis on volume was related to *kavoneh*. The informants, however, did not believe this to be the case. Simi Spitzer said that *kavoneh* is reserved for prayer and does not apply to Yiddish songs, regardless of their content.

Simi proposed several other potential reasons for the importance of singing loudly: "When a teacher tells students to sing louder, maybe she wants them to have more spirit and make it more lively, or maybe they were practicing, maybe she wanted it to stick in their heads better? Maybe she wanted them to remember it well." Several informants agreed that increased volume makes

the singing more lively, which improves the learning experience. Suri Gold added that girls who get solos “have to be courageous enough to get up on a stage and sing,” and this courage is often expressed with loud voices.

The preference for loud singing in the performance setting stands notably in contrast to the great care taken to observe the rules of *Kol b'ishah*. In a recently-published book of interviews with female Hasidic educators in Israel, the principal of the Belz Bais Malka school is quoted on this topic:

With regard to the girls' singing, even within the school, we are very careful because *kol b'ishah ervah* (it is forbidden for a man to listen to the sound of a woman's singing voice because is considered erotic). We have very specific conditions for where and when they may sing. Under the age of nine, the student is considered not yet at the age of *khinukh* [education] in this matter. After the age of nine, singing is only allowed with all windows closed and in a place where it is certain that no men are in the vicinity. When we have a school *sholosh seudos* (third Sabbath meal) for the students, it is much easier today than it was years ago. Even ten years ago, without air conditioning here in *Eretz Yisroel* (the Land of Israel) we closed all the windows and it was very hot. But we cannot allow our singing to be heard by men.<sup>75</sup>

The question of *Kol b'ishah* has come up on a number of occasions in my interviews, as well. I asked several informants if they ever feel uncomfortable or frustrated because of the restrictions *Kol b'ishah* places on their singing. Simi Spitzer responded:

Yes often when the brother-in-law comes over and sits at the table [on Friday nights] so I can't sing along *zmires*, oftentimes I would want to sing along but I can't... [Also] it happens sometimes for example that one hears a truck and there's music [coming from the truck] and I would want to sing along, but I don't sing. On the street, you don't sing. Is it hard? No. Doesn't matter. I know that [one must not sing] outside. I grew up with it, so it's not hard.<sup>76</sup>

The description of a brother-in-law preventing women from singing recurred in several other interviews. In every case, the woman expressed feelings of frustration but quickly added that she does not really mind it, since it is mandated by the Torah. Leye Grinberg explained:

Once I had a situation, I was at my father-in-law's house. All the men went to synagogue. We [the women] wanted to sing. But it happened that my

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75 Interview with the principal of the Belz Bais Malka school in B. C. Glaberson, *Educating Our Daughters, Why?: Extraordinary Interviews with Women Educators* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2006), 92.

76 Spitzer 2008.

brother-in-law was there. Then I feel frustrated, because just like that I can feel often frustrated, but we are Jews, we have a Torah and thank G-d!<sup>77</sup>

Leye also mentioned that she can not even always sing in her own home, because she has “paper thin walls” and when her male neighbor is home, he can hear her. During our interview, Leye was able to sing, because the neighbor was at work. She continued, “Friday night, when I hear he goes to synagogue, then I know that I can sing.”

Hasidic women, particularly young women, are very conscious of *Kol b'ishah* and learn to modulate their voices according to the occasion. Later on in the interview, Leye became concerned with the volume of her singing voice, because the window was open. Since I had told her that I have interviewed many other women, she began asking me how the volume of her voice compared to that of my other informants:

I don't want people to hear me outside. Do you think they can hear me outside? Do I sing loudly? The window is open a little. Do I sing more loudly than you've heard other people singing? My voice is loud. You've heard already, you go around listening to singing. Do I sing louder? I have a very loud voice. I ask if it can be heard outside. I hope not.<sup>78</sup>

I assured Leye that it was very unlikely that anyone outside could hear her, considering that her apartment is on the fifth floor of her building.

As with many other aspects of singing, older women tend to be somewhat more lenient with adhering to *Kol b'ishah*. At one point during an interview with Leye Levinson and her daughters, Ms. Levinson opened the window, because the room was getting very warm. Her 11-year-old daughter expressed concern: “Mother, it's *Kol b'ishah*, leave it closed.” Ms. Levinson responded confidently, “Nobody can hear.”<sup>79</sup> The disagreement occurred partially because girls are taught to be especially stringent with the law until they learn when there is or is not a danger of being heard. Older women, however, have more experience and can make educated decisions about when the prohibition is applicable.

The commitment to avoiding *Kol b'ishah* affects women in other ways, as well. I would like to propose that because they associate singing with the dangers of being heard by men, women often have the perception that they do not ever sing or know any songs, even when this is clearly not the case. On a number of occasions, at the beginning of an interview, a woman would deny knowing or singing songs; after some specific leading questions, however,

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77 Grinberg 2008.

78 Ibid.

79 Levinson 2007.



she would agree that she does sing in certain contexts and would proceed to sing extensively.

For instance, when I asked Blumi Klein if she ever sings, she said no. When I prompted, “Even when you’re at home? Or to your children?” she responded, “I sing to myself, to my children a little bit.”<sup>80</sup> Taybl Glickman had told me over the phone that she knew a number of Yiddish songs but did not have a good voice; when I came to her house for the interview, however, she said “I’m not into singing” and insisted that she never sings.<sup>81</sup> When I reminded Taybl of our earlier conversation, she reluctantly conceded that she did know a few songs. When she began singing, it turned out that one of the songs was actually a lengthy ballad to which she knew all of the words.

The most telling example came from Mrs. Brandwein. When I first approached her on the street in Williamsburg, she told me that women do not have time for singing and therefore she could not help me. When I insisted, asking if she could suggest someone else for me to contact, she revealed that she had a notebook full of songs in her purse. The fact that she was carrying songs around was particularly remarkable, because it turned out that Mrs. Brandwein lives in Monroe, not in Williamsburg, and she was in Brooklyn just for the day to visit her elderly mother. I asked why Mrs. Brandwein had brought the notebook, and she replied, “My mother likes me to sing for her... she doesn’t listen to all these tapes and CDs.”<sup>82</sup> Despite Mrs. Brandwein’s initial claims to the contrary, it turned out that she does have time for singing: she sings at least once a week when she visits her mother.

While the restrictions of *Kol b’ishah* do complicate the relationship of women to singing, obliging them to be vigilantly conscious of their environment and the volume of their voices, women, and particularly girls, are able to express themselves uninhibitedly in this medium on various occasions. As Suri Gold observed, “So because we don’t have a drive for it, it’s not public, and it’s not so professional, but it’s great, and the songs really touch people, and that everyone knows.”<sup>83</sup> Even without voice lessons or formal training, women and girls are able to engage in performances that delight the “*haymish*” female audience, as it is the content and emotive quality of singing that is valued in the community.

If I were to leave my readers with one set of lyrics that summed up the role of song in a Hasidic woman’s life cycle while epitomizing the emotive quality

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80 Blumi Klein, interview with the author, November 2004.

81 Taybl Glickman, interview with the author, November 2004.

82 Mrs. Brandwein, interview with the author, May 2008.

83 Gold 2007.

of singing that is valued in the community, it would be the following paean to religious Jewish motherhood:

### Momme

Shtayt a boym, inmitn feld, mit fille  
prakht,  
Mit fil zorg, bavasert ir, tog in  
nakht,  
Shtayt der gertner dort dernebn,  
mit fil getrayshaft, azoy  
ibergegeynbn.

Kikt tsim boym, derzeyt di frukht,  
fin zayn mi,  
Zaftik shayn, mit azoyfil tam iz zi.  
Genisn fin di payres, s'iz tsayt,  
Hanueh fin vos er hot ayngzeyt.

Hazoyrim bedimo—mit azoyfil  
yegieh,  
A sheyvekh farn boyre oylom, a  
groyse zekhiye,  
Baygeshtanen zenen zay fil shturems  
in gefar,  
Mit shireh tsim bashefer derfar,  
Oz yeraneni atsay yuar..

Ki ha-udam der mentsh tsim boym,  
is dokh glayzkh  
Momme mayn, farzayen iz dayn  
fakh,  
Mit tfileh tsi hashem burekh  
shmoy,  
Khanoykh lana'ar al pi darkhoy.

Nisht imzist iz dayn mi, Momme  
mayn,  
Di payres shtayen du rayf far dir  
haynt,  
Ikh blik tsirik, di yurn zikh geplogt,  
Ikh bin dir shildik, azoyfil in deym  
tog.

### Mother

A magnificent tree stands in the middle  
of the field  
With much care it is watered day and  
night,  
The gardner stands nearby,  
With much faithfulness, so devoted.

Looks at the tree, sees the fruit of his  
labor,  
It is juicy, beautiful, with so much  
flavor,  
It's time to enjoy the fruit,  
To derive pleasure from what he sowed.

“They that sow in tears”—with so much  
toil,  
Praise for the Creator of the Universe, a  
great honor,  
They resisted many storms and  
dangers,  
With song to the Creator for this,  
“Then the trees of the forest will sing  
for joy..”

Because a person is similar to a tree,  
Mother of mine, to sow is your trade,

With prayer to G-d, blessed be His  
name,  
“Educate the youth according to his  
ways.”

Not in vain was your labor, mother of  
mine,  
The fruits are here, ripe for you  
today,  
I look back, the years that you toiled,  
I owe you so much on this day.



Hazoyrim bedimoh—mit azoyfil  
yegieh,  
A sheyvekh farn boyre oylam, a groyse  
zekhiyeh,  
Oy ashray li, vi bin ikh zoykhe dertsy,  
Az ikh hob aza momme vi di,  
Aza geshank fin hakudoysch burekh  
hi.

Ver is nokh azoy vi mir, aza bal  
khoyv?  
Far dir, Momme, shildik fil hakores  
hatoyv,  
Oy ashray li, vi bin ikh zoykhe dertsy,  
Az ikh hob aza momme vi di.  
Aza geshank fin hakudoysch burekh  
hi!

“They that sow in tears?—with so much  
toil,  
Praise for the Creator of the Univerise, a  
great honor,  
Oh, I am happy, how could I have earned  
the honor  
To have such a mother as you,  
Such a present from the Holy One, Blessed  
be He.

Who else is as much in debt as am I?  
To you, mother, I owe much gratitude,  
Oh, I am happy, how could I have earned  
the honor  
To have such a mother as you,  
Such a present from the Holy One, Blessed  
be He.

*Ester-Basya (Asya) Vaisman holds degrees in Yiddish and Linguistics from Barnard College and Harvard University, where she is currently writing her dissertation on the subject of this article. A native of Chernovtsy, Ukraine, “where seemingly even the air is filled with Yiddish,” she has undertaken to counteract the trend among most American Jews to dismiss Yiddish as either a dying language or one that is confined to the ultra-Orthodox world. For Asya Vaisman and other researchers like her, the study of Yiddish means not only to read about it in libraries, but to internalize its rich culture by speaking the language every day of one’s life.*

## ***Som Fon Iz Shlekht?! — In Praise of a Cutting-edge Cat*** *By Gershon Freidlin*

This cat cut the 20<sup>th</sup> century in half—his career having flourished at its midpoint, 1947- 1957.

He wasn't really a cat, but a Kohen—whose family name, rather than Katz, likely had been 'Ka"tes,' which—after adjusting for the Lithuanian inflection—stands for *kohen tsedek*, i.e., 'p.c. priest.'

Mickey Katz, 1909-1985—his dates correspond to those of Benny Goodman—was a virtuoso clarinetist, vocalist, swing/klezmer band leader-arranger, comic and *bal-mishpokhe* (family-man), who successfully passed on much of his trade to a son, Joel Gray, (the other one also is no bum). Listen to his original sides, recorded on major labels, plus, to the 1993 CD of his songs by black clarinetist Don Byron, who has been associated with both the New England Conservatory of Music and the Klezmer Conservatory Band (KCB) formed by one-time NEC students.

The Katz presentation at its best is a raucous Yiddish-English mixture, cascading into klezmer riffs and returning to a slightly slower reprise. In purely instrumental selections, he'd take a 'Hava Nagila,' and play it not as a bonfire dance nor as a symphonic special, but as a working band would play it.

Although American-born, his Yiddish was faultless and earthy. He represented the children of immigrant America of that time. His core audience was familiar with Yiddish, but it would pass from their lives. If their children took it up, it would come through the academy—you can demonstrate Katz's language leaps onstage, but you can't teach it in a classroom. You won't hear it at Jewish Studies departments at Columbia, Harvard, NYU or YIVO. His was a stage language, one a salesman might pick up in retelling a joke to prospective customer. Katz ended an era, but he did so consciously and without complaining. He knew and loved show business and accepted its hardships.

So rooted was Katz in the Jewish America of his day that he directly derived from U.S. cultural mustering for the fight against Hitler. Here's the sequence: In 1942, for a Disney movie cartoon, "Donald Duck in Nutziland," Spike Jones and His City Slickers contributed the song, "Der Fuehrer's Face," sung by Carl Grayson. This ditty became a patriotic anthem; I, a generation later, as a rabbi in Connecticut, interpolated it into my Purim Megillah reading. Yet, its popularity did not stop after the World War II dismissal of Grayson from the band, for being more *shikker* than Slicker.

That's when Katz joined Jones as a clarinet sideman and maker of 'glugg-glugg'—a series of throat noises associated with the Slickers—that Katz, after a brief stay with that group—occasionally also used with his own ensembles.

Such sounds would link for the listener Katz with Jones, and showed that Mickey prided himself on two traditions: one Yiddish, the other American. His own bands often included major Jewish-American swing instrumentalists, also practiced in the Yiddish-wedding repertoire.

I have three Katz favorites that parody pop hits of their time: “Mechaye War Chant”—itself a parody of Spike Jones’ parody of “Hawaiian War Chant,” “Kiss of Meyer,” and “Geshray Fun a Vilder Katshe.” The last is spelled in various ways, and is ‘covered’ (given its own later rendition) by the KCB. Its lyrics bear comparing those of “Chicken,” originally recorded by Nellie Casman, and later covered by Henry Sapoznik. The mortal danger to highly articulate fowl strikes close to home, certainly for Jews, where the *shoykhet* (slaughterer) is not a mitzvah-performer, but a villain.

A good parodist brings out meanings from a song that might have escaped even an author; Katz and Jones were major American mid-20<sup>th</sup> century parodists. The aforementioned three of my favorite Katz performances are distinctive for their lack of schmaltz, their listenability—where features can be picked out and isolated, and the dexterity of their blend of languages and musical forms—sectioned off by abrupt halts before jumping to a new section of a song.

Katz could talk *grob* (grossly; read his 1977 autobiography, *Papa Play for Me*), but that was not the essence of his *oeuvre*; nor was it of the Barton Brothers, whose work had inspired Katz’s own career on the Jewish circuit.

In 1968, I chanted High Holiday services at a mid-sized hotel in the Catskills. To my shock and pleasure, after the meal on the first night of Rosh Hashanah, out came the Barton Brothers with their repertoire and vulgar rhymes. They were accompanied now not by the Epstein Brothers Orchestra, as in their prime, but by a solo pianist, kind enough to lend me their microphone the next morning for Musaf.

For years afterward I listened repeatedly to the Barton records. The melding of their jokes and singing with the Epsteins’ playing provides a musical comedy treat of a high order. Gross? They, like Katz, were performing just as the ‘sexual revolution’ was getting under way—not that they were promoting it. Part of their job was to help listeners adjust to greater social freedoms while still maintaining family life. Their vulgarities hopefully aided in achieving that goal. One can still hear the Bartons occasionally on mainstream radio. Michael Savage, a nightly talk-show host, plays their signature song, “Joe and Paul,” when he feels like recreating a more genteel era.

Current Yiddish musical theater offerings often address groups who have till now been deprived of both Yiddish and its lore—like recent immigrants from Russia, or the American-born youth who pick up their knowledge, often

substantial, in academies (with a *shtikl* doctorate thrown in). These fans do not look to either Barton or Katz as primary sources for *momme-loshn*.

A decade ago, while editing *What a Life!*, the English-language bio of the Yiddish musical theater Burstein (Burstyn) family, by Lillian Lux Burstein (Syracuse University Press), I was invited by her to offer the annual Hebrew Actors Union (HAU) memorial *hazkarah* prayer at Mt. Hebron Cemetery in Queens. I felt awed standing before the graves of Rumshinsky, Tomashevsky, Schwartz and Berg (Judith—choreographer for the film, “The Dybbuk”). Lillian Lux is no longer alive, nor is Seymour Rechtzeit, the then HAU president and archivist.

A few years ago I listened to Rechtzeit’s hit recording with Xavier Cugat, of “The Wedding Samba,” aka, *Der nayer sher* (‘ay’ rhymes with ‘my’), by Abe Ellstein. American-born Ellstein is considered, along with Rumshinsky, Olshanetsky and Secunda, a leading composer for the American-Yiddish stage. The KCB did a nice cover of the Ellstein song, using the original lyrics—which are OK by me, but not as ai-yai-yai as the melody. As coda to this essay, I offer my own, Katz-inspired lyrics to *Der nayer sher*:

**Refrain:**

Ayeke-bayke, bella-bella-layke, payk-un-payke, grinzl-payke

Shtum-brum, a-fender-zayke. [Shouted]: Hey, Frances!

Ayke-bayke, bella-bella-layke, payk-un-payke, grinzl-payke

Shtum-brum, a-fender-zip.

A-kookaroo, a mozanyuna,

A brinza, mameliga, a karnatzl, heyse zokn mit a floken.

A-kookaroo, a-mozanyuna,

A shnorkeh, a vaysn mit a bloyen mozanyu.

**Verse:** [whistled]...

**Refrain:**

[Music by Abe Ellstein. Lyrics © 2007 by Gershon Freidlin from his play, *Hey, Frances*.]

**Coda *yeteira*:**

Shortly before I came up with these lyrics, a student taking a doctorate in computers—a neighbor who used to babysit our cats—whose English was

competent but carried the inflection of his native China, asked me for a sentence in Yiddish or Hebrew that he could surprise a professor with who was always bumbling to him some phrase in Chinese.

*Sholem aleykhem, reb yid*, came to mind, but soon passed. The choice became obvious, which the neighbor heard, rehearsed and inflected better than his English-language speech: *Som fon iz shlekht?! ('What's wrong with some fun?!)*—a line from *Mechaye War Chant*.

The professor was bowled over; his soul had been touched from an unlikely source.

If you, too, wish to try the Katzism, remember: everything is in the inflection—plus, do not forget the leer; it will not make you a sleazeball, as it did not make one of the Cutting Edge Cat.

*A frequent contributor, Rabbi Gershon Freidlin, Pittsburgh, serves on the Journal's editorial board. His article "Ad Yom Moto: Life's a Game?" appeared in the Fall 2008 issue. In 1998, at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention of the Cantors Assembly, he sang, "It Shouldn't Happen to a Dog," by Menashe Skulnik, a contemporary of Mickey Katz.*



## Breathmaster: An Insight into the Biomechanics of Great Singing

By Michael Trimble

*Chi sa respirare, sa cantare*

“Who knows how to breathe, knows how to sing”

(Attributed to Maria Celloni, 1810)

On my seventy-first birthday March 15, 2009, I decided to write down for posterity an in-depth record of the biomechanical and psychomotor processes I have studied, compiled, tested and implemented over a 50-year period as professional singer, voice teacher and coach. This long experience has given me many opportunities to learn the essentials of breath development, beauty of tone, stamina, health and longevity of the singing voice. I have given this project a great deal of thought since the first serious opportunity arose to have a book published on this subject in 1980.

One of the problems in writing down all of this information has been to sort out the useful knowledge from the useless knowledge. In order to do this, I have had to find out, objectively, what I have learned that is useful to someone else and what is useful to me in my capacity as teacher, advisor and mentor. Some of what I learned was useful to me as a singer and only to me. Why? Because every voice is unique and every singer is unique. Each singer is made up of a unique combination of anatomy; conditioning; chemistry; strength; natural breath capacity (as opposed to developed breath capacity); musicality; psychological health, and physical health. A teacher must know this and be able to approach each student on this individual basis. Singing is a talent and cannot be learned or taught. It is important to understand that the singer who possesses the ability to match pitches with the voice has a natural talent. The singer must learn the criteria that are required of great singing. In this regard, Buddha's wise words, adopted as the eastern Martial Arts philosophy, offer a useful adage:

“Train the body and the mind will follow...”

### **One thing is absolutely clear and applicable to all singers:**

The foundation on which all great singing is built is the correct breathing method, the inhalation, posture and exhalation of the breath. This psychomotor system response and biomechanical process must be repeated correctly under expert supervision until the body responds habitually to the correct, healthy, muscular coordination of the breathing function. Through repetition, the body integrates the pathways which are correct and eliminates, if incorrect pathways have already been created (bad habits), those which are damaging to good singing and cause physical damage to the vocal cords. Here are what three vocal authorities had to say on the importance of efficient breathing:

In fact, all bad habits of the throat are merely efforts of protection against clumsy management of the breath. Faulty singing is caused by awkward respiration. The foundation of all vocal study lies in the control of the breath. The stroke of the glottis (violent attack) which many singing teachers advise is absolutely harmful to the voice.<sup>1</sup>

It is indispensable, for the singer, to properly take and control the inhalation and exhalation of his breath; for breathing is, so to speak, the regulator of singing.<sup>2</sup>

The lungs and diaphragm and the whole breathing apparatus must be understood by the singer, because the foundation of singing is breathing and breath control... A singer must be able to rely on his/her breath, just as he/she relies upon the solidity of the ground beneath his/her feet.<sup>3</sup>

The first two rules of the historical Bel Canto era of singing<sup>4</sup> (approx. 1820-1920) are: *no action in the throat*, and *no change of emission*. Every singer of the golden age of beautiful singing who wrote a book about their approach to the production of the singing tone, repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the relaxed, totally free throat and proper breathing techniques which permit the throat, tongue and facial muscles to remain free. Professional singers are expected to be able to fulfill the requirements of the operatic repertoire

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1 Giovanni Battista Lamperti (1839-1910), *Vocal Wisdom* (New York: Taplinger), 1931/1957: 5, 13, 6.

2 Manuel Garcia II, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing, Part I* (New York: DaCapo Press), 1984: 45; Garcia is credited with the invention of the Laryngoscope in 1854.

3 Luisa Tetrazzini, *The Art of Singing* (New York: Dover edition) 1975: 11.

4 A Note of Interest: The "reign" of Sir Rudolph Bing at the Metropolitan Opera from 1950 to 1972 is considered by avid opera fans to have been the second Golden Age of Bel Canto.

(and great cantorial repertoire), genre(s) of vocal music that require, by their nature, beauty of tone, projection, flexibility, range, emotional expression, vocal stamina and vocal longevity. At one point in his book, Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) refers to the “massive breathing essential to good singing.”<sup>5</sup>

A list of these singing authors includes Enrico Caruso, Luisa Tetrizzini (1871- 1940), Lilli Lehmann (1848-1929) and Lillian Nordica (1857-1914). I recommend that singers read as much material as possible about the vocal methods of these artists, especially the books written by the artists themselves. It seems obvious, therefore, in order for the throat to remain free while singing or speaking, action must happen elsewhere in the body. It is this process and the combined activities of the muscles of the body and the breathing system that we will explore, and hopefully, begin to understand and practice correctly.

In comparing books on Bel Canto singing, one is convinced that at the time there existed a traditional way one learned to sing, along with an aesthetic that one recognized and strived to attain, to the best of one’s ability. It is no accident that the era of Bel Canto and the Golden Age of hazzanut followed each other historically. One wonders what conditions were present that allowed this to happen; that such marvelous singing should thrive sequentially in two different worlds of expression: in the world of Italian opera and the world of synagogue prayer.<sup>6</sup>

The ability to “know what is good for you” is so rare among singers that it is often never discussed at all. It does not occur to many coaches and teachers to even broach the subject. Yet, when the Metropolitan Opera baritone Robert Merrill (1917-2004) presented a Master Class for singers during my summer opera program at Sarah Lawrence College in 1978, he answered this question very succinctly. During the question and answer period following the Master Class, Mr. Merrill was asked by a young singer what was the most important consideration in order to make a professional career. He answered: “You have to have the talent, gift or intelligence to know what is good for you specifically. You have to be able to run everything through your mind... You will hear a lot of nonsense and garbage, most of which, if you followed the advice given, would eventually ruin your voice!”

Mr. Merrill’s insight brings to mind Mahatma Gandhi’s famous admonition: “It is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming their own right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever,

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5 Enrico Caruso., *The Art of Singing* (New York edition: Dover) 1975: 46.

6 Pamela Kordan Trimble, “Kol Hazzanit: Alternatives to the Vocal Requirements and Expression of Traditional Hazzanut for Women Cantors,” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Vol. 32 (New York: Cantors Assembly), 1972: 105.



and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world.”<sup>7</sup> There will be a few people you meet who may have some good advice for you, but the thing to remember is that everyone you meet has an opinion! You will hear, “I think the tone is too bright... I think the tone is too dark... I think it should be more accented... I think it should be smoother, etc.” One hundred people in a room will give you one hundred different opinions. Which ones do you listen to and which (most, if not all) do you ignore? Most professional singers end up listening to no one. If a singer is lucky, as Robert Merrill was, he or she finds one great teacher/mentor and listens only to the advice of that individual. Mr. Merrill studied with Samuel Margolis (1883-1982) for over forty years (Margolis was also the teacher of Metropolitan Opera basso Jerome Hines). In the end, the singer stands alone on the stage and will take the credit, blame or criticism for his or her performance.

I have helped countless singers over the years find and “re-find” their voices. Singers of all ages and all stages of development have been coming to me since 1959, desperately looking for help with their voices. What did I know when I was 21 years old? What *could* I “know” at that age? very little—and what I did know was intuitive. But I did seem to possess some kind of knack or talent for teaching: the ability to impart information clearly, and also, an ability to empathize physically with what the singer was doing or not doing in the throat and in the breathing system that either helped or hurt the quality of sound the singer was producing.

This innate ability permitted me to actually help singers with general and specific problems. For instance, it seemed obvious to me that a singer should not have to make faces to sing well. How could a singer act, smile, cry, look surprised, etc. if the face was always locked in a grimace, or having to show all the teeth, or having to pull the jaw down? If singers look at the pictures of Enrico Caruso demonstrating the vowels in Dr. P. Mario Marafioti’s book,<sup>8</sup> they will see great emphasis on softness and relaxation of the facial muscles, the corners of the mouth always pulled back (even on the oo vowel). There is not one vowel which is formed with the jaw pulled down—as the following illustrative photos demonstrate:

During a radio interview I listened to in the 1960s, the American dramatic soprano Rosa Ponselle (1887-1981) said that Enrico Caruso told her to always keep a “rectangle” in the back of her throat. This is the same shape

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7 R.K. Prabhu & U.R. Rao, editors, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (India: Jitendra T. Desai, Navajivan Trust), 1945/1967/1996: 42

8 P. Mario Marafioti. *Caruso’s Method of Voice Production* (Dover, New York), 1949: 243-247.



Photo by Bettini Syndicate Inc.

Fig. 25—Vowel A

In this illustration the great tenor is singing the vowel A, with very dramatic expression. Note how wide his mouth is open, which his lips are completely relaxed, and his tongue lies flat on the floor of the mouth, its tip in contact with the interior of the lower lip

Giovanni Battista Lamperti recommended while insisting that the open throat in Italian singing was the same shape as the “ah” in the Italian word “stai” (stah – ee).”<sup>9</sup>

A singer should have a loose jaw, a relaxed tongue and a breathing method that releases tension instead of creating tension. Tension and relaxation are words that must be carefully defined in any type of physical skill. There must be a balance of tension and relaxation somewhere in the body, of course. To

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9 G.B. Lamperti. *Vocal Wisdom* (New York: Taplinger), 1931: 132



*Photo by Bettini Syndicate Inc.*

Fig. 26—Vowel E

This illustration shows Caruso singing the vowel E, with lyric expression. The mouth is half open when compared to the size of the vowel A. Note the marked relaxation of the masque and tongue which, as in A, is in contact with the interior of the lower lip.

achieve it the singer must learn to use only the essential muscle groups at the correct time, as one unit (this is the biomechanical function that becomes habitual with proper training), necessary to produce a free and healthy tone, relative to the individual's vocal potential and at that particular moment in each singer's development.

One of the reasons I have the patience necessary to re-train singers with damaged vocal cords is that I was and still am totally fascinated with the idea that human beings can use their voices to create extraordinary musical





*Photo by Bettini Syndicate Inc.*

Fig. 27—Vowel I

In this illustration Caruso is seen singing the vowel I. Besides the relaxation of the masque, as in the vowels A and E, and its characteristic expression which make it almost evident when the focus of the voice is centers, his lips approach without the slightest evidence of tension.

sounds combined with emotional expression. The basic musical scales and various exercises never, for an instant, bore me. I find the process challenging; it requires intense concentration, physical development and dedication by both teacher and student. Repetition of correct function under expert supervision is essential to incorporate the physical concepts into a singer's working technique as quickly as possible. I can still sit at the piano, day after day, playing the same simple scales and feel the way a prospector must feel during the search for buried treasure. As the singer achieves looseness of



*Photo by Bettini Syndicate Inc.*

Fig. 28—Vowel O

This illustration shows Caruso singing the vowel O. The prominent feature lies in the shape of the lips, which are protruded, making a megaphone for the vowel. The lips, however, are in complete relaxation.

the tongue and throat, first a little gold dust, then a few nuggets and signs of beauty of tone begin to appear or reappear. The excitement I feel as a teacher whenever a pupil succeeds in finding the “zone” must be similar to what the prospector feels when he first finds gold dust. Somewhere beneath the dust are the nuggets and then, with enough digging, the mother lode!

Wilbur Gould, MD (1919-1994) was world renowned as *the* great throat specialist for professional singers. He was Chief of Otolaryngology at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan, and throughout my New York City teaching years



*Photo by Bettini Syndicate Inc.*

Fig. 29—Vowel U

This illustration shows Caruso singing the vowel U. In this vowel the prominent role is played by the lips, which by protruding markedly give the shape to for the vowel U.

(1973-1994), Dr. Gould sent professional, working singers with vocal-cord problems and damage to me for rehabilitation before he would schedule surgery. He was a true colleague in helping singers when they most needed help, and a wonderfully caring human being. He always encouraged the singers to take the time necessary to correct vocal-breathing techniques—in order to avoid surgery. If surgery was unavoidable, Dr. Gould sent the singers to me for vocal rehabilitation after the vocal cords had healed properly.

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be; now put the foundations under them.<sup>10</sup>

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10 Henry David Thoreau, *On Walden Pond*.



## Down to Basics

The essential building blocks which are integral to my teaching reflect many influences, including the encounters and friendships I nurtured with great singers during my developmental and professional years as an operatic tenor. From 1960 through 1975, I met, sang for, and took lessons and coachings with a number of historically famous singers. My great friend, Lawrence Shadur (1935-1991), a wonderful baritone with the Metropolitan Opera, was Lauritz Melchior's god-son. Through Larry I had the opportunity to meet Melchior (1890-1972) and Richard Tucker (1913-1975). Trying to find out technical secrets from these masterful singers was like attempting to study with the inscrutable Zen master described in Eugen Herrigel's book, *Zen in the Art of Archery*.<sup>11</sup> I was young and full of enthusiasm, and the advice given by these legendary singers seemed so vague and undefined. Management and use of the breath, however, lay at the root of all discussion.

When I first sang for Richard Tucker his immediate reaction was: "Get a good breath under that." "How?" I asked, "what should I do?" Now, one must understand that Tucker was the master technician—the so-called tenor's tenor—because of his great technique. He could sing everything from Mozart to Verdi, and beautifully. My favorites among the roles he sang were from *La forza del destino*, *Un ballo in maschera* and *I vespri siciliani*. He was simply the best Verdi tenor I ever heard (but I loved his singing in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, as well).

At a later coaching session Mr. Tucker said: "I've only got two things to tell you, kid. Breathe behind you and keep it light, like this." He then demonstrated via a gigantic, thrilling, free high note that seemed to threaten the layers of paint on the walls. I was sure the rafters would come down from the incredible vibrations bouncing from the walls and off my head. When the tone ended, Mr. Tucker said, "See what I mean? Always keep it light. It is all done by the breath and not with the vocal cords."

I'll never forget that day! It was 1962, I was a 24-year-old lyric tenor with great promise. After a few months of study, Mr. Tucker said, "too bad Paul Althouse died... (his only voice teacher) he could have helped you." He repeatedly added: "Breathe in your lower back and don't let the belly wall or the chest move at all, especially on the attack." This was the same approach to breath control I learned in conversations with Cantor Charles Bloch in New York and with Cantor Irving Bushman in Cleveland (at the time I served as Chair of Vocal Studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music where Cantor Bushman taught.) Cantors Bloch and Bushman were both beautiful singers who enjoyed very long and successful careers.

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11 Eugen Herrigel. *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics), 1989

Great singers echo again and again the same approach to breath control. Here are some insights from the very best among them:

To take a full breath properly the chest must be raised at the moment that the abdomen sinks in. Then with a gradual expulsion of the breath, a contrary movement takes place. It is this ability to take in an adequate supply of breath and to retain it until required that makes or, by contrary, mars all singing... With the acquisition of this art of respiration, the student has gone a considerable step on the road to Parnassus.<sup>12</sup>

In order to insure proper breathing capacity it is understood that the clothing must be absolutely loose around the chest and also across the lower part of the back, for one should breathe with the back of the lungs as well as with the front, upper part of the lungs... In learning to breathe it is well to think of the lungs as empty sacks, into which the air is dropping like a weight, so that you think first of filling the bottom of your lungs, then the middle part, and so on until no more air can be inhaled... This feeling of singing against the chest with the weight of air pressing up against it is known as breath support, in Italian we have even a better word, "appoggio", which is the breath prop or lean... Never for a moment sing without this appoggio, this breath prop. Its development and its constant use mean the restoration of sick or fatigued voices and the prolonging of all one's vocal powers.<sup>13</sup>

I learned this: To draw in the abdomen, raise the chest and hold the breath in it by the aid of the ribs; in letting out the breath gradually to relax the abdomen... A horn player in Berlin with the power of holding a very long breath, once told me, in answer to a question, that he drew in his abdomen very strongly, but immediately relaxed his abdomen again as soon as he began to play. I tried the same thing with the best results... The breath pressure, which includes abdomen, diaphragm and chest muscles, is often named "Atemstauen" (breath stop) or "appoggio," the "breath lean" or "breath prop."<sup>14</sup>

## Role models

We need to discuss the singing methods that have proven successful for singers in avoiding vocal problems over the length of their careers. As mentioned, all vocal success and all vocal problems result from management or mismanagement of the breath. An example of the latter, breathiness, is considered bad

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12 Enrico Caruso. *The Art of Singing* (New York:Dover edition), 1975: 53-54; first Publication by The Metropolitan Co., 1909.

13 Luisa Tetrazzini. *The Art of Singing* (New York: Dover edition) 1975: 11-12, 15-16; first Publication by The Metropolitan Co., 1909.

14 Lilli Lehmann, *How to Sing* (New York: MacMillan), 1949: 14, 23.



in classical singing and it can cause many vocal problems like hoarseness, nodules, bowed vocal cords, etc. Any excess breath passing through the glottis, especially under pressure, can be disastrous for the vocal cords.

I met the great tenor Giovanni Martinelli at the Metropolitan Opera in 1961. He was seventy-seven years old at the time and still singing! I, of course, asked him what his ideas were about how to sing. He answered very energetically, “*primo respirare* (first breathe), *poi appoggiare* (then lean).” I asked him, “how should I breathe?” He grabbed my lower ribs in the back and said “*qui, qui, e profondo* (here, here, and deeply).”

I heard Lauritz Melchior sing a concert when he was seventy years old. His voice was still clear, strong and remarkably youthful. When I asked him to describe his singing technique, he began to explain how he breathed. It was the same story. Breathe into the lower back, lean on the diaphragm, never sing into the nose. Let the breath open the throat. No action in the throat, only reaction to the low back breathing.

George London (1920-1985), with whom I had a wonderful working relationship, said, “The rib cage should not move independently. The ribs move only if the breath moves them.” He called the process “the machine” and said to me many times, “Mike, make the students work the machine. Open the back, close the back, repeatedly!”

There were many instances over the years when I would ask singers how they sang. Cesare Siepi (1923- ) and Cornell MacNeil (1922- ) would not say a word about technique. Jan Peerce (1904-1984) told me, “Don’t move anything in the front of your body when you breathe or sing.” Dame Eva Turner (1892-1990) was the only singer I ever met who used the term “psychomotor system.” In 1962, long before computers were so common, we sat down together and talked about vocal technique. “The mind must be programmed through repetition to do the right thing as a habit,” she explained, “thus training the psycho-motor system to sing for you.” “How and what must I repeat over and over, Dame Eva?” I asked. Again I heard those magic words: “Breathe, breathe, breathe, *and no action in the throat!*”

What she then added has stayed with me for decades: “Even a grain of salt or sugar dropped in the throat would be *too much action.*”

### **In sum, to this point**

Breathe into the lower back, either drawing the abdomen in or not allowing the belly to move outward (to remain still), thus sending the inspiration toward the back, into the lower portion of the lungs. Make no action in the throat or jaw or tongue (imagine an invisible throat, an invisible jaw, an invisible tongue, as

if you could pass your hand through them, as if nothing were there). Only the tip of the tongue should be allowed to move to make the dental consonants, which is an up-and-down movement that does not react in the throat. No forward or backward movement of the tongue is needed. Try not to pull the tongue back into the throat (i.e., no action in the tongue or throat). Breathe in a way that relaxes the throat, much like yoga breathing.

Robert Merrill and the Danish tenor Helge Roswaenge (1897-1972) were advanced yoga practitioners and when asked how to breathe, they both demonstrated deep, slow, low back yoga breathing. Strong yoga breathing, like any strong form of back breathing, causes a completely relaxed tongue, allowing the tongue to depress in the back using only the power of the inhalation and thus creating a v-shaped groove down the center of the tongue (sometimes called “inhaling the tongue”). This type of breathing will also cause the soft palate to rise in an upward and *forward* direction. Such action will seal off the naso-pharynx, creating a resonating cavity behind the nose. This is the resonance referred to as “the mask.” *Singing in “the mask” is different from singing in the nose.* If the singer sings “NG” as in the word “hung,” a resonance line can be identified across the bridge of the nose. Here is Caruso again:

Never sing into the nasal cavity—it is against all the rules of song. There are a number of wrong sorts of voices, which should be mentioned to be shunned...the *white* voice, the *throaty* voice, the *breathy* voice, the *nasal* voice and the *bleat* (goat) voice... After all, those who have practiced the art of right breathing need have none of the defects mentioned above.<sup>15</sup>

The singer must avoid placing the voice *into* the “hung” line. *Below* the hung line causes the voice to resonate in the throat cavity and bring up a predominant chest resonance into the tone—which has no carrying power over an orchestra. The true mask is found *over* the hung line. If a singer wishes to direct the voice by singing into the mask, every tone and every vowel must be placed over the hung line. This would explain why—to eliminate nasality—the Swedish tenor Jussi Bjoerling (1911-1960) and the Bulgarian soprano Zinka Milanov (1906-1989) insisted that young singers practice holding the nose closed with the fingers to make sure that no tones escaped *into* the hung line.

Metropolitan Opera baritone Leonard Warren (1911-1960) used to vocalize using the “B” consonant. We could hear him backstage at the met singing “bah, beh, bee, boh, boo,” and “blah, bleh, blee, bloh, bloo.” Vocalizing on the consonant “B” causes the nose to close (as opposed to the consonant “M” which opens the nose). The students called him “The Genie” because he “lived in a bottle” (he sounded so stopped up!)

15 Enrico Caruso, *The Art of Singing* (New York: Dover edition), 1975: 57-58

Both the Australian soprano Joan Sutherland (1926 - ) and the Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007) used to lean forward while singing, as did the Polish tenor Jan Kiepura (1902-1966). They held the chest out, keeping it still and not allowing the resonating breath within it to collapse. The Italian tenor Benjamino Gigli (1890-1957) also kept the chest high and out while singing.

Much of this discussion could be eliminated if today's young singers would go back to the old, proven system of breathing and/or learn yoga breathing. The soft palate will automatically find its correct function and position. One of my students counted the number of times Enrico Caruso mentioned breathing in his book. The count was 60 times! Considering the small size of the book, Caruso was obsessed with "the art of right breathing."<sup>16</sup>

It seems strange that contemporary singers don't avail themselves of books written by great singers of the past. Both Enrico Caruso and Lilli Lehman described their breathing function very clearly (as we have seen from the many quotations above, drawn from both of their books. The gist of their vocal wisdom is that the abdomen be drawn in while inhaling and let out while singing. Caruso said to draw the abdomen in while inhaling and do "a contrary motion" while singing. Lilli Lehman described the "breath jerk," a deliberate violent jerking in of the abdomen when inhaling.

My wife and I once interviewed Dr. Maurice Sheetz who, at that that time was a Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine Fellow at St. Luke's/Roosevelt Hospital in New York City. I asked him what he thought about the type of breathing technique that Caruso, Tetrizzini and Lehman describe in their books. Why would these great historical singers develop a breathing technique (the inhalation and exhalation of the breath/ appoggio, etc.) in a manner opposite to what is being taught to our young singers in universities and music conservatories of today?

Dr. Sheetz's response amazed me in its immediacy and directness. He said that it was obvious that Caruso, Tetrizzini and Lehman wanted to force the back half of the diaphragm down, thus increasing the breath capacity to almost double the amount that is achieved by letting the belly go out while inhaling. He went on to describe that image in more technical terms:

It is like saying that at one end of your body you've this tremendous pressure of breath against your sternum, but at the same time you are learning to relax the muscles from the neck up...There are these little muscles that surround the vocal cords; the ones in the back that change the length and tension of your cords are called the Arytenoids. What happens is that you build up pressure against your sternum; then you have to learn how to relax the muscles surrounding the vocal cords so that you can open

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16 Ibid. p. 58.

your throat and at the same time slowly release some of the pressure, not all of the expiration, directly against your vocal cords. It is analogous to banking a pool ball off a side cushion instead of going directly through; you divert that air so that it goes through in a controlled amount, as little as possible.

I asked him about so called “natural” breathing—the “sleeping baby” breathing—for instance. He said that babies breathe one way when they sleep and the opposite way when crying or laughing. The belly out while inhaling and belly in while exhaling is natural when *not making a sound*. But when a baby begins to sustain sound by crying or making separated sounds while laughing, *the belly definitely goes out while sound is being produced*.

I asked why Tetrizzini said she kept the pressure against the chest at all times. Again the pulmonologist said it was very obvious that the continuation of sound required a continuation of control of the diaphragmatic tension in order to prevent the breath from coming into the throat and flooding the vocal cords with more air than can be utilized while singing or speaking. Dr. Sheetz described this function as “a controlled expiration of the breath against a closed glottis.” Apparently, the front of the diaphragm must remain still while the back of the diaphragm gradually relaxes. This allows the amount of air that can be utilized by the vibration of the vocal cords to be sent by the lower ribs to the larynx. This would explain why Enrico Caruso described the action of the lower ribs in the back as resembling a bellows: opening while breathing in and closing (squeezing) while singing.<sup>17</sup>

**YouTube** is a fantastic resource for all singers now because we are able to hear and in some cases actually watch many of the celebrated singers of the past perform and see what they were doing with their bodies while singing. Turn on your computer, bring up **Youtube**, and observe videos of all the singers mentioned in this article.

## Postures While Exercising the Voice

In this article I am including three of the many postures that comprise my warm-up method, and one ten-count breathing exercise. Twenty-four breathing exercises and vocalises will be explained in detail in Volume 1/DVD 1 of my upcoming book due to be published in September of 2011. At this point I might add that Yoga is not essential to good singing. Many singers have had long, successful careers without Yoga. However, nearly everyone would agree that exercise is good. It makes us feel better, and it might help us all sing better! And among the most widely practiced forms of exercise, Yoga will

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17 Enrico Caruso, *The Art of Singing* (New York: Dover edition), 1975: 54.

definitely help develop breathing control and capacity. The guiding principle here is: *Ritual eliminates choice*.

As with all physical exercise systems, the person involved is all-important and the exercise should be helpful and not harmful in any way. This is not to say that a *little* pain must be avoided! As the sports adage goes: no pain, no gain. Almost every physical exercise we begin has some discomfort that is part of the price we pay to get into good physical shape. Every artist must ultimately find his or her way. There is always a threshold of difficulty in everything we aspire to accomplish. The art of singing is fraught with problems and mountains of material that has to be learned. It is up to the individual artist to decide how many languages to learn or how many roles to learn, and how much physical exercise to undertake. I recommend that all forms of exercise such as aerobics or weight lifting be avoided, unless a doctor who is familiar with the individual aspirant should approve these or any other forms of exercise.

If the doctor approves physical exercise for you, I would recommend that it be the old exercise systems that have had the bugs worked out of them. Yoga and Tai Chi are ancient, as are the other Martial Arts practiced in Eastern Asia. Any of these systems taught in a reputable school by a qualified instructor are safe for practitioners—including singers. Running is good for general conditioning but does not seem to increase breath capacity. Yoga, swimming, and playing a wind or brass instrument increase breath capacity dramatically.

### **Posture #1: Lolling About**

(Warning: This exercise should not be used by pregnant women or within 3 months after delivery without a physician's approval)

Sit in a large easy chair and lean back all the way. Slide the pelvis forward toward the edge of the seat while leaning the head well back. The neck should be totally relaxed and supported by the high back of the chair, thereby avoiding any form of tension in any part of the neck.

Place both hands on the lower abdomen, right above the pubic bone. Inhale through the nose silently with the lips closed for as long as possible by drawing the abdomen in slowly with the hands pressed against the abdominal wall. The breath should be drawn into the lower rear quadrant of the lungs. At this time don't worry about the chest, which should be very relaxed. Expansion of the chest will be developed through other exercises at a later time. At this stage, we are concerned with the freedom and expansion of the lower back and the lower lungs while maintaining a totally loose throat and neck. Hold

the breath for a moment as the lungs are completely filled. There should be no tension in the vocal cords.

As mentioned earlier, to avoid the glottal stop, Lilli Lehmann taught “the breath jerk,” a sudden jerking in of the lower abdomen at the moment of inhaling. Geraldine Farrar (1882-1967), Caruso’s favorite singing partner, used this same breathing method, learned from Lilli Lehmann, her teacher. At this moment, reverse the process by relaxing the belly (abdominal wall) outward, slowly. sing a low, comfortable note without any particular criteria in terms of volume or quality, avoiding a glottal stroke or any tension in the throat. Avoid any flexing of the muscles in the abdomen. While sustaining the sung note as the lower belly (abdomen) moves continually outward, use the hands to disturb the tone by moving (shaking or wiggling) the abdominal wall in and out (not up and down) rapidly until a rhythmic disturbance of the sung tone is achieved. It is sometimes better to make a fist with one hand and use the other hand to press it inward. It is important to note that the movement of the fist or hands must be in an inward (towards the spine) direction and outwards (away from the spine) direction, alternating fairly rapidly.

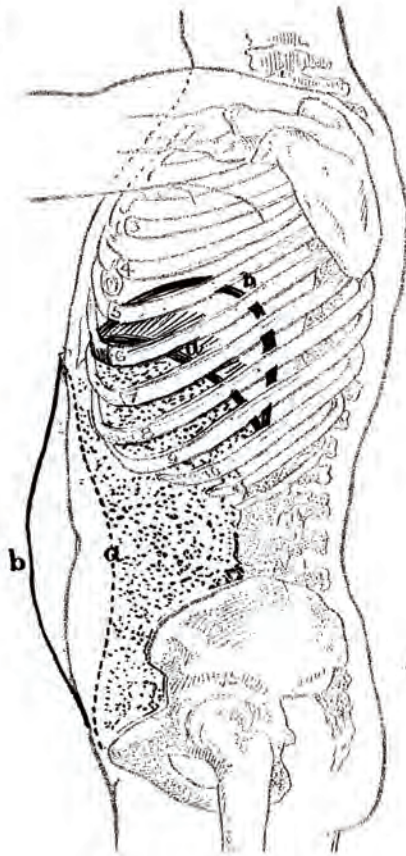
As soon as the rapid movement causes an audible response in the voice, change the tempo of the pulsing with the hands to a slower or faster rhythm, eventually creating a range from slow to a very fast, almost quivering speed and back again to very slowly. The movements should not be vertical (up and down) in relation to the body, but at a 90-degree angle relative to the abdomen. All of this movement should be done while holding a long note in a comfortable part of the voice. The pitch can be lower or higher, and even to the very highest notes of the range, as long as the voice responds and the lower belly remains flexible. It is important that the sound be continuous and not crack or break.

The abdominal wall should be completely loose during inhalation and exhalation. This can be achieved by continually moving (wiggling or shaking) the belly with the hands during inhalation and exhalation.

The object of this exercise is to loosen all tension in the abdomen, throat and viscera in general, and to encourage breathing into the lower back. It is not necessary to pull in the abdomen while breathing in (or to use the “breath jerk”) if the inhalation sinks deeply into the lower back. However, most singers tend to create tension in the abdomen and all abdominal tension must be eliminated in order to maintain a free throat. Lolling is a loosening and freeing exercise, dedicated to the neutralization of the muscles that affect the throat and the breathing process. It is generally beneficial to the practitioner because it encourages total relaxation in the body and mind while beginning



# 1. Diagram of the Action of the Diaphragm



**a. Inhalation    b. Exhalation**

Giovanni Battista Lamperti. *The Technics of Bel Canto*  
(New York: G. Schirmer, 1905: 6.<sup>18</sup>)

an activation of the breathing process.

If you were taught that the belly or abdomen must be drawn in while exhaling and/or singing and speaking, conflicts can occur if a female singer becomes pregnant. Everyone agrees that women sing better and better when they become pregnant and the larger the fetus becomes, the better the singer sings.

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18 The book is dedicated to his pupil, Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935), who sang regularly at the Metropolitan Opera at turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was considered one of the finest coloratura soprano of her day.



She has no choice but to breathe in her back! A pregnant woman who has the nearly impossible task of pulling the belly in while inhaling or singing can get into a state of severe conflict with her voice and diaphragm if she was taught to pull in while exhaling. It is better to do what comes naturally and breathe into the back with the belly hanging out. Let us all learn from Mother Nature! If it were necessary to pull in the belly while singing, a pregnant woman couldn't sing!!

Singers who are not pregnant should practice pulling the abdomen in while inhaling in order to eliminate the possibility of tension in the abdomen. While it may feel like tension is being created by pulling the abdomen in, an examination using the "shake the lower belly" test will reveal, that although the abdomen is pulled in while breathing, there is no tension (flexing or hardness) in the muscles of the abdominal wall. This is crucial to good singing. Singers who activate abdominal muscles while breathing or singing must compensate by creating an opposite and equal force somewhere else in the body, usually in the throat. Everything we do is done for the purpose of total relaxation of the throat. This exercise is conducive to a very free attitude concerning the quality of the sound and helps the singer to relax.

## **Posture #2: The Primitive (Campfire) Squat**

From a normal standing position, squat down all the way, *with the heels on the floor*. Most adults cannot squat down and keep their heels on the floor the first time they try. However, it can be done, believe it or not! In some cases, it is as difficult as learning to ride a bicycle or learning to ski, because it is all about balancing and *centering*. Every child we see playing in the sand on the beach squats this way... heels down. It will require a lot of practice in some instances, but it is possible to learn to squat correctly. All primitive people squat this way around their campfires. It is the "natural" way to squat, and must be relearned by most modern adults. Moreover, since it is essential for proper centering and energy flow, it should be learned.

The mechanics of squatting are simple. From a normal standing position with the arms relaxed and hanging down and the feet apart at shoulder width, bend the knees deeply and completely. It will be necessary to shift the weight forward with the arms well in front of the body as the body goes down. Ideally, the squatter will be able to rock back and forth without a loss of balance. In attempting this, most people lose their balance and fall backwards. While a little embarrassing, this is harmless and is a natural part of the learning and adjusting process, just as falling off the bicycle is part of finding your balance and coordination. Don't give up! Keep trying until you are successful!

Once accomplished, this posture is inductive to the lower back breathing begun in the “Lolling” posture. The dome-like diaphragm should be descending while breathing in and the rear half of the diaphragm should descend to the lowest point possible. It is not enough to depress only the front of the diaphragm. These postures, and the ones described in the following examples, cause the singer or speaker to breathe in a complete way, utilizing the total diaphragmatic function, thus providing a deeper tone and more freedom of the throat, which leads to more control of the voice.

### **Posture #3: The Tree**

Stand up on the right foot with the leg straight, take the left foot in hand and turn it upside down so the sole of the foot is facing upwards. Pull the heel of the left foot back into the crotch until the heel is well back and against the inside of the upper right thigh. Press the knife-edge (the outside edge) of the left foot against the inside of the right thigh, high up, and let the left, bent leg rest against the right thigh.

Raise the arms and touch the fingertips together above the head. Be sure that the space formed around the head is as equal as possible. Allow the arms to relax without losing their posture above the head. The elbows will move slightly forward. The shoulders should be as loose as possible and the entire body should feel as soft and relaxed as possible without compromising the perfection of the posture.

Maintaining this position, concentrate on straightening the body upwards. The breathing should continue to be very deep and directed toward the tailbone and buttocks. The abdomen should be drawn inward during the inhalation and released outward during the exhalation. This is a very good posture to begin octave exercises from a very low note. The body should remain free and the singing should not cause any loss of balance or any loss of the correctness of the posture. In fact, one of the rules of the “posture system in singing” is that, once a posture is established, the singing should not cause any lack of balance or any change in the perfection of the posture.

This posture is the only one dedicated to the development of the pure, vertical *lean*. It is the posture that best develops the “brick in the bucket” concept of a straight-down, vertical drop of the breath down into the pelvic floor with nothing to hold it down but gravity. (“Bouncing” is discussed in my book on vocal technique, which also develops the vertical concept of the drop of the breath; however, it is not really a posture but an action technique.)

The main thing to remember with the tree is that we are not floating away into space. Gravity is all we need to hold us down on the earth. Therefore, it makes sense that gravity can hold the breath, viscera, and diaphragm down if we can relax and allow it to happen. This is the secret of those obese singers who seem to sing so beautifully without the problems and tendencies that seem to plague most singers. We know that obese singers who lose a lot of weight invariably develop vocal problems. Some are very famous, magnificent singers who lost control of their voices after losing enormous amounts of weight, sometimes over 100 lbs. Having been obese since childhood and having relied on the weight to keep the breath dropped down in the lower body, when the loss of the extreme downward pull was no longer there, the singers developed huge wobbles and the voices became hard and strident. The breath is no longer held down deep in the body by the weight carried in the abdomen.

This loss of control can be corrected after a severe diet by teaching the singer how to get the breath down again. By exercising, through Yoga posturing and consciously thinking “deep,” the concept of where to place the breath in the body can be relearned. In this posture, the feeling of heaviness and weight are all-important. The voice itself seems to drop down into the body, as if each tone weighs several pounds and is sitting right in the center of the floor of the pelvis. The sensation of the voice sitting securely down in the lower body is essential to having secure and easy high notes. The feeling of the body being heavy helps especially with the high soft notes. It is obviously something to be desired for any singer! This is one of the most important postures for developing the upper register of any voice.

### **Ten-count Breathing**

This exercise is the same for both men and women. Stand or sit erect (in a straight-back chair if sitting); your spine in proper alignment—chest slightly raised; arms slightly behind the body, allowing the “air box” to be fully open and expanded.

Exhale, releasing all of your breath, allowing the abdomen to fall out as you exhale.

Inhale to a count of 10 seconds (start with 5 if necessary and build up to a 10-count). Inhale through the nose silently, slowly, as if smelling a fragrant flower for 10 seconds; as you inhale, simultaneously draw in the lower abdomen slowly with the inhalation.

Hold the breath for 10 seconds and then, exhale slowly and evenly for 10 seconds, relaxing the abdomen outward as the breath is released.

This exercise can also be done while walking or standing still.

### **At all times, the singer works towards the following criteria:**

The jaw is free; the tongue relaxed and resting on the inside of the lower lip from one corner of the mouth to the other.

The lips are relaxed, the mouth closed with corners of the mouth slightly back (a gentle smile) for inhalation.

Inhalation is through the nose (as if slowly smelling a fragrant flower). Upon exhalation, allow your jaw to fall open and slowly exhale through the mouth.

### **In Conclusion**

Anything written on singing today will have to deal with faulty concepts of vocal technique that have become so universally acceptable as to be considered convention. It is important to remember that the greatest singers in history—including Enrico Caruso and Lilli Lehmann—describe the correct method of breathing for singers as follows:

When the singer inhales, the abdomen should be pulled in before singing, and at the instant the singer begins to sing a tone, the abdomen should be released down and outward. Caruso described the process as pulling the abdomen in while inhaling, and doing a contrary motion while singing. Lilli Lehmann (she of the “breath jerk”) described her breathing method as being like that of Enrico Caruso. This seems paradoxical when one considers that today, the so-called correct method of breath support is taught to be the *exact opposite* function of what both these immortal singers advocated!

How can a young singer become as great as the “old” greats if he or she does not use the same criteria they used, as described in their books? Young singers today are directed as follows: no grunting; no sobbing; no slowing down; no speeding up; no holding notes too long; no cutting off notes too soon; don’t wait too long; don’t hurry; don’t sing too dark; don’t sing too bright; don’t look up; don’t put your head up; *don’t breathe* (the most amazing of all bad advice!); *don’t, don’t, don’t!*

All we can do is hope that there are young singers in the wings who are smart enough to wade through the *don’ts* and discover the *dos* that set the voice free. The true fans of beautiful, thrilling, expressive singing will be ever so grateful.

A final series of images that I would like to leave with readers is from Giovanni Battista Lamperti, who taught the Old Italian Bel Canto method of singing:

The breath is the ocean—the voice is the boat that floats on the ocean!

Nature gave us the voice—we cannot change it—

but we can educate the breath and learn to control it.

This constitutes the whole method of singing.<sup>19</sup>

*Michael Trimble won both the Metropolitan Opera Auditions and the American Opera auditions in 1963 and made his debut in Milan at the Teatro Nuovo as Cavaradossi in Puccini's Tosca. He has sung over 60 leading roles in the Italian, French and German repertoire throughout Europe, Canada and the United States, performing with such celebrated conductors as Karl Bohm, Christoph von Dohnányi, Charles Mackerras, Nello Santi, Ferdinand Leitner, Wolfgang Sawallisch and Karl Richter. Mr. Trimble served as Chair of Vocal and Choral studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music, as Professor of Voice at the University of Texas in Austin, as Guest Professor at the University of Miami, and on the voice faculty of the Aspen Festival for over 25 years. In 1992 he established the Trimble Vocal Institute and, despite his attempts at retirement, still maintains an active voice studio and vocal consultation service in Bainbridge Island, Washington, where he and his wife, Cantor Pamela Kordan Trimble, relocated in 2001. At the Journal's request, Michael Trimble graciously excerpted this article from his forthcoming book, **The Encyclopedia of Great Singing: A Complete In-Depth Guide to Great Technical Singing, Vol. I plus DVD**; scheduled for publication in September 2011.*

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19 G.B. Lamperti. *Vocal Wisdom* (New York: Taplinger), 1957: 131-132, 144.

# Contrafaction

By Joshua R. Jacobson

Four hundred years ago Samuel Archivolti, a rabbi in Padua, Italy, wrote about the synagogue music of his day:

There are two categories of song. The first category is a melody which is composed to fit the words in consideration of their ideas. For by melodic changes we are able to distinguish between pause and continuation, a fast tempo and a slow one, between joy and sadness, astonishment and fear, and so forth. And this is the most excellent type of melody in music, for not only does it consider the ear's pleasure, but it also strives to give spirit and soul to the words that are sung. This type of song was used by the Levites [in the *Beit hamikdash*], for it is the only way they could have arranged their music, and it is the proper type to be written for songs in our sacred language.

The second type [of song] is the vulgar sort of tune in which the words [must] fit [the music], and its only concern is for the ear's pleasure. So a single popular melody may be applied to many songs whose subjects are as distant from one another as the West is from the East, so long as they are all written in the same meter and rhyme scheme.<sup>1</sup>

One doesn't have to read between the lines to understand that Archivolti prefers the first category to the second. In fact, Archivolti's classification is nearly identical to that of Italian secular vocal music from the same period. Madrigal composers in Italy were divided into two camps: those who composed in the "first style" and those who composed in the more modern "second style."<sup>2</sup> In 1607 Giulio Cesare Monteverdi wrote in defense of his famous composer brother, Claudio Monteverdi, "The first style... is the one that considers the music [or "the harmony"]... the master<sup>3</sup> of the words... The second style... makes the words the master of the music."<sup>4</sup> The author is saying that composers of the first style accommodated the lyrics to the music, whereas

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1 Samuel Archivolti (1515-1611), *Arugat ha-bosem* (Venice, 1602), in *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music in manuscripts and Printed Books from Geonic Times up to 1800*, ed. Israel Adler, (Munich: G. Henle Verlag), 1975: 100. Translations in this article are by the present author.

2 In Italian, *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica*.

3 Literally "mistress," but given the other connotations of the word "mistress," and given the relative paucity of gendered nouns in English, compared to Italian, I think "master" is a better translation.

4 Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: The Baroque Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 48-49.

composers of the second style made the music fit the lyrics. The second style gave birth to the “recitative,” in which the accompaniment took a back seat to the free declamation of the words in their natural rhythms.

In the context of the synagogue, Archivolti’s first category refers to the cantillation of the Torah, *haftarot* and *megillot*, as well as traditional nusah davening. As is the case with operatic recitative, a flexible melody fits the flexible rhythm of the text, which is primary. Music makes the text more meaningful.

Archivolti’s second category seems to refer to metered tunes that are sung in unison by the congregation. The focus is on the pleasure of singing rather than on the meaning or mood of the text. Whether in the seventeenth or the twenty-first century, congregants love to sing tunes. I am using “tunes” in the sense of songs that have a strong rhythmic pulse, a limited range, a strong tonal (or modal) center, predominantly stepwise motion and syllabic text allocation (i.e. generally no more than one or two pitches per syllable). Tunes must also be simple and easy to learn, characterized by repetition and recurrence of melodic and textual segments. Tunes expanded into extended songs will be strophic in form, and will usually have a refrain (in which lyrics and music recur after each verse). Fondness for this kind of singing seems to be universal. In fact, some anthropologists have speculated that music may have originated as a means of achieving tribal unity—bringing people together and binding them through communal singing.<sup>5</sup>

The texts that are best suited for such treatment will themselves have regular meter and strophic form. In other words, each line has the same number of syllables in a consistent alternation of weak and strong accents, and each verse has the same number of lines.<sup>6</sup> Among the liturgical hymns that best fit this description are *L’kha dodi*, *Adon olam*, *Eil adon*, and *Yigdal*. But even texts such as *V’-Sham’ru*, with its irregular meter and non-strophic structure, have been set to tunes. And in many cases the text has been altered to suit the tune: the wrong syllable is forced to receive metric stress, words are repeated to accommodate the length of the musical phrase, the text is broken in nonsensical phrasing, and one line of text will recur artificially in order to create a refrain. This is exactly what Archivolti was describing—“the vulgar sort of tune in which the words [must] fit [the music].”

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5 Oliver Sachs, *Musicophilia* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 244.

6 Most English poems are qualitative in meter—having a pattern of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. The meter of classical Hebrew poetry is generally quantitative—having a pattern of alternating long and short syllables.



One can further differentiate synagogue tunes into two categories: (1) melodies that have been composed specifically for a liturgical text, and (2) pre-existing melodies that have been adapted for use with various prayers.

For the most part congregants don't know and don't care who composed the tunes they sing. Some tunes, such as *Avinu malkeinu* (Example 1.), are "traditional," that is, they are relatively old, and no one knows who composed them.

### Example 1.

*Avinu malkeinu* (excerpt) Trad.

A - vi - nu Mal - ke - nu ho - nei - nu va - a - nei - nu A -  
vi - nu - mal - kei - nu ho - nei - nu va - a - nei - nu ki ein ba - nu ma - a - sim.

In other cases, while professional musicians may know who composed the tunes, the typical congregant is unaware of their provenance. Included in this list would be Meyer Leon's<sup>7</sup> *Yigdal* (Example 2.), Isadore Freed's *Mi khamokha* (Example 3.), Julius Freudenthal's *Ein keiloheinu* (Example 4.), Israel Goldfarb's *V'hayah Adonai* (Example 5.), Jeff Klepper's *Shalom rav* (Example 6.), Sol Zim's *L'dor va-dor* (Example 7.), Nurit Hirsch's *Oseh shalom* (Example 8.), Tanhum Portnoy's *Eits hayyim hi* (Example 9.), Moshe Rothblum's *V'sham'ru* (Example 10.), and Max Wolhberg's *M'khalkeil hayyim* (Example 11.), to cite but a few. Some songwriters however are so popular that their names are associated (at least for now) with their tunes. One speaks, for example, of Debbie Friedman's *Mi she-beirakh* and Debbie Friedman's *Havdalah*.

### Example 2.

*Yigdal* (excerpt) Leoni

Yig - dal e - lo - him hai v' - yish - ta - bah nim - tsa v' - ein eit el m' - tsi - u - to.

### Example 3.

*Mi khamokha* (excerpt) Freed

Mi - kha - mo - kha ba - ei - lim A - do - nai, mi - ka - mo - kha ne - dar ba - ko - - desh

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7 A.k.a. Michael Leoni (London, 1751–Jamaica, 1797)

### Example 4.

#### Ein keiloheinu (excerpt)

Freudenthal

1

Ein kei-lo - hei - nu, Ein ka-do - nei - nu, Ein k' mal-kei-nu, Ein k' mo-shi - ei - nu.

### Example 5.

#### V'hayah Adonai (excerpt)

Goldfarb

1

5 V' - ha - yah A-do - nai l - me-lekh al kol ha - a - rets, ba -  
yom ha - hu, ba - yom ha - hu yih - yeh A - do-nai e - had,

### Example 6.

#### Shalom rav (excerpt)

Klepper

1

Sha-lom rav - al yis-ra - eil am- kha ta - sim l' - o - lam

### Example 7.

#### L'dor va-dor (excerpt)

Zim

1

L' dor va - dor l' dor-va - dor l - dor va - dor na - gid god - le - kha,

### Example 8.

#### Oseh shalom (excerpt)

Hirsch

1

O - seh sha-lom bim-ro - mav hu ya - a-seh sha-lom a - lei - nu

### Example 9.

#### Eits hayyim hi (excerpt)

Portnoy

1

5 Eits hay - yim hi la - ma - ha - zi - kim bah,  
v' - to - m' - khe - ha m' - u - shar.

### Example 10.

Rothblum

V'Sham'ru (excerpt)

V - sham' ru v' - nei\_ Yis-ra- cil\_ et\_ ha - shab - bat,

5 la - a - sot et ha - sha - bat l' - do-ro-tam b'-rit o - lam.

### Example 11.

Wohlberg

M'khakeil hayyim (excerpt)

M-khal-keil hay-yim b' - he - sed, m' hay - yei mei-tim b' - ra-ha-mim ra-bim,

Many of our popular melodies were originally composed for choral performance. The “Sephardic” *Mizmor l'-david* (**Example 12.**) was composed by Michele Bolaffi (1768-1842) in Livorno, Italy in 1826. Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890), the great Viennese hazzan, composed *Ki mi-tsiyon* (**Example 13.**) for his renowned choir at the Seitenstettengasse synagogue.<sup>8</sup> And Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894), who served as chief choirmaster of Berlin in the second half of the nineteenth century, created *Tsaddik ka-tamar yifrah* (**Example 14.**). The “traditional” *Adon olam* (**Example 15.**) was composed by the Russian hazzan, Eliezer Gerowitsch (1844-1914) around the same time.<sup>9</sup> Gershon Ephros (1890-1978) wrote the melody often heard for the Torah service, *L'-Kkha Adonai ha-g'dulah* (**Example 16.**). Due to their popularity, these choral compositions were spontaneously adopted by their congregations, transformed into monophonic tunes (based on the soprano part), and then passed through oral tradition to synagogues around the world.

8 Congregations apparently enjoyed singing Sulzer's *Ki Mi-tsiyon* melody so much that they applied it to the subsequent texts of the Torah service, *Barukh she-natan torah* and *Shema yisra'eil*.

9 L. Gerowitsch, *Schirej Simroh: Erster Theil* (n.d., n.p.). *Adon Olom* (p. 28) is marked A.W. (Alte Weise), suggesting that the tune may have already been traditional in Gerowitsch's time. Gerowitsch's setting is not strophic; the familiar tune is found only for the first verse.

### Example 12.

#### Mizmor l'david (excerpt)

Bolaff

1  
6 Miz - mor l' - Da - vid Ha - vu\_\_\_ la - do - nai b' -  
nei ei - lim ha - vu\_\_\_ la - do - nai ka - vod va - oz.

### Example 13.

#### Ki mi-tsiyon (excerpt)

Sulzer

1  
7 Ki mi-tsi - yon tei - tsei\_\_\_ to - rah, ki mi-tsi - yon tei -  
tsei\_\_\_ to - rah, u - d' - var\_\_\_ A do - nai mi - ru - sha - la - yim.

### Example 14.

#### Tsaddik ka-tamar (excerpt)

Lewandowski

1  
5 Tsad - dik ka - ta - mar\_\_\_ yif - rah, k' -  
e - rez bal - va - non, bal - va - non yis - geh,

### Example 15.

#### Adon olam (excerpt)

Gerowitsch

1  
5 A - don o - lam a - sher ma - lakh b' - te - rem kol y' - tsir\_\_\_ niv - ra.  
l' - cit na - a - sah b' - hef - tso kol, a - zai me - lekh sh' - mo nik - ra.

### Example 16.

#### L'kha Adonai (excerpt)

Ephros

*f*  
4  
L' - kha, A - do - nai, ha - g' - du - lah v' - ha - g' - vu - rah v' - ha - tif -  
e - ret v' - ha nei - tsaḥ v' - ha - hod.

Lewandowski wrote in his memoirs:

With the introduction of choral music, congregations were prevented *a priori* from direct participation in the services, because of the artistic nature of choral singing. Congregations were now condemned to silence, whereas they had previously been accustomed to shouting. After a short while, out of a desire for equal participation, congregations adopted the melody, or soprano line, singing together with the choir in two, three and four octaves. The other voices [of the choir] were thus overwhelmed [by the congregation], and the artistic form was entirely destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

Now, these are all cases where someone set out to create a melody to fit a specific text. Presumably, if the composer knows and cares about Hebrew vocabulary and grammar, the melody will match the mood and the meter of the words.

But frequently someone is inspired to adapt a tune from one context and apply it to another. Musicologists have a term for this process of retrofitting—“contrafaction.” Some listeners, unaware of the original source, will associate the tune only with its new context. For example, in 1814 Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics to “The Star Spangled Banner,” intending it to be sung to the tune of “The Anacreontic Song,” a popular British drinking song written by John Stafford Smith. And in 1882, Samuel Cohen, a resident of Rishon Letsiyon, suggested that Naftali Herz Imber’s poem, “Hatikvah” (or “Tikvateinu”) be sung to the tune of “Carul cu boi,” a farmer’s song he remembered from his native Moldavia.<sup>11</sup>

10 Louis Lewandowski, *Kol Rinnah U'T'fillah* (Berlin, 1871), in Geoffrey Goldberg, “Neglected Sources for the Historical Study of Synagogue Music: the Prefaces to Louis Lewandowski’s *Kol Rinnah U'T'fillah* and *Todah W'Simrah* — Annotated Translations” *Musica Judaica* XI (1989-1990): 41.

11 When congregations sing “*va-havi'einu l'-tsiyon ir'kha*” to the tune of “Hatikvah,” they are actually singing it to the tune of “Carul cu boi,” creating a double contrafaction.

The obvious advantage of contrafaction is that the tune is already well known. Some *piyyutim* (liturgical hymns) share a similar poetic meter and are thus ripe for melodic promiscuity. One often hears the same melody transferred from *Eil adon* to *An'im z'mirot* to *Adon olam* and beyond. And this is not a phenomenon that is new and unique to our generation. Recall Archivolti's observation about congregational singing in sixteenth-century Italy: "A single popular melody may be applied to many songs whose subjects are as distant from one another as the West is from the East, so long as they are all written in the same meter and rhyme scheme."<sup>12</sup>

One of the greatest Jewish songwriters of the twentieth century, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994), sometimes would compose a melody before he had any lyrics in mind. His well-known melody for *Mizmor l'-david* (the final Psalm before *L'kha dodi*) (**Example 17.**) was composed in the summer of 1974. "Shabbos morning before davening I made up this niggun 'Mizmor l'dovid' It didn't have words yet... Before it was set to the words 'Mizmor l'dovid' I used to sing it to the words 'Shabbat Shalom U-m'vorakh,' Good Shabbos."<sup>13</sup> And he would also not hesitate to retrofit one of his own melodies with a new set of lyrics. In 1977 Carlebach composed a lively melody for the text, *Ki va o'eid* (found in the Sephardic rite at the end of *Ein keiloheinu*) (**Example 18.**). But soon thereafter he began to use the same melody for singing the second Psalm of Kabbalat Shabbat, *Shiru ladonai shir hadash* (**Example 19.**)<sup>14</sup> A true Carlebach Hasid is not bothered by the fact that the versification of Psalm 96 becomes compromised in order to keep the tune going.

### Example 17.

Mizmor l'david (excerpt) Carlebach

Miz - mor l' - da - vid. Ha - vu IA - do - nai b' - nei ei -

lim, ha - vu IA - do - nai ka - vod va - oz.

12 Archivolti, 100.

13 Ben Zion Solomon, ed., *Shlomo Shabbos: The Shlomo Carlebach Shabbos Songbook* (Meor Mod'im: Kehilat Jacob Publications, 1993), 15.

14 Solomon, 9.







### Example 27.

*Ma'oz tsur (excerpt)* Trad.

Ma - oz tsur y' - shu - a - ti l' - kha na - ch l' - sha - bei - ah.

### Example 28.

*Mi khamokha (excerpt)* Trad.

Mi kha - mo - kha ba - ei - lim A - do - nai.

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That brings us to the subject of alien contrafaction: adopting non-Jewish melodies into the synagogue. Jews have been singing sacred texts to borrowed melodies for many centuries. The superscriptions of many of the Psalms most likely indicate the melody to which it would have been sung in ancient Israel. The heading of Psalm 45, for example, *la-m'natsei-ah al shoshanim*, has been interpreted as an indication to the music director (*ha-m'natsei'ah*) that the following Psalm should be sung to the melody of a song known as “*shoshanim*.”

The *Ma'oz tsur* melody that we cited above is based on an old German love-song, *So weiss ich eins, das mich erfreut*. But for most Jews that origin is hidden and irrelevant. Indeed, many of the Ashkenazic piyyutim appear to be based on non-Jewish melodies, secular and sacred. In his book, *A Voice Still Heard*, Eric Werner asserts that there are “at least seventy-five instances of this process from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.”<sup>16</sup> Other alien contrafactions are more recognizable to the congregation. *Adon olam* has probably been the worst victim of indiscriminate contrafaction. I have had to endure hearing that majestic hymn sung to the tune of “Yankee Doodle Went to Town,” “Take Me out to the Ball Game” and even “Silent Night.” I suspect that the readers of this journal have their own horror stories, as well.

What is the traditional Jewish opinion on bringing gentile melodies into the synagogue? Some rabbis objected on theological grounds: one should not bring into the synagogue something that was used for worship in another religion. Other rabbis objected on a different basis. They pointed out that

16 Eric Werner, *A Voice Still Heard: The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 94.

while singing contrafactions we might remember the original lyrics of these songs.

Rabbi Yehudah He-Hasid (c. 1150 - 1217) wrote, “In the case of a hymn composed by a priest for worship in a non-Jewish service, even if a Jew considers it to be a beautiful form of praise, he should not chant it to God in Hebrew.”<sup>17</sup>

Rabbi Yehudah Al-Harizi (c. 1170-1235) wrote of his visit to a Baghdad synagogue in 1220: “The cantors don’t understand the words, and the people have no idea what they are saying. And instead of the holy (*k’doshim*) songs of [King] David, they sing the songs of prostitutes (*k’deishim*).”<sup>18</sup>

In the *Shulhan arukh*, Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488-1575) wrote, “If a *sh’liah tsibbur* sings using gentile melodies, you should protest that he should not do such a thing. And if he doesn’t listen, you should remove him.”<sup>19</sup>

The Italian Rabbi Samuel ben Elhanan Archivolti (1515-1611) wrote, “What can we say? How can we justify the actions of a few *hazzanim* of our day, who chant the holy prayers to the tunes of popular secular songs? While reading sacred texts they are thinking of obscenities and lewd things.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1605 Rabbi Ben Zion Sarfati (d. 1610) wrote that in his youth in the synagogue of Padua, Italy, his choir “used to sing the whole order of *K’dushah* at the request of [Rabbi Meir]. Certainly it was not worse, indeed better than the those who raised their voices against us,<sup>21</sup> singing [the *K’dushah* to the tunes of] the vulgar songs that are sung outdoors in the streets.”<sup>22</sup>

In his *Shirei y’hudah* published in Amsterdam in 1696, Rabbi Y’hudah Leib Zelichower (d. 1709) wrote,

But now, in this generation... they know not, they do not understand, they walk in darkness, they abandon the ancient melodies and toss them behind their backs, they laugh and make fun of them saying, “that’s old stuff, and we get no pleasure from them,” and they fabricate new melodies to take their place, either [melodies] of their own, or they borrow them

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17 Yehudah He-hasid, *Sefer hasidim*, §428.

18 Y’hudah Al-Harizi, *Tahkemuni* (Tel Aviv: *Mahbarot l’sifrut*, 1952), 226, in Amnon Shiloah, *Ha-moreshet ha-musikalit shel k’hilot yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Everyman’s University, 1986), 12.

19 Joseph Caro, *Shulhan arukh, orah hayyim*, 53/25.

20 Archivolti, 101.

21 Sarfati compounds his condemnation by quoting Jeremiah 12:8 “My own people [or “heritage”] acted toward Me like a lion in the forest. She raised her voice against Me; therefore I have rejected her.”

22 Modena, preface to *Ha-shirim asher lishlomo* by Salamone Rossi (Venice, 1622).

from their theaters and bring them into God's Temple, and they sound like the melodies that go with mixed dancing. And there are even some of them who learn melodies from the uncircumcised... and sing them in our synagogues. Have you ever heard of such evil? Could God desire this kind of song and music?<sup>23</sup>

In an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Tokhehah m'gulah* (*Open Demands*), written in Styria (now Austria) in the seventeenth century, we find several complaints lodged against *hazzanim*, including, "If you become used to foreign melodies, you will manage to destroy the proper *kavvanah*. And the listeners are focused on the melodies to such an extent that even Torah scholars haven't a clue how to concentrate and achieve *kavvanah*. What happens is that people become used to going to the synagogue [merely] to listen to pleasant singing."<sup>24</sup>

Moshe Vital, a well-known Sephardic cantor in Jerusalem in the early twentieth century wrote, "For artistic and theological reasons a Sephardic cantor is forbidden to introduce secular songs into the synagogue... Sometimes one of our cantors works also as a secular singer who entertains others with secular songs, and it is quite common to hear from his mouth the melody of a love song merged with sections of prayers, such as a *Kaddish* or a *K'dushah*... But he should allow himself to do this only if the melody is not recognizable to the congregation."<sup>25</sup>

Yet not all opinions have been against contrafaction. Some rabbis entertained a more positive view. Some expressed the hope that using melodies that people already knew and loved would encourage greater participation in the worship service. Others subscribed to the Kabbalistic idea that there is a spark of holiness in even the most degraded objects, and that it is a great mitzvah to rescue these sparks and redeem them into the service of the Holy One.

In the sixteenth century, Rabbi Israel Najara (c. 1555–c. 1625) wrote Hebrew sacred lyrics to be sung to melodies of then-popular Arab and Turkish songs. His intention was to distract young people from the secular world, allowing them to sing their favorite tunes, but with new, uplifting lyrics. "The

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23 Y'hudah Leib Zelichower, *Shirei y'hudah* (Amsterdam, 1697), 26B, in Israel Adler, *La pratique musicale savante dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1966), 249-250.

24 Anon. *Tokhehah M'gulah*, 29B, in R. Hanokh Henikh. *Reishit Bikkurim* (Frankfurt am Main, 1707-8), in Adler, *Hebrew Writings*, 247.

25 Amnon Shiloah, *Ha-moreshet ha-musikalit shel k'hillot Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Everyman's University, 1986), 13-14.

mouths of liars and the singing of sensual songs will be blocked, and they will no longer think about love songs when they see [my] songs.”<sup>26</sup> His collection, *Z'mirot yisrael* was published in 1587 in Safed and subsequently reprinted in an expanded edition in Venice in 1599. In the introduction, Najjara wrote that his *piyyutim* are all “based on the characteristics of Arab melodies and other songs.”<sup>27</sup> Of the 346 songs in this collection, 150 are based on Turkish songs, 60 on Arab songs, 30 on Spanish (Sephardic) songs, and a few others on Greek songs. Furthermore, Najara created a superscription for each *piyyut*, which included the word *lahan* (“to the tune of”) and then the title or incipit of a well-known non-Jewish popular song. For example, “*lahan Istanbuldan çektim* Turkish.”

But Najara was not clumsily superimposing a foreign melody on an inhospitable text. Najara was creating new lyrics, modeled after the very structure of the song he was imitating, thus ensuring a perfect fit of music to lyrics. In some cases he borrowed and transformed the content of the original song. The Ladino song “Arvolera,” in which a forlorn wife is faithfully awaiting the return of her missing husband Amadi, becomes a *piyyut* in which the Jewish people faithfully await their redeemer. In other cases Najara consciously created a phonological link from the parody to the original. His *piyyut* “*Anna Eil, shomrah nafshi*” is based on an Arab song, “*Ana al-samra wa-sammuni sumayra*.” Najara’s songs were deliberately demotic, rejecting the learned esoteric style of earlier *paiyytanim* such as Eleazar ben Kallir. His songs were not limited to liturgical use, but could be sung on many occasions. Their content was often nationalistic, emphasizing the intimate relation between the Jewish people and their God, often using metaphors of the love of a man for a woman. The refreshing poetic style quickly caught on among the people of Safed and were transmitted far and wide by the many seekers who made pilgrimages to this center of spirituality. In all, Najara composed some 800 paraliturgical songs, many of which are still popular in the Sephardic world. The only song of his that is widely recognized among Ashkenazim today is the Shabbat table song, *Yah ribbon alam*.<sup>28</sup>

While Najara’s songs enjoyed tremendous popularity, even among such prominent rabbis as Isaac Luria, not everyone endorsed his methods. Rabbi Menahem di Lonzano (1572-1619) denigrated Najara’s work. Was it because

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26 Abraham Z. Idelsohn, “Yisrael najara v’-shirato,” *Hashiloah* 37 (Nisan-Elul, 1920), 25-36 and 122-135.

27 Hanokh Avenari, “Ha-shir ha-nokhri k’-makor hashra’ah l’-yisrael najara,” in *The Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1965), 283.

28 Idelsohn, “Yisrael najara v’shirato,” 25-36 and 122-135.

Lonzano's own *piyyutim* never achieved the same level of popularity as those of his rival?

I have noticed that a few scholars are complaining [and saying] evil [things] about the composers of songs praising God using non-Jewish melodies. But they are wrong; there is no [problem] in this. But what are truly despicable are some [sacred] songs that start with [Hebrew] words that resemble the words of the non-Jewish [song]... [Najjara] thinks he did something great, but he has no idea that a song like this is an abomination, it is not acceptable. Because the person who sings it will be thinking about the [original] lyrics about an adulterer and an adulteress; his emotions and thoughts will be with them. That's what happens when people sing *shem nora* [God's mighty name] instead of *señora*, etc.<sup>29</sup>

Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews, in particular Syrians, continue the practice of contrafaction in their *pizmonim*.<sup>30</sup> The Syrian *payy'tan* Raphael Isaac Antibi (?-?) defended this practice, citing the Kabbalistic interpretation.

A melody is a holy spark. When you play love songs the spark is hidden in its shell. Therefore in every new melody that the gentiles compose you must establish words from the scribes, words of holiness, in order to extract the spark from the "other side" [i.e. Satan] to the side of holiness. And this is an obligation no less than preventing sinners from sinning, causing many people to turn from sin, to extract that which is precious from that which is evil, to choose the sparks of holiness.<sup>31</sup>

Rabbi Israel Moshe Hazzan (1808-1862), who served in Jerusalem's High Religious Court, defended the practice of borrowing a beautiful melody that had been used in non-Jewish worship.

And I testify by heaven and earth that when I was in Smyrna, the great city of scholars and mystics, I saw some of the outstanding religious authorities who were also great creators of the science of music, headed by the wonderful Rabbi Abraham Ha-Kohein Ariash of blessed memory, who secretly used to go (behind the screen) of the Christian church on their holy days to learn the special melodies from them and to adapt them to the High Holiday prayers which require great humility. And from those same melodies they would arrange the most remarkable blessings and holy prayers, and it is clear from this that the tune is not of the essence, but the sacred words.<sup>32</sup>

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29 Menaḥem di Lonzano, *Shtei Yadot* (Venice, 1617-18), 142A, in Adler, *Hebrew Writings*, 244.

30 Kay Shelemay *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance among Syrian Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

31 Raphael Isaac Entebbe, *Shirah ḥadashah* (Jerusalem, 1885), preface, in Idelsohn, "Yisrael najara v'shirato," 134.

32 Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State University

Jacob S. Kassin (1900-1994), Chief Rabbi of the Syrian Community of New York, echoed this sentiment.

[Borrowing melodies and providing them with new, sacred Hebrew texts is done for a] good reason, a reason of fundamental importance, and it is correct that it is said about it “that it is good.” This is so because the melody is a holy spark. Because when one plays sensual love songs, the spark is submerged in the *k'lippot* [waste coverings]. It is for this reason that it is necessary to establish a foundation of holy words—drawn from the mouths of scholars and from the mouths of books—for any tune with a non-Jewish source, in order to lead the spark from the realm of evil to the realm of holiness. This is an obligation in the same way that it is an obligation to draw sinners to good, to turn away from iniquity, and to bring out the precious from the vile. It is an obligation to make clear the holy sparks. So it is with holy songs. The holy sparks bring light to the just.<sup>33</sup>

In 1976 Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) wrote, “I have been asked if it is permissible for the cantor to graft the melody of a secular love song on to the blessings or other prayers... or whether a distinction must be made between the holy and the profane.” His response was that removing the melody from its original context is likened to the performance of a good deed: “... it is a mitzvah to do so, and implies sanctification of God’s name in that something has been transferred from the realm of the profane to the realm of the sacred.”<sup>34</sup>

But Yosef then qualifies his *hekhsher*, indicating that the transformation will be successful only if the cantor “chooses the songs... out of the purest motives, to praise and sing to the Lord, blessed be He,” and only if the adaptation is sensitive to the prosody of the Jewish text. He condemns the cantors who “contort the meaning of a verse, put the accent on the ultimate syllable, where it should be on the penultimate, and vice versa. These are boorish inversions, the way fools sing; they transform the words of the living God and subordinate the prayers and blessings to a secular tune.”<sup>35</sup>

Among the Ashkenazim, it is primarily HaBaD,<sup>36</sup> the Lubavitch Hasidim, who allow, even embrace, non-Jewish melodies into the liturgy, provided they are sung with spiritual enthusiasm. These Hasidim believe in the importance of the mitzvah of *kiruv*: bringing Jews closer to Judaism, closer to God. They

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Press, 1992), 82.

33 David Matouk Betesh, ed., *Shir ushvaḥah hallel v'-zimrah* (New York: Magen David), <http://www.pizmonim.org/> (accessed June 20, 2008).

34 Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 82-83.

35 Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions*, 84.

36 Acronym for *Hokhmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding), *De'iah* (knowledge).



believe that through this act they are redeeming a soul. They also believe that you can redeem a song; that you can take a secular song, remove it from its original profane context, outfit it with sacred words or even just with vocables such as “ai di di di dai,” and not only do you have a sacred song, you have performed a mitzvah: you have converted something from profanity to the service of God.

But perhaps that is an oversimplification. To achieve *d'veikut* [adhering to God], one must have the proper state of mind. The transformation of a secular tune into a sacred niggun, the process of “musical *tikkun*,” is a four-stage process, as described by Ellen Koskoff.<sup>37</sup> First an appropriate person must be able to recognize the potential in the song, to perceive the holy spark dormant in the music. Second, the redeemer must spend time with the song, creating a sense of ownership. Third, the secular lyrics must be discarded. Finally, the remodeled song will be performed by the devout with proper intention and in the appropriate style.

The Hasidim believe that once a song has been redeemed, it is no longer available to its original owner. The story is told that Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (1745-1813), the first HaBaD rebbe, one day heard an organ grinder sing a beautiful song. The rebbe tossed some coins to the street musician so that he would sing the song over and over. Eventually the rebbe was able to sing the song himself, to take ownership of the song (stage two above). From that time on, according to the legend, the organ grinder lost his ability to remember that song.<sup>38</sup>

Another story: In 1812 the rebbe heard “Napoleon’s March” played by the French army as they crossed the Russian border. He understood it was time to escape before the arrival of the enemy forces. As a sign of gratitude to God for his deliverance, the rebbe designated “Napoleon’s March” to be sung as a wordless niggun each year at the *Neilah* service, symbolic of the victory of the Jewish people over Satan.<sup>39</sup> Koskoff writes that this tune “also signals the ultimate defeat of Napoleon’s power through the mystical transformation of his army’s music and its redemption as a niggun.”<sup>40</sup>

The rebbe’s great-great-grandson, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), is credited with another unusual contrafaction.

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37 Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubovitcher Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2001: 77-78.

38 *Ibid.*, 75.

39 Macy Nulman, *Concepts of Jewish Music and Prayer* (New York: Cantorial Council of America), 1985: 90.

40 Koskoff, 99.

[In 1974] a large group of Jews from France who were looking into their roots came to Crown Heights (Brooklyn, New York) to acquaint themselves with the Lubavitcher movement. At the *hakofos* [the dancing on Simhat Torah], they were unable to join in with the singing, being unfamiliar with the melodies of the niggunim. Suddenly the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *shlita*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, began to sing a tune they knew well, that of the French national anthem (*La Marseillaise*), accompanying it with the words of a prayer, *Ho-aderes v'ho-emunoh* [Power and Trustworthiness]. The singing began softly, as most of the Hasidic multitude were unacquainted with the song. But the momentum built up and before long, French guests and bearded Hasidim were singing the rousing march in unison. As the Rebbe kept them going, over and over, the newcomers felt that all these bearded people were not strangers at all, but brothers, with one soul and one God binding them all together. Feelings of love and yearning toward God were welling up and gripping them with their intensity.<sup>41</sup>

\* \* \* \*

Is contrafaction a vulgarity or a mitzvah, a distraction from the words of prayer or an effective shortcut to successful congregational singing? There are rabbinic sources to support each of these views. But perhaps the keys to any successful congregational singing can be found in two of the examples we examined. Israel Najara took great care to fit the structure of the lyrics to the tune. The HaBaD Hasidim adopt a tune only if it has a holy spark, only when its original identity has been forgotten, only if it can be sung with the proper intention, and only after it has been transformed into a vehicle for spiritual transcendence.

*Joshua R. Jacobson is Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at Northeastern University and Visiting Professor of Jewish Music at Hebrew College. He is also founder and artistic director of the Zamir Chorale of Boston. Over one hundred of his choral arrangements, editions and compositions have been published, and are frequently performed by choirs around the world. In 2004 the Cantors Assembly presented Prof. Jacobson with its prestigious "Kavod Award." His book, **Chanting the Hebrew Bible: The Art of Cantillation**, published by the Jewish Publication Society in 2002, was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. Dr. Jacobson holds degrees in Music from Harvard College, the New England Conservatory, and the University of Cincinnati.*

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41 Gitty Stolik, "Musical Rhapsodies," *Women's Youth Organization Book of the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention* (May 24-28, 1984), in Mordechai Staiman, *Niggun: Stories behind the Chasidic Songs that Inspire Jews* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1994), 154. That melody is still sung in many HaBaD shuls. I heard it myself in the HaBaD House in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Shabbat, March 11, 2006.

# *Mail Box*

## **Subject: Remembering Johanna L. Spector (1915-2008)**

June 10, 2009

I cannot say enough about how much Dr. Spector influenced me in my work as a cantor and in the way I thought about Jewish music. She was unforgettable—a superior scholar whose pioneering fortitude as a woman ethnomusicologist enabled her to produce on-site films of musical traditions pertaining to communities that had recently resettled in Israel from Samaria, Yemen, Iran, Morocco, Tunisia, Djerba, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Turkey, Greece, Bukhara and elsewhere. She was also a creative and determined thinker, unstoppable in her quest to record and analyze our Middle Eastern cousins' musical heritage before the process of diffusion had westernized it beyond recall.



Archive of June Light Goldberg

Johanna forged her own path after losing her husband, brother and family in the Holocaust and surviving imprisonment in a series of concentration camps. Her hoped-for career as a concert pianist was eclipsed by the need to earn a livelihood in the United States, where she arrived in 1947. Choosing the field of Jewish music—against all advice—she completed the rabbinical program at HUC in Cincinnati in 1950. As a Doctor of Hebrew Studies, she became the first ethnomusicologist to preserve the musical heritage of exotic Jewish communities on film. As Professor of Ethnomusicology at JTS from 1954 to 1985, she taught the Cantors Institute's first generation of graduates that the Ashkenazic rite—East and West—shared a common provenance with the Sephardi and Mizrahi minhagim, and that all of them originated long before, in the Middle Eastern culture sphere.

Lastly, she became a very dear friend and mentor over the course of my studies with her that culminated in my 1979 Masters thesis, *The Middle Eastern Roots of East European Hazzanut*. Her several books and numerous encyclopedia and scholarly journal articles as well as her documentary films continue to reinforce the professional skill that I and all of my colleagues, her former students, bring to our sacred calling.

May her memory be a blessing.

Edward W. Berman

West Orange, NJ

## **Subject: Austin Synagogues Increasingly Choose Cantors as Spiritual Leaders**

July 7, 2008

Neil Blumofe, spiritual leader of Congregation Agudas Achim (founded in 1914), joined his community as its hazzan in 1998. He recently announced he would be receiving smikhah from the Academy for Jewish Religion—California in May and from the Jewish Theological Seminary—New York in 2010. “I will have two rabbinic ordinations, one from the West Coast and one from the East Coast, which is a perfect synthesis of progressive and traditional strands of Judaism in America. It will allow me to keep involved with what is most current in American Jewish life and to bring both worlds to my congregation,” Blumofe said.

Cantor Marie Betcher, education director at Congregation Shir Ami, was recently invited to also serve as the six-year-old Reform congregation’s first spiritual leader, making her the sixth female cantor in the nation to serve in that capacity. “At our upcoming (American Conference of Cantors) convention in San Francisco, there will be a meeting of cantors serving congregations as spiritual leaders,” she said. “That there are enough to hold a meeting indicates that this is a growing trend around the country.”

Cantor Yitzhak Ben-Moshe is scheduled to arrive at traditional, non-egalitarian Conservative Congregation Beth El this month as its first spiritual leader (it has been lay-led since its founding in 1981). Ben-Moshe will lead services and give divrei Torah. He will also conduct life-cycle events. “There’s a sense that synagogues need to be musical and participatory,” the cantor said, “moving away from the rabbi as a lecturer and leader of English readings, and

the sort of formal worship that was characteristic of American congregation in the 20th century. The 21st century is moving towards a model of service filled with singing and spirit. I think cantors as spiritual leaders are one side of that.”

Tonya Cone, correspondent

*The Jewish Outlook*, Austin

## Subject: “Hasidim and Mitnagdim Between the Wars in Northeast Poland”

October 20, 2009

*JSM* 2009’s Point/Counterpoint articles about a comfortable symbiosis between the Hasidic and Mitnagdic communities in Vilna during the 1920s and 1930s concur with what I read recently in an Internet Yizkor Book from Zambrow, in the Bialystok province of Northeast Poland. Pages 220 and 256-258 show that the Rebbe of the Habad Hasidim had earlier “Judaized” an old Ukrainian folk song’s mocking condemnation of a doltish peasant who neither bought nor sold anything at market. In the Rebbe’s version, the ne’er-do-well becomes the *yeitser ha-ra* (evil inclination) and the general populace who shun him are Jews from various communities. The Ukrainian lyrics have been replaced by a Hebrew refrain from Psalm 42:3, with Yiddish verses that unite all Jews against the allure of evil:

Neither the Hasidim nor the Mitnagdim—  
Whether dwelling in Jerusalem or Babylon  
Will follow you—O evil inclination—  
Or listen to your covetous enticement;  
Instead, their bodies thirst for the Holy One—  
Their souls yearn for the World’s Radiance!

The Rabbi of Zambrow, in his 90s during the 1930s, was a Litvak (Lithuanian), but no flaming opponent of Hasidism. In fact he never distinguished between Hasidim or Mitnagdim, but gathered to him all who feared and adhered to God’s word. He demonstrated this love for all Israel by singing and dancing the Habad Rabbi’s Niggun (see p. 236) with Yeshiva bakhurim on every yom tov.

Helen Winkler

Toronto

## Dem rebbens niggun

Zambrow Yizkor Book: Image 232

Chabad sefer ha-niggunim: Number 196

**Moderato**

1



REFRAIN: Hoy— tsom - oh, tsom - oh, tsom - oh, tsom - oh l'kho — naf - shi;

3



Kom - hoh, kom - hoh, kom - hoh, kom - hoh, kom - hoh, l'kho — b'so - ri.

5



VERSE 1: Akh! du, yet - ser ho - ro, gey dir vay - ter ker dir vi - der;  
VERSE 2: Khasidim - lekh, mis-nagdim-lekh, Yeru - shal - mim - lekh, — Bav - lim - lekh; —  
(UKRANIAN: Ekh - ta du - ren mar - ku tshtsho - ti rub - yash na yar - mor - ku;)

7



VERSE 1: gey — dir tsu — day - ne lib - ste — bri - der.  
VERSE 2: ve - ln dir nit — fol - gn, veln dir — nit he - rn.  
(UKRANIAN: nyit kop-lyayesh nyi - pro - da - yesh, shol-ko rab - yish smar - ka.)

## Subject: “The Glantz/Pinchik Conundrum”

September 3, 2009

I read with interest this article by Joseph Levine in the Fall 2009 *Journal*, and wish to clarify several matters.

1. Hazzan Levine seems to indicate that the earlier publication of Glantz’s arranged recitatives by Bloch Publishing Company in the late 1940s, relative to the publication of Pinchik’s arranged recitatives by the Cantors Assembly some fifteen years later, relates to a lesser degree of accessibility on the part of Pinchik’s approach. He cites Glantz’s *Shema Yisroel* and Pinchik’s *Rozo D’shabbos* as cases in point. The three pieces by Glantz that Bloch published were not necessarily issued because of public demand. Bloch generally published with the financial support of the composer in question; funds were raised even to facilitate the publication of Cantor Gershon Ephros’ six-volume *Cantorial Anthology* (1940-1953). Hence it is probable that the publication of Glantz’s *Shema Yisroel*, *Uvnucho Yomar* and *Holoch V’koroso* was made possible by a subvention—if not by Glantz himself—than most certainly by Sarah Wachs, who served selflessly as his manager for many years.

2. As to the printing of Pinchik's recitatives, I have heard a privately made 1951 tape of a conversation between Cantors Moshe Ganchoff, Pinchik and Wolf Hecker (then director of Hebrew Union College's School of Sacred Music), concerning the planned publication of such a volume. On the tape, Pinchik sings excerpts from *M'loch*, *Mah Tovu* and a few other texts. The underlying implication of the discussion is that *The Repertoire of Hazzan Pinchik*—at least its liturgical portion—was to be published by The Sacred Music Press as part of its *Out of Print Classics Series of Synagogue Music* (1954). Moreover, Cantor Noah Schall informed me that in 1953 he was contacted by Pinchik to possibly edit the placement of texts within the scores of such a publication. Why HUC dropped the project shortly thereafter is uncertain.
3. Regarding a basis for the estrangement between Glantz and Pinchik, there is no indication that it was due to Glantz's disapproval of his competitor's lifestyle (aside from a statement to that effect which Hazzan Levine attributes to Glantz's son, Ezra). Did Glantz distance himself from anyone else in his field because that colleague was not an exemplar of Torah life? Rather, one might conclude it was simply a matter of professional jealousy. Regardless of what one might think of the hazzanic talent of these two greats, Glantz was not a popular cantor in the same sense that Pinchik was. One indication: in 1941 when Glantz served Sinai Temple of Los Angeles, his yearly compensation was around \$6,000. Pinchik was paid more for *Yamim Nora'im* alone at the time.

Barry Serota  
Chicago

## Subject: “Jewish Music as Midrash: What Makes Music Jewish?”

September 1, 2009

*[Editor's note: Jack Kessler's review of the above book appeared in the Fall 2009 Journal; this is author Michael Isaacson's reply.]*

Jack, I thank you for your thoughtful review of my book and CDs. Undoubtedly you read the book and considered your review deeply. and for that I'm grateful to you. I do think it would have been a better, more balanced review



had you left your own biases at the front door and really reviewed all I had to say.

You suggest that my background and environment is Classical Reform (which doesn't even exist anymore), but a look at my bio would have told you that I was brought up Orthodox, went to a yeshiva, and have composed for Conservative synagogues as well. I even can read Hebrew!

I never implied that "all art is midrash." I did suggest that the best art can function as midrash and most often does.

I don't understand how you can laud one aspect of the overtone system and yet call the evolution of western music "silly" when it follows the direct path of overtones from the fundamental to its higher more dissonant partials. Believe me, microtonal music is one of the possibilities for the future and in synthesis it is alive and well today.

Tell your singers whom you teach not to be concerned about textual matters like diction and meaning as well as musical issues and just sing the gestalt. Art is in the details... you know that... and so is active listening. Not so intellectual ... just honest instruction.

You accuse me of focusing only on music performed in the synagogue, but what about my chapter on Life Cycle music? Did it not fit into your agenda?

This comes down to your less-than-subtle personal bias of "active participation." When a rabbi has the congregation talk along with his drash, I'll buy into your blanket thesis of "dynamic engagement." Until then I'll continue advocating moments of thoughtful listening by the congregation (which, as you know, can be just as actively engaged) initiated by skilled hazzanim and not merely by expedient song leaders.

I also spent a great deal of time talking about the "balanced bimah" and balance in all repertoire. Did you miss these words? or did they also not fit into your own bias? I have nothing against Klezmer but refuse to extol it as the art form that you seemingly adore. As a matter of fact, when I was growing up, second rate musicians, who only played wedding and Bar Mitzvahs, were known as Klezmorim. I guess this echelon is more than enough for you... it is neither for me nor for many Jews who have been turned away from Judaism by its present musical banality.

Finally, I have nothing against "mindful ecstasy," but that does call for some intellectuality (or at least a functioning mind), which you repeatedly seem

reticent to acknowledge or support. I don't think you can have it both ways, unless unconsidered ecstasy is enough for you, too.

The bottom line for me is that unless cantors begin to act like hazzanim again, all this active participation will lead to song leaders replacing trained synagogue musicians. Could that replacement be your bottom line thesis?

Michael Isaacson  
Encino, CA

## **Subject: A Song Treasury Worth Researching**

Date: December 13, 2009

An amazing collection of Yiddish folk-and-art songs in every imaginable category, as well as Israeli songs from the early *Halutzim* period onward, plus immaculately prepared talks on these topics, all in handwritten-printed-and recorded form, was recently donated by Naomi Bell, one of my dearest friends and a devoted member of our congregation, to the University of Toronto. Over many decades Naomi has collected, studied, performed and lectured about this material, one of the largest private Jewish music collections anywhere.

On several occasions I was honored to have her accompany me in presenting sample programs from this treasury, such as "The Yiddish Art Song" and "*Songs of the Halutzim*," and can attest to the profound impression they left upon audiences. Naomi later told me she looked back fondly upon the years we worked together as her "golden" memories, and in a very real sense, they're mine as well.

To discover what's in the 23 boxes and items of **Bell, Naomi. Papers, 1923-2003**, please log onto [[Finding Aid](#)]. The collection is housed in the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library at the University of Toronto [[www.library.utoronto.ca](http://www.library.utoronto.ca)].

Beny Maissner  
Toronto

# Reviews

## Louis Danto's 4-CD Retrospective Album—50 Years of Musical Treasures—and His Music Collection

Reviewed by Charles Heller

### The 4-CD Commemorative Album

Modestly packaged by Cadenza Records (LRCD 120) without liner notes except to indicate place and date of performance, this 4-CD set spans an incredible 50 years of performances. Be prepared to hold your breath for 4 CDs of music—these are definitive performances of classics of Jewish music, from the Baroque era to modern Israel, as well as opera arias and lieder.

This collection consists of never-before released recordings of concerts and broadcasts. Many of the concerts were never professionally recorded, and we owe the recordings to amateur enthusiasts in the audience.

The opening track sets the tone: Glantz' setting of *Ezk'ra Elohim* (from Neilah). Despite being inadequately miked, and with an indifferent accompaniment, this is a stunning performance of stunning music. If you never had the privilege of attending the Ne'ilah service at Beth Emeth Synagogue in Toronto (where Danto would give a thrilling account of this piece, top B-flats and all, despite having been fasting for 24 hours) this recording will give you some idea of what you missed.

CD1 comprises selections from liturgy, with "real" hazzanut composed by Roitman and Glantz as well as more folksy Hasidic-style settings, and including Ben Steinberg's soothing *Shalom rav*. There is even a live performance of the *Sheva b'rakhot*, accompanied on the legendary Conn organ. It was state-of-



the-art in the 1960s, but was old-fashioned by the 1980s when this recording was made; but even in the 1990s when its obsolescence meant you could not get spare parts, it was still so admired that visitors at a wedding would come up to the organist (the present writer) almost as much in awe of the organ as of the cantor.

CD2 is mainly music by Israeli composers, as well as other material with Hebrew texts. There are beautiful songs by Ben Chaim (*Ruah*, *ruah*, and *Ha-geshem*) as well as the colorful *Bo'i na ro'ati* of Esther Brik, an evocation of an idyllic “Palestinian” pastoral scene that surely could not be performed today without embarrassment. There is also Miron’s charming *Ufi ruah* and some Israeli Song Festival-type numbers. An unexpected track is a “niggun” recorded in 1989. Despite the poorly-miked choir in the background, Danto gives a soulful performance. (This niggun, arranged by the present reviewer who learnt it from an elderly member of his congregation, is published by Neil A. Kjos Music Company, as “Niggun/Hasidic Melody,” Catalog #8779). There are 17 tracks altogether on this disc, but the titles just mentioned will give you a sense of the whole disc.

CD3 is devoted to Yiddish songs, ranging from Goldfaden operettas to songs composed in the shadow of the Holocaust, such as the almost unbearably moving *Unter di poylishe grininke boymelekh*, here poignantly paired with its pre-Holocaust model *Unter di grininke boymelekh* (regrettably not listed in the liner notes). These 21 selections are noteworthy for Danto’s limpid Yiddish enunciation, his sense of humor, his bel canto control of dynamics at the service of the text, lovingly caressing the *mommeh loshn* (in truth, his mother tongue.) These are all expressive performances informed by his own life experiences, but especially noteworthy are Gebirtig’s *Dray tekhterlekh* and Secunda’s setting of Leivick’s starkly dramatic poem *Eybik*.

CD4 contains 19 tracks of arias, lieder and Neapolitan favorites. Included are four selections from a recital given in 1954, which demonstrate that right from the start of his career Danto has been a master of the *voix mixte*, a vital component of bel canto that enables the lowest register to flow seamlessly into the highest—and vice versa. This is particularly well shown in the wide compass of *Un’aura amorosa* from *Così fan tutte*. We forget today that Mozart in the 1950s was a minority taste waiting to be rediscovered, as Handel still was in the 1960s (see below). In fact, *Così* had only had its U.S. premiere 30 years before this recording was made—there were undoubtedly listeners in Danto’s audiences who had never even heard of this opera! Louis Danto has often remarked on how even celebrated singers at that time would “shmir” (grease) Mozart’s vocal runs instead of singing each note because they simply

did not have the technique to tackle bel canto repertoire. This is of course not a fault in this CD, although there are no conspicuous runs to show off in this aria, nor in the other Mozart selection, *Dalla sua pace* from *Don Giovanni* (which was actually written for a singer of limited ability at the Vienna production of 1788). Danto's very selection of this repertoire in the 1950s indicates an exceptional musical talent at work and a commitment to bel canto from the very start of his career, developing into a life-long mission.

Also noteworthy is Handel's *Non lo diro col labbro* from *Tolomeo* (once known to English audiences as *Did You Not See My Lady*)—a brave choice for a concert in 1965, before the Handel revolution of the 1970s. Although this track is poorly recorded, encumbered with a ponderous accompaniment, yet we can discern here also at this stage in Danto's career the control of a bel canto expert, especially in the sensational messa di voce leading into the da capo (which sadly lacks embellishment). By the way, the liner notes give this aria its alternative English title: *Silent Worship* (Alexander, the character, is singing "I shall not say it [my passion] with my lips"—instead he will rely on his fervent gaze to indicate his feelings.) It would be very unfortunate if anyone listening to this track thought it was Handel's setting of part of the Amidah.

Although these early operatic recordings lack much sense of drama, there is certainly enough vocal technique for today's students to learn from, not to mention a mastery of Italian that we do not generally associate with hazzanim. Danto also sings in German, French, English and Russian, the latter of course being a specialty.

My personal highlights of these CDs include: the Baroque-era cantata *Shokhen b'rum eil elyon* by Lidarti, with its breathtakingly beautiful oboe obbligato performed by a no-name soloist on a recording made for Israel Radio; the Ravel-like shimmering music of Paul Ben-Haim; and the chamber-ensemble versions of Yiddish songs, of which we may particularly mention the elegiac arrangement by the late Srul Glick of Gebirtig's *Moyshel mayn fraynt* (with Rivka Golani, viola).

Perhaps the most awe-inspiring track of all is Secunda's *Dos yiddishe lid*: a scratchy recording, with a pianist playing wrong notes, and in the background the audience scraping their chairs. But wait—this was recorded in Italy in 1948. Here is a teenaged Louis Danto, just emerged from the ashes of Poland, singing to an audience of Displaced Persons: *fun a brenendike oyv n kumt er lebedig aroys* ("from a burning oven the Jew comes out alive"), as a memorable phrase from the lyric so aptly put it. This song was written

in the 1920s; but can it ever have had a more meaningful performance than this one in 1948?

### **The Music Collection**

Cantor Danto's Music Collection is an archive of printed music, manuscripts and recordings that he collected and donated to Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Synagogue, 100 Elder Street, North York (Toronto), ON M3H 5G7, where it is now housed.

During his 50-year career, Cantor Danto performed a vast range of material: classical arias and lieder in Russian, Italian, Hebrew, Yiddish and other languages; Baroque music in Italian and Hebrew (yes, there is a wonderful repertoire of Baroque-era Jewish music, and it is largely due to Cantor Danto that we can hear it); Yiddish folk and modern Israeli music; and of course a vast range of cantorial music. All these categories, and more, make up the Danto Collection, which is not only the largest collection of its kind in Canada, but one of the major collections to be found anywhere, drawing admiration from the world's leading scholars.

Cantor Danto's own life-story is the background to this collection: As a boy, he went from Poland to study music in the Soviet Union. By the time he left school, World War II was over and his family had been destroyed. He went to Italy and would have gone on to Palestine had he not been befriended by the Yiddish composer Dovid Botwinik, who was studying with Professor Mortari. Through Mortari, Danto was introduced to Biniamino Gigli, who encouraged him to continue his vocal studies. Danto became a student of Tito Schipa (and indeed sang Handel's *Lascia ch'io pianga* at Schipa's funeral).

The Collection contains many treasures collected by Danto as his career took him around the world. It was augmented by rare editions and manuscripts acquired through Danto's friendship with leading singers and cantors, notably Chaim Kotylansky and Rabbi Dov Aryeh Lebel, who taught many of today's generation of cantors (as well as being Danto's father-in-law). To get a feel of the Collection, consider what I found when I visited it recently. I pulled out a box of hazzanut at random and this is what was inside:

a volume by Moritz Lazarus of Lemberg, 1902; choral compositions for Hallel by Siegmund Rosenthal, Frankfurt am Main, 1883 (in correct German pronunciation, of course: *Haudu* for *Hodu*, etc.); music for the Choral Temple in Nicolajeff (Ukraine) by Bezalel ben Yitshok-Eisig Brun (better known today as the composer of *Umipnei hata'ainu*).

This was just the first box I pulled out. There are shelves and shelves of more boxes waiting to be catalogued...

In the Yiddish section, I found a box containing a neat pile of books arranged by size, a large anthology at the bottom, and a tiny paperback on top, whose title reads: *Noten tsu Yosef Magilnitsi's "Kovets shirei tsiyon v'shirei am": geshribn un aranzhirt fun berimten Musiker* (Collection of folksongs, notated and arranged by famous composers). The author is Rev Bezalel Vaysblum of Philadelphia (no date, but from the appearance of the ads for corsets it must be pre-World War 1). The volume includes music and words for patriotic songs in English and Hebrew (Ashkenazi pronunciation), such as this:

Hagidu **no** ha-**se-he-zu**

L'-**or\_ bo-ker** bo-**kei**-a...

(which you might just recognize as "Oh say, can you see...")

as well as *Columbia the Gem of the Ocean* and

*My Country 'Tis of Thee* (**Ar-tsi\_ bas\_ dror no\_ \_ ei**-moh).

Lower down in this box we find recitatives by A. E. Nesvizhsky of Vilna, and what is of particular interest, an entire musical siddur by the same composer (1903), printed by a photographic process directly from a manuscript.

The Collection also contains many valuable early editions of music by Idelsohn, such as *Sefer hashirim* (Berlin 1912) which includes Idelsohn's original works, under the pen-name of "Ben Yehudah." Then there are early editions of music by Warshawsky, Engel, Milner, Shnipelisky and on and on...

At present, the Collection is being catalogued under the supervision of Mrs. Rouhama Danto and two hard-working volunteers, Andrea Kirshenblatt and Lil Perelshtein, together making up a team with a formidable knowledge of Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew and French literature and music. The next phase will be to make the materials more accessible to students and musicians. For more information, please contact Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Synagogue: [info@beby.org](mailto:info@beby.org) (416 633-3838).

*Charles Heller recently completed 30 years as Choir Director at Beth Emeth Synagogue, Toronto. His most recent book is the award-winning **What To Listen For in Jewish Music** (Toronto: Ecanthus Press, 2006 [www.ecanthuspress.com](http://www.ecanthuspress.com)). To order the 4-CD commemorative album, please email <<[danto@symaptico.ca](mailto:danto@symaptico.ca)>>.*



## ***Lomir Zingen*—a CD of Yiddish Songs Performed by Children at the Bialik Hebrew Day School of Toronto**

*Reviewed by Errol Helfman*

For a cantor or educator who wished to introduce Yiddish into their religious school curriculum, the CD *Lomir Zingen*, performed by the Bialik Hebrew Day School Students of Toronto, could be of great assistance in beginning this process and in helping to motivate both instructors and pupils.

Here is a comprehensive 33 song, feel-good collection of traditional and more modern Yiddish melodies, everything from joyous freylekhs and waltzes to mournful songs of loss and yearning. It features vocals enhanced by guitar, keyboard, tambourine, clarinet, string, electric bass and piano. While it may not contain every melody ever written in Yiddish, it most certainly provides an uplifting and empowering Jewish musical experience.

The CD evokes a joyous party mood, each piece capturing some facet of the lives of East European Jewry. As the children sing—mostly in unison with an added vocal solo here and there—they express the very soul of a people from its darkest hours to its moments of ecstasy. Moreover, these day school students introduce us to what they characterize as being their own personal language from the first selection, *Dos iz yiddish, s'iz mayn shprakh, mit a veyn un mit a lakh*, (“This is Yiddish, it is my language, with crying and with laughing”), suggesting that Yiddish songs are a reflection of our lives. This is particularly true of Jewish life in Canada, where Old World traditions like the language of everyday speech lag at least a generation behind the United States in the process of cultural assimilation.

Who would have imagined Mary Poppins singing “Chim-Chimney” in Yiddish? Yet, *Zingt kinderlakh, zingt kinderlakh, zingt sheyn dos lied* actually captures the essence of Mary’s love for her young charges. And to simply have fun with a class, one might try *Miki mayzl, shtelt zikh kinder alle oys, lomir shpil’n kats un moys; miki mayzl, miki mayzl, ta-ra ra-ra miki mayzl, kum arayn, un gey aroys*. A loose translation would be: “Mickey Mouse, let’s play a game of cat and mouse... ta-ra ra-ra, Mickey Mouse, in and out the house.”

One could effectively engage senior members of a synagogue with *Shabbes zol zayn* (“Let there be Shabbat, Yom Tov and peace all over the world”). For congregants who happen to be totally unfamiliar with Yiddish, the *ya-ba ba-ba, ya-ba ba-ba, bai bai bai bai* refrain of this song will surely do the trick!

Anyone responsible for setting the religious school’s music curriculum will be interested in knowing that *Lomir zingen* includes many holiday songs as well: Sukkot, Hanukkah, Tu BiShvat, Purim, and Pesah.

The insert booklet covers all 33 songs, with Yiddish words for every selection appearing in Hebrew characters, most with brief English translations. However, the booklet is incomplete in so far as the children sing many verses for which no corresponding text is given in either Yiddish or English, nor any transliteration for non-Yiddish speakers.

The engineering quality on this recording is adequate, considering that the students were recorded in live class performance during May of 2007. The instruments and vocals are distinct, with a good sound stage and depth of tonal quality. Although it is evident that the performers on this CD are not professionals, clearly the intent was to have all of the children attending this Hebrew Day School deeply involved in mastery of, and appreciation for, the Yiddish language.

Anita Eckhaus, vice-principal of the Bialik Hebrew Day School, who conceived the project and saw it through to completion, reminds us that, “this CD is a testament to the resilience of the Jewish culture and its ability to evolve over time.” The children of grades 3 to 8 who are heard singing from the depths of their hearts on this recording are honoring their Yiddish teacher, Anna Berman, who sang these songs with them during every lesson. Anita Eckhaus, hearing these lovely sounds as she meandered through the halls between classes, sought and found a way to capture and preserve them. For Anna Berman, it was “a dream come true,” as she told the Canadian Jewish News in an interview, “a tremendously valuable resource for... students as well as anyone interested in experiencing or learning about Yiddish through song.”

This CD should appeal to all Jews, but especially to professionals who have the responsibility of maintaining a connection with our complete musical heritage and to preserve it for future generations.

*Errol Helfman recently retired as hazzan of Temple Beth El, Birmingham, Alabama, after a half-century in the cantorate. A native of Montreal, he studied with Tevele Cohen, well-known cantor of the traditional Congregation Beth Itzhok in Chicago (1932-1959), and at the Hebrew Union College's School of Sacred Music in New York. As a long-time member of the Cantors Assembly he served as co-chair of its Southeastern Region and on its Executive Council. Yiddish song, particularly in its role of helping to establish and maintain community spirit, has held a lifelong fascination for him. **Lomir Zingen** is available from the Bialik Hebrew Day School: [info@bialik.ca](mailto:info@bialik.ca).*

# The New British Siddur

**Daily Prayer Book of the British Commonwealth,  
translation by Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, 2006.**

*Reviewed by Victor Tunkel*

British Jews are proud of the fact that most of the standard editions in English of the great classics of our people's literature: Humash, Tanakh, Mishnah, Talmud, Zohar, Midrash, and of course the siddur were first published in England, rather than by the much larger and wealthier Jewish community in America. The standard siddur for Britain and the Commonwealth has since 1890 been the so-called "Singer's" *Prayer Book of the United Synagogue* (the main Anglo-Jewish association of Ashkenazi Orthodox synagogues). It got its nickname from the clear and literate translation by the Reverend Simeon Singer (1848-1906). It might have been equally fittingly called the "Baer" siddur, since for the Hebrew texts of this and all subsequent siddurim we should acknowledge the great scholarship of Seligman Baer (1825-97).

After a long delay and much taking of opinions, the latest Singer's—or better to say the first "Sacks" siddur—appeared in 2006. That long delay has meant quite a moderate penetration of the *ArtScroll* siddur in some synagogues in Britain. For us the *ArtScroll* siddur has two immediate advantages over the old Singer's: its layout and typography are much superior. Those things apart, the *ArtScroll* is not much liked among many regular daveners here. Its Hebrew texts are defective (see below), its English is graceless, its rubrics enjoin *minhagim* and practices not recognised by our community, and its whole outlook is backward and blinkered.

The new siddur begins with a 22-page masterly introduction by Chief Rabbi Sacks "Understanding Jewish Prayer." He looks afresh at all the well-known aspects of our worship: its sources, structure, study as prayer, mysticism, history, sacrifice, *kavvanah*, and whether prayer is answered. (Did he mean us to read this during services? it might prove more inspiring.)

The Sacks siddur covers all services throughout the year except those of the High Holidays, and has all the weekday *parshiyot*. To achieve this the siddur runs to nearly 1,000 pages, so with its small format the paper has to be very thin. One wonders how durable the books will be. The Hebrew text is in a strong, black, very sharply square font designed by Nadav Ezra. The

inserts for special occasions, e.g. in the Amidah, indicated in the *ArtScroll* by shading the text, are less clearly shown by Sacks: they are set in smaller font and between lines. Time will tell if this works. An important innovation is the marking, by elongation, of the short *kamats*, though there are some mistakes both of inclusion and omission. (But no guidance is given as to the pronunciation of the *kamats* before a *hataf-kamats*.) More importantly, there are much-needed rubrics, stage-directions, guiding all the physical aspects of worship: *tsitsit*, *tephillin*, three steps, feet together, bowing, *Sh'ma*, *Tahanun*, *aliyot*, *lulav*, *Hoshanot*, etc; though breast-beating in the Weekday amidah is not called for. While these instructions in Traditional prayer books were pioneered by the *ArtScroll*, "It is our custom" or "According to our custom" occurs pointedly from time to time in the Sacks rubrics.

In marked contrast to the *ArtScroll*, our loyalty to Israel is emphasized with the services for Yom ha'atsma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim with, of course, the regular prayer alongside that for the Queen and her government, for the welfare of Medinat Yisrael and its defenders.

Some corrections to *ArtScroll* Hebrew: in the Kedushat Yotseir: *b'safah b'rurah u'vin'imah kedoshah, kulam...* etc; i.e. "pure speech and sacred melody" as the utterance of the angels, is obviously right grammatically. So also in the Hazkarah: *tahat kanfei hash'linah* must be right, since the metaphor is *b'tseil k'nafekha*, i.e., "sheltered in the shadow of the divine wings"; the shadow must be *beneath* the wings. (The *ArtScroll al kanfei* seems to be based on *al kanfei nesharim* (from Yitro): "on eagles' wings." But that was a method of transport, not of protection. (The thought of spending all eternity as air passengers is not appealing!)

A general point correcting *ArtScroll* is the supplying of the missing *makeif* (hyphen) in locutions like *b'rov-hasdekha*, *sh'mor-tam*, *miyordi-vor*, *al tizkorlanu*, etc., to make the two words one. This is necessary for the recognition of the short *kamats* and its pronunciation. *ArtScroll* is either unaware or dismissive of this need, as it is also of the necessary hyphenation of *kol* (when spelled with a *kamats*) to the following word, and for the same reason of pronunciation. (The one exception, correctly observed by Sacks, is in the phrase *kol atsmotai tomarna*, quoted from Psalm 35, where the Masoretes made the word stand on its own with a *merkha*, unhyphenated, and may therefore be pronounced *kal*.)

On the other hand, Sacks and his committee have not been as bold as one might have hoped. We are still praying in *R'tsei* for the acceptance of our non-existent fire-offerings; whereas at least one edition of the *ArtScroll* siddurim punctuates more appropriately: *v'hasheiv et ha'avodah lid'vir beitekha v'ishei*

*Yisrael, ut'filatam...*, asking God to restore these offerings and meanwhile accept our prayer. Similarly, the misplaced bracket which for no reason prevents us saying *Eloheinu veilohei avoteinu* on Yomtov when not Shabbat, is retained, despite Rav Yakov Emden and others pointing it out as an early printer's error. In the Shabbat Shaḥarit Amidah, Chief Rabbi Hertz's siddur—though based on the Singer's— had *lo yishk'nu r'sha'im* instead of *lo yishk'nu areilim*, but this has not been adopted in Sacks. So the uncircumcised still can't have any benefit from Shabbat. And the censored sentence *she-heim mishtaḥavim l'-hevel va-rik* ("For they bow to vanity and emptiness...") in Aleinu remains absent, whereas *ArtScroll* discreetly brackets it as optional.

There are throughout very helpful running comments or explanations to various prayers. A minor complaint is that where these prayers occur repeatedly (the Sh'ma, Aleinu, Kaddish, Adon Olam, etc), while we can't expect the comments to be repeated on each occasion, there could be a cross-reference to where they first occur. Not everyone comes to every service.

The first edition has several small typos or errors, notably the masculine form where a memorial prayer is for a woman, and in the last refrain of Geshem a singular in the translation for the Twelve Tribes. These may be corrected in later impressions. However an interesting Orwellian omission is in the Preface, where what purports to be the Preface to the first edition of 1890 is included for historical interest. It states "...the Biblical passages were translated by an accomplished scholar..." In the true 1890 preface he was named: Mr. Claude G. Montefiore. But he later became an unperson because of his prominence in the Liberal Jewish movement. This mean-spiritedness is not to be attributed to Sacks himself but to one of his predecessors, as the suppression occurred in previous Singer's editions. (Was Sacks aware of it?)

Sacks's translations (S. below) are not only literate but elegant, and especially when compared with the clumsy wordiness and obscurity of *ArtScroll* (A. below). For example:

A. *Our oxen are laden; there is neither defection nor outburst, nor wailing in our streets*

S. *Our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breach in the walls, no going into captivity, no cries of distress in our streets*

(Psalm 144)

A. *He will judge the corpse-filled nations*

S. *He will execute judgement among the nations, heaping up the dead*

(Av HaRaḥamim)

A. *You have changed for me my lament into dancing*

S. *You have turned my sorrow into dancing*

(Psalm 30)

A. *For His anger endures for a moment; life results from His favour*

S. *For His anger is for a moment, but His favour for a lifetime*

(Psalm 30)

A. *Long has my soul dwelt with those who hate peace. I am peace—but when I speak they are for war*

S. *I have lived too long among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but whenever I speak of it, they are for war*

(Psalm 120)

In these and many other examples, not only is the language more thoughtful and graceful (and often also rhythmical) but the meaning is so much clearer. *ArtScroll* is particularly unintelligible with medieval poetry, for example in Geshem:

A. *May He obligate [the Angel Af-Bri] to give us portions of the segregated rain to soften the wasteland's face when it is dry as rock*

S. *May He make him apportion due portions of rain, Moistening the earth with drops pure as opal*

Similarly in the Shabbat Z'mirot, admittedly very compressed in poetic meaning, Sacks's version is not only more intelligible but also retains the metre of the Hebrew.

A. *Concerning the ban of labor, the Awesome One commanded us; I shall merit kingly glory if I safeguard the Sabbath: I shall bring an offering to the Fearsome One, a perfumed meal-offering—Sabbath of contentment.*

S. *All work is forbidden by the revered One's commandment. I will merit royal glory if I keep the Sabbath day, Bringing the Awesome One a sweetly scented gift A Sabbath of serenity.*

(*Yom Zeh L'Yisrael*)

A general improvement is the rendering of *Sh'ma Yisrael* as "Listen, Israel" instead of the time-honoured but obsolete usage "Hear, O Israel." As Sacks explains, listening is active, hearing is passive.

For readers of this *Journal*, I regret that there is no music included, nor even a mention of the importance of music as the inseparable vehicle of our prayer, and despite Sacks's affirmation in the introduction that "the Siddur is the choral symphony the covenantal people has sung to God across forty centuries..." When the original *Singer's* was published by the United Synagogue in 1890, they at the same time published their large "Blue book" of choral and congregational music (referred to in the 2008 issue of *JSM*, pages 205-6). The *Singer's* siddur and this musical compendium have gone along in tandem for over a century. However the English Sephardi community have done better. Their daily siddur has 117 pages of music as an addendum in the siddur itself. Perhaps if the Ashkenazim had done likewise there might be less ignorance of basic *nusah* and less scope for the unsuitable tunes that characterize much Anglo-Jewish worship today. But that is a subject for another day.

*Victor Tunkel, a London barrister and law lecturer, has had a lifetime involvement in Jewish music as an amateur chorister, cantor, cantillator, collector and educator. His elegant taste is evidenced by his pairing of the Halevi poem with the Duarte Sonatina in JSM 2007 ("Music of the First Jewish Woman Composer"). His book, **The Music of the Hebrew Bible: The Western Ashkenazic Tradition**, was reviewed in the 2006 *Journal*.*



## *Khei Ha'olamim—Life of the Worlds— Journeys in Jewish Sacred Music*

by Cantor Richard Kaplan, © 2003 Five Souls Music

Reviewed by Ira S. Bigeleisen

*Life of the Worlds* is a remarkable and wonderful journey into Sephardic piyyut and Hasidic niggun. Cantor Kaplan has a rich baritone voice that he uses expressively, at times with great bravura, at other times with an intimacy that goes deep into the heart. On this wide-ranging recording, Kaplan applies his ethno-musicological training to liturgical texts from Jewish communities around the world. As a result, no two of the eighteen tracks are alike. The selections are interpreted with a sure musical sense that always seems intuitively right. The accompaniments are engaging and fit naturally with the music. The accompanying booklet has personal notes on each piece along with the words, transliterations and word for word translations, in other words it is both accessible and useful.

1. *Ha'aderet veba'emunah—LeKhay Olamim*: A Yemenite Piyyut with a refrain for Leader and Congregation to be sung before the Amidah. I think this piece is eminently suitable for worship because the congregational refrain is so singable that people would pick it up immediately. It is performed with an arrangement of Middle Eastern instruments that builds as the song goes on.
2. *Le'Eil Adir N'ranenah*: An Afghani piyyut in alphabetical acrostic for leader and congregational response accompanied with piano, *doira* (frame drum with jingles) and *tar* (long-necked lute). The verses are rhythmic and the response is instantly learnable.
3. *Bati Legani*: A beautiful melody by Rav Zalman Shachter-Shalomi; the text is from Shir Hashirim. The intimate singing combines with the piano accompaniment in an especially affective rendition.
4. *Kinah Lekhurban Gan Eden*: Based on the concept of Kinot on Tishah B'Av, this is a lament for the destruction of the earth (an eco-lament). In Hebrew and English, with words and music by Cantor Kaplan, the unaccompanied melody uses Eikha trop as its inspiration. Here Kaplan does some of his most creative work as a composer and writer.
5. *Sephardi Yerushalmi Khatsi Kaddish*: The melody is the popular Ladino song, "Cuando El Rey Nimrod." The accompaniment by *oud* (pear-shaped lute) and *kanun* (board zither) is charming.
6. *Nava T'hilah*: Shokhein Ad is set to an Afghani Folksong in 7/8 meter; this is one of the most interesting of all the settings. Accompanied by

- ney* (Turkish end-blown flute) *saz* (wire-stringed lute), *dundun* (African talking-drum) and *dumbek* (hand-held drum), the piece rocks.
7. *Hayoshevet Baganim*: Set to a text from Shir Hashirim, the melody is Yemenite. With only a drum for accompaniment, the music is almost mantra-like. Cantor Kaplan is in his element here with a performance that is truly meditative.
  8. *Ein Keiloheinu*: This is an authentically non-Western approach to the familiar piyyut, its Moroccan melody being worlds apart from the usual four-square tunes heard in most American synagogues. I suspect that without the accompaniment, worshipers would find the melody difficult to follow. That being said, the performance is quite engaging.
  9. *Modeh Ani/Elohay Neshamah*: These two excerpts from Birkhot HaShahar are set to a beautiful Sephardi melody from Salonica that suits both the text and most voices. The performance is full of feeling, with a supple, expressive line and very effective accompaniment on the *oud* and *ney* (long, end-blown flute).
  10. *Eli Shema Koli*: The piece opens and ends with an unaccompanied, unmeasured chant from the Sephardi Yerushalmi community. This Moroccan piyyut is sung to the tune of an Algerian freedom song in which the leader intersperses each verse with a chorus that involves the congregation responsively. The accompaniment on accordeon, *dumbek* (chalice-shaped drum), *riqq* (Arabic tambourine), *bendir* (Moroccan framed drum), violin and *oud* gives the song a driving verve.
  11. *Reb Nachman's Niggun*: Kaplan is at his most captivating in this unaccompanied, meditative niggun of the Bratslaver Rebbe. The singing is admirable, but at times felt a bit static to this reviewer...
  12. *Hishtapkhut Nefesh*: This is a beautiful rendition of the piece by Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk. The Yiddish is beautifully pronounced and the accompaniment by cimbalon, bass, *tilinca* (Romanian wooden pipe with no finger-holes), *baraban* (two-skinned drum from the Caucasus played with sticks), and violin is effective. In the accompanying notes, Kaplan identifies the mode as a gypsy *doina*; in Yiddish it's known as a *volokhl* (shepherd's song in the Ukrainian-Dorian minor mode with characteristically raised fourth and sixth steps).
  13. *Niggun of the Alter Rebbe*: In this *d'veikut* (meditative "clinging-to-God") niggun by Shneur Zalman of Lyady, who founded the HaBaD branch of Hasidism), Kaplan attains an appropriately devout mood, through his beautiful and deeply felt tone of voice.
  14. *Ve'erastikh Li*: Set to a Salonican melody, this three-part nuptial vow from Hosea is used in daily prayer while wrapping the fingers with the

Tefillin shel Yad. Here Kaplan combines vocal sonority, sinuous line and supportive accompaniment into a very moving rendition.

15. *El Mistater*: Kaplan chants this unaccompanied piyyut from the Husyatiner Hasidim without the varied coloration and vocal agility that is so evident on every other track on this recording.
16. *Ashrey*: This is a jazzy version of the deservedly popular responsive setting for Psalm 145 by Pinchas Spiro. In the middle of it—from *Tov HaShem la-kol...* through *L'hodi'a livnei ha-adam...* (verses 9-12), Kaplan inserts a Gregorian chant as sung by Joel Cohen and the Boston Camerata on their recording, *The Sacred Bridge: Jews and Christians in Medieval Europe*. The chant actually originates in Sephardic practice, as Eric Werner showed so clearly in his book *The Sacred Bridge* (1955: 419f).
17. *Yemeni Shema*: This melody is verifiably Yemenite, and Kaplan is once again in his comfort zone—combining his beautiful voice with musical sensibility to create an impressively novel rendition of a familiar text.
18. *Grandfather Sang a Song*: The prayer *ha-ma'ariv aravim*—from the Evening service—is first chanted in Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) style. That is followed by the personal tale of how Kaplan's family emigrated to America. The chant then re-emerges in a jazz version interposed with Yiddish. This story of the American Jewish Experience interweaves cultural elements from all over the diaspora, and transforms them into something new and unique.

Richard Kaplan is an artist well worth getting to know. His varied interests and musical acumen make this recording a listening pleasure from beginning to end. Whether accompanied or *a cappella*, the music is served with a conviction that allows for setting aside one's critical ear in order to make the journey with Kaplan. Moreover, his innovative melding of piyyut texts with disparate musical traditions points a plausible way toward the re-invigoration of Jewish music generally and Jewish worship in particular.

*Ira S. Bigeleisen has been cantor at Adat Ari El congregation in Valley Village, CA, since 1993. A graduate of the Belz School of Jewish Music of Yeshiva University, he has appeared as a guest hazzan and concert artist all over the United States, Europe and Israel. Considered an authority on the nusah of prewar Germany, he led services at the re-opening of the Rykestrasse Synagogue in Berlin. Adat Ari El has won top awards for worship programming under his leadership, including **One Shabbat Morning**, the innovative Saturday morning service. He is currently composing music for children aged four-and-up to sing in the traditional service.*

*Zamru Lo—The Next Generation, Volume III*  
*Congregational Melodies for Hallel, Shalosh R'galim,*  
*and the Weekdays*

Compiled and Edited by Cantor Jeffrey Shiovitz  
(Cantors Assembly, 2009)

*Reviewed by Sam Weiss*

Readers of this journal surely know what to expect in a volume of congregational melodies compiled and edited by the indefatigable and diligent Jeffrey Shiovitz. Volume III of *Zamru Lo—The Next Generation* continues the high standards and comprehensive scope Shiovitz established for Volume I (published in 2004, and devoted to Shabbat melodies), which was reviewed by Robert Scherr.<sup>1</sup> In fact, many if not all of Scherr's basic observations on the editorial, liturgical, musical and textual qualities of Volume I are also applicable to Volume III, and I refer the reader to that review for those observations.

Not reviewed in these pages, however, was Volume II, Shiovitz's 2006 compilation of melodies for the High Holidays. The present review of Volume III will therefore also glance at Volume II while taking the measure of the entire three-volume *Next Generation* anthology—particularly as it relates to its predecessor, the three-book *Zamru Lo* collection compiled and edited by Moshe Nathanson. These books were originally published by the Cantors Assembly in 1955 (*Congregational Melodies and Zemirot for the Friday Evening Service*), 1960 (*Congregational Melodies and Zemirot for the Entire Sabbath Day*) and 1974 (*Congregational Melodies for the Shalosh R'galim and the High Holidays*). When necessary, the six *Zamru Lo* volumes will be referenced here individually by their respective editor's surnames and year of publication.

In his preface to the Sabbath collection (Shiovitz 2004) the editor only foresaw a single “second volume which will contain congregational melodies for the Yamim Noraim and Shalosh Regalim.” This was a reasonable prediction considering that his Volume I covered ground (Friday night and Shabbat day) similar to the earlier Volumes I and II (Nathanson 1955; 1960), and one additional book would logically correspond to Volume III (Nathanson 1974). It is a tribute to the dedication to his mission that Shiovitz did not keep to that plan, but when faced with the wealth of available material he instead created two more handsome *Next Generation* volumes that round out a magnificent library of traditional and modern synagogue melodies.

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1 *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Fall 2005, vol. 30, 228-230.

That Shiovitz completed this project in only five years (compared to the nineteen-year publication spread of Nathanson's *Zamru Lo*) earns him an extra *Yasher Ko'ah*. The shorter production time may have been a factor in why the new *Zamru Lo* is a somewhat more cohesive anthology than the older one. For example, the original first two volumes (Nathanson 1955; 1960) were transliterated according to Ashkenazic pronunciation while the third (Nathanson 1974) transitioned to the modern Israeli pronunciation. All of Shiovitz's volumes use the same modern transliteration system. The earlier project had sixty-two Hallel selections divided equally over two separate books (Nathanson 1960; 1974), but in *The Next Generation* all of the Hallel pieces can be found between the same two covers (Shiovitz 2009), and their total number has increased almost threefold.

The fact that the Hallel service constitutes substantially more than half of Shiovitz's Volume III explains why it gets "top billing" in his title, while "Hallel" does not appear in any of Nathanson's titles.<sup>2</sup> Whether this new quantitative emphasis on Hallel represents a new reality in current synagogue practice or simply reflects a greater abundance of published music available to the editor is an open question that is also applicable to other liturgical areas that Shiovitz has expanded, like the sixty-two item Weekdays section.<sup>3</sup> But even more significant than the comparative numbers is the fact that twenty-five of Nathanson's original sixty-two Hallel settings are also included in Shiovitz's one hundred and seventy-four—which hints at the many decisions that Shiovitz had to make in compiling a *Zamru Lo* for the the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This ratio of the old incorporated within the new nicely illustrates how the two *Zamru Lo* anthologies complement each other, and similar examples of the interdependency between the two *Zamru Lo* generations abound throughout the collections. For the newest synagogue melodies it's *The Next Generation*; for

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2 Regarding this newfound congregational status of Hallel one can ironically—albeit hyperbolically—apply a verse from Hallel itself: *Even ma'asu habonim hay'tah Irosh pinah* (Psalm 118:22, "the stone that the builders cast aside has become the cornerstone").

3 This portion of the book consists of an entirely new Shaḥarit section plus a virtually new Ma'ariv section—i.e. fifteen new settings as opposed to the earlier five snippets of Ma'ariv inserted between the *Z'mirot* for *S'udah Sh'lishit* and *Motza'ei Shabbat* (Nathanson 1960). Shiovitz's Weekdays selections are based largely on the works of Max Wohlberg, Samuel Rosenbaum, Pinchas Spiro, and Jack Chomsky. It is noteworthy that Wohlberg's contributions to this *Next Generation* section come from his *Shaḥar Avakeshka*, a forward-looking collection of melodies that was published in 1974—the same year as Nathanson's third "previous generation" *Zamru Lo*.

traditional chestnuts and even some of the old masters it's *The Next Generation* and/or Nathanson's *Zamru Lo*. The older *Zamru Lo* settings included by Shiovitz have not merely been reprinted, however. They have also benefited from two important features of the new collection: completely notated texts for passages that contain repeated melodies (more so in Volume III than in the Shabbat and High Holidays volumes), and full chord symbols for every measure (and often every beat) of music. These chords are not the perfunctory basics, but rather interesting musical enhancements that make the pieces inviting and enjoyable whether or not one uses accompaniment in performance.<sup>4</sup>

Comparing the two collections for the fate of individual texts can be illuminating. For example, the famous *Selihot* passage beginning with the words *han'shamah lakh* ("Yours is the soul") was classically a favorite spot for hazzanic improvisation rather than congregational singing; it is thus plausibly missing from the first *Zamru Lo* High Holidays section (Nathanson 1974). After Shlomo Carlebach, the progenitor of Neo-Hasidic music, released his first record album with *Han'shamah lakh* as the title song, the melodic preferences for this text gradually changed from cantorial to congregational.<sup>5</sup> This is duly reflected in four congregational melodies—including Carlebach's—presented in *The Next Generation* (Shiovitz 2006, 7-10).<sup>6</sup>

A similar, if more subtle, trend can be discerned in the concluding verses of *Min Hameitzar* (Psalm 118) in the Hallel service (Shiovitz 2009, 94-126). While the end of this psalm has long standing as a passage sung chorally or congregationally, such treatment would logically begin at *od'kha ki anitani*, the first of the set of four repeated final verses. Indeed, of the eleven melodies for

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4 One assumes that it is Jeffrey Shiovitz who provided the careful chording, though it is not explicitly mentioned. This reticence typifies the lower profile that Shiovitz maintains throughout the pages of *The Next Generation* series. Whereas Moshe Nathanson's name appears all over his *Zamru Lo* books as arranger and/or assumed composer of many passages (especially those labeled "traditional"), the name "Shiovitz" does not appear at all beyond the preface. Unfortunately, in this volume the reluctance to acknowledge sources of arrangements often affects pieces whose arrangers are known, including those documented by Nathanson.

5 For a full discussion of the development of Neo-Hasidic music in the synagogue see Sam Weiss, "Carlebach, Neo-Hasidic Music, and Current Liturgical Practice," *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Fall 2009, vol. 34, 55-75.

6 The fact that the Carlebach version is first of the four is strictly due to alphabetical order. Shiovitz continues Nathanson's model of organizing all melodies for a given title in alphabetical order by composer's surname (including the name "Traditional," which comes before "Unknown"). This proves useful when searching for a particular version among the twenty or thirty settings of some of the more popular titles in this book.



the end of this Psalm in the first *Zamru Lo* (Nathanson 1960; 1974), ten begin at *od'kha ki anitani* and only one (by Jacob Beigel) begins at the preceding verse, *pit'hu li sha'arei tzedek*. Beigel's version is also included in *The Next Generation* (Shiovitz 2009, 96), along with three others that begin at *pit'hu li*—and twenty-one more that begin at *od'kha ki anitani*. But this slight difference in the ratio of one starting point over the other is not nearly as striking a change as the twelve additional settings of the verse *pit'hu li sha'arei tzedek* by itself, i.e., without continuing into *od'kha ki anitani*. This liturgical development, too, is part of Shlomo Carlebach's legacy: *Pit'hu li sha'arei tzedek* was the opening song on his iconic album *At the Village Gate*, which featured this verse in Hebrew letters on its cover.<sup>7</sup>

Along with the expanded liturgical sections there are abridged ones as well. Totally absent from *The Next Generation* are any Haggadah melodies (save for the incidental Hallel psalms, of course), which is in marked contrast to the earlier full inventory of tunes for the Passover Seder (Nathanson 1974). This sound editorial decision reflects the fact that compared to thirty-five years ago, only a minority of hazzanim conduct Seders for their congregants, so the main locus of this repertoire has shifted from the synagogue to the Hebrew School. Similarly gone are the former *Z'mirot* sections (Nathanson 1955; 1960). In this case the missing items have not really disappeared; they are actually flourishing in their new home, the popular *B'Kol Ehad* booklets also edited by Jeffrey Shiovitz.

Although they are mainly books of congregational melodies, both *Zamru Lo* series contain a fair amount of material that is not meant for congregations to sing, such as various versions of the *Kaddish* and other *nusah* passages that may contain only brief congregational responses, or pieces which unrealistically assume that the congregation will imitate a hazzanic phrase by the cantor.<sup>8</sup> In Volumes II and III of *The Next Generation*, however, there is yet a greater amount of solo music. Examples include pieces that are clearly choral rather than

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7 This cover design was, of course, a bold play on the words *sha'arei tzedek* (“gates of righteousness”) and “Village Gate,” the name of the nightclub where Carlebach's 1963 live performance was recorded.

8 E.g. the *Min hametzar* verses in the Shofar ceremony (Nathanson 1974; Shiovitz 2006), or the complete *piyyut* for *T'fillat geshem* (Nathanson 1974; Shiovitz 2009).



congregational,<sup>9</sup> passages of straight *davenen*,<sup>10</sup> and even occasional recitatives.<sup>11</sup> Many of the Weekday settings, moreover, call for congregational singing on extended passages of rhythmic *nusah*—which probably works better on paper than in a real congregation (Shiovitz 2009, 220-260).<sup>12</sup>

It is rare for an anthology of this size (the three books total close to a thousand large-format pages) to be totally free from errors. Perhaps due to the accelerated production schedule alluded to before, or for other reasons, the latest *Zamru Lo* volume does have its share of spelling inconsistencies that could have been corrected with further proofing.<sup>13</sup> A bit more surprising are some incorrectly sequenced prayers. In the Hallel section both settings of *He'emanti ki adabeir* (Psalm 116) precede *Adonai z'kharanu* (Psalm 115), and both settings of the related Psalm 116 text *Ki hilatzta nafshi* inexplicably appear between *Ma ashiv* and *L'kha ezbah*.

It is commendable that the Passover hymn *B'rah Dodi* is included in the *Shalosh R'galim* section, but for some reason this *piyyut* for the First Days of the holiday comes after the Seventh Day hymn *Yom l'yabashah*. The latter setting, a nice adaptation by Abraham Idelsohn of a folk melody, is mistitled (also in Nathanson 1974) *Shirah hadashah*, after its recurring refrain. By not using the

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9 For example, where Nathanson has a brief citation from Wolf Shestapol's choral setting of *Adonai z'kharanu* (beginning with the words *lo hameitim*), Shiovitz has the complete psalm (misattributed to "Sevastopol"), whose melody line is clearly beyond the limits of congregational singing (Nathanson 1960, 66; Shiovitz 2009, 39).

10 There is a nice *K'vakarat ro'eh edro* and a *Ki veiti veit t'fillah* in the High Holiday volume charmingly attributed to "Boro Park" (as if this removes it from the category of "Unknown"), and a sweet but clearly hazzanic *Sh'ma koleinu* by Lawrence Avery. (Shiovitz 2006, 109, 245, 246). Avery is also the source of the *Shalosh R'galim* solos *Ein kamokha*, *Shalosh p'amim*, and *Birkat kohanim* (Shiovitz 2009, 168, 206, 207). Particularly noteworthy are Charles Davidson's setting of the *Nanu'im* for *Hodu*, the traditional settings of *Meirshut* for *Hatan torah* and *Hatan b'reishit*, as well as the traditional chant of *Akdamut milin*. (Shiovitz 2009, 70, 167, 212, 213)

11 E.g. Davidson's *Ahavat olam* and a complete transcription of Yossele Rosenblatt's *Tal*.

12 See note 3, above.

13 In skimming through the opening pages we find "*Mi Kadonai*" in the music and on the contents page but "*Mi kadonai*" in the title. One title for Psalm 114 has *Mah L'cha Hayam* while the title on the adjacent page drops the "h" in *Mah*. The *tzeirei* is universally transliterated as "ei" but an occasional "e" or "ai" comes through (*hahalel*, *hayarden*, *y'daihem*). There are isolated errors here and there (e.g. *hayara'ah vayanos*, *chalomish*) but certain misspellings recur in other settings of the same text—not surprising in today's copy-and-paste notation practices (e.g. *hamashpili lir'ot hashamayim*, *hahofchi atzur*, *av lahem v'lo y'richun*).

famous incipit *Yom L'Yabashah* as the title but rather a phrase that is identical to a nearby daily liturgical passage, this Passover gem may very well remain unnoticed by those seeking a setting for *Yom L'Yabashah*.

Since not all users of *The Next Generation* collection will have an equally solid grounding in Hebrew pronunciation (a consideration which may not have been as relevant in Moshe Nathanson's days), the "key to transliterations" page at the beginning of the book is a welcome touch. Unfortunately, however, two of the nine keys on this page (which is identical in all three volumes) are problematic. It is a common editorial time-saver in transliterating Hebrew lyrics to coalesce the sounds of *kamatz katan* and *holam* into the single symbol "o." But to compound this shortcoming by giving only the *holam* pronunciation ("o as in oh") for these two distinct Hebrew vowel sounds is simply incorrect.

The second problem is not as serious, but is still worth noting. The *sh'va na* is quite properly transliterated throughout the *Zamru Lo* series as an apostrophe (though not in this book's title word "*Regalim*"). Shiovitz gives the key to this apostrophe as follows: "*sh'va* [when pronounced]: i as in easily." Since the only type of *sh'va* that is represented in lyrics using the English alphabet is the one that is pronounced, to say "when pronounced" in this context is unnecessarily confusing. More importantly, the pronunciation keyword given for this vowel ("i as in easily") is an infelicitous choice. While it is true that most native English speakers will pronounce the middle vowel in "easily" as a neutral schwa sound,<sup>14</sup> it is also a fact that too many English speakers confuse the sound of the Hebrew *sh'va* with that of the *hirik* (e.g. *Mi Yimaleil, li'olam*, etc.) so a keyword like "easily" will only reinforce that tendency.<sup>15</sup> A much less ambiguous keyword like "a as in above" or "e as in given" would have been preferable.

Such minor critical observations aside, Jeffrey Shiovitz has done a yeoman's job in assembling and editing the three grand volumes of *Zamru Lo—The Next Generation*. Appreciative hazzanim and Jewish music lovers worldwide will thank him for generations to come.

*Sam Weiss, hazzan at the Jewish Community Center of Paramus, NJ, is a recitalist, lecturer and Jewish Music consultant in the fields of liturgical, Yiddish and Hasidic song. A frequent contributor to the Journal of Synagogue Music, his article, "Carlebach, Neo-Hasidic Music and Liturgical Practice," appeared in the Fall 2009 issue.*

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14 Furthermore, some British and most non-native speakers will pronounce that vowel closer to a weak "i" rather than a schwa.

15 The editor himself seems to have fallen into this trap, spelling and titling *M'kimi mei'afar dal* correctly as *M'kimi*, but also incorrectly as *Mikimi* (Shiovitz 2009, 5, 6, 8, 10).

# In Memoriam



## Isaac Goodfriend (1924-2009)

Isaac Goodfriend's shared words of wisdom were: always sit with a Holocaust survivor and ask them to share their stories; the experience will not only enlighten you, it will warm the survivor's heart to know that somebody cares and really wants to listen.

In turn, our late *khaver* Isaac managed to warm the hearts of everyone who knew him. At Cantors Assembly conventions he would share his innate gifts of song and wisdom with us in elevators or hallways, at meals or during formal concerts, or late at night, just sitting around reminiscing. He was like those Old Masters of legendary fame, whose singing could be described as a "bubbling brook."

Like flowing spring water, his warm baritone voice ran clear and pure, soothing your soul even as the words they carried on wings of song enriched your mind. For his vocal artistry was not confined to hazzanut alone, but

overflowed into a prodigious repertoire of Yiddish folk and Ghetto songs heard during his childhood and teen years in Poland.

He was at his best in the Yiddish Cabaret-style songs that emerged from Nazi labor camps like the one at Piotrkow where he was interned as a 16-year-old, and from which he escaped in 1944. Hidden by a Polish farmer, he lived to see the War's end, and from that time on displayed an unswerving optimism to one and all.

"Isaac was a lion," an admirer said of him; and his beloved life's partner, Betty, was a lioness, a charming and vivacious hostess. Together, they provided a home away from home to countless colleagues who came to perform with him or simply to visit with a couple who considered life a blessing to be enjoyed fully.

Yet, his own narrow escape had taught Isaac that not everyone was singled out by fate to live forever serenely and undisturbed. His album, *Songs of Martyrdom and Hope* ( <http://faujsa.fau.edu/goodfriend/> ), features a selection that could have served as his theme song: *Di zelbe gasn* ("The Same Streets"). It wonders whether

it must be so—

that fortune smiles on one  
while his friend is in dismay

that, like the moon and sun,  
our world must be this way.

and one would really like to know:  
why must it always be so?

[JAL]

## Di zelbe gasn

As sung by Issac Goodfriend  
Arr. Charles Heller

*Tango Rhythm*  
REFRAIN:

Baritone

Zi darf es a-zoy zayn, zi muz es a-zoy

Piano

4

zayn az far ey - nem iz zikh ba - shert un far dertsvey - ten iz alts far -

*rit.*

8

vert, Er hot es ayn - ge - shtelt a - zoy zol zayn di

*a tempo*

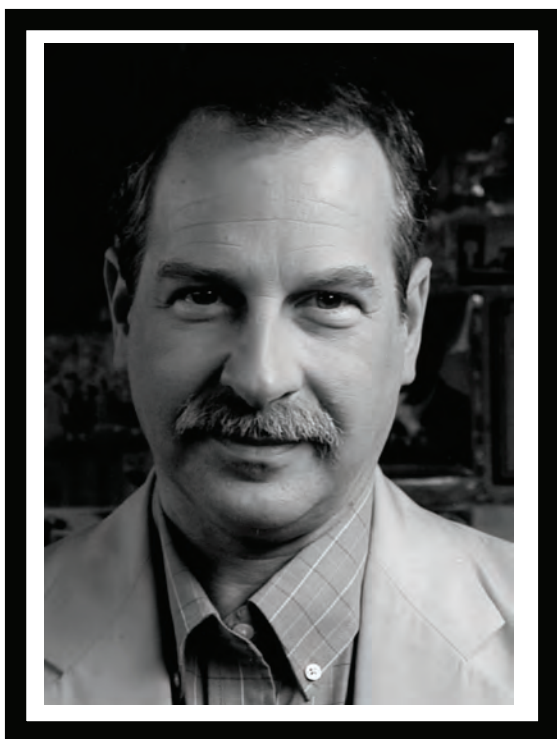
12

velt, es fregt un fregt dos harts mayn tsi darf a -

15

zoy zayn, tsi muz a - zoy zayn?

*parlando*



## **Barry Serota (1948-2009)**

An irreplaceable bridge between the golden age of yesterday and today, Barry Serota had made *aliyah* and settled in Modi'in in the spring of 2009. He died suddenly—on his way back to Israel six months later—after a brief visit to his former home in Chicago.

Barry was a walking encyclopedia of hazzanut, a friend of hazzanim, whom he never hesitated to help either in his professional capacity as an attorney or in any other way. His passion was to singlehandedly produce an entire library of re-mastered old recordings—through his foundation, Musique Internationale—and to make them available for fellow lovers of hazzanut everywhere. He was also an entertaining and informative speaker who filled hundreds of requests over the years for lectures that included recordings and videos from his vast collection.

One of Barry's favorite anecdotes concerned Cantor Pierre Pinchik's ingenious solution for a tessitura problem. Halfway through Pinchik's setting of *Rozo d'shabbos* ("The Mystery of Sabbath"), a mystical introit to the Arvit service proper on Friday night, the music moves up a fourth and remains centered there until the end. That particular vocal tessitura felt uncomfortably high for Pinchik on the day he recorded the prayer ("Let all evil powers flee before the Sabbath...").

Since he was accompanying himself at the organ, he solved the problem by playing the second half a semi-tone lower, in E minor instead of F minor. The change went unnoticed because it occurred just after listeners had turned the 12" 78 RPM platter over on their phonograph turntable. Those few among Pinchik's adoring public who did notice, simply thought it was part of the original composition, yet another indication of their idol's quirky musical genius.

Inspection of that part of the published score proves otherwise. It shows no key change, and confirms Barry Serota's expedient reason for the pitch suddenly on the recording. The artist simply didn't feel up to it, and since he was the accompanist as well (as 'Pinchos Siegel'—his given name—young Pinchik had supported his musical studies by playing piano gigs in clubs), he improvised an unobtrusive way out of the situation.

Along with the *Journal* staff's deepest sympathy to his widow Yvonne and the children—perhaps the finest *Envoi* we can offer Barry are his own words, which appear in the MAILBOX section of this issue, and reveal the acuity of his perception when it came to matters hazzanic.

[JAL]



## ...Rozo d'shabbos

Ending, first side of record: F minor...

1

...ro - zo de-sha-bos i - hi-sha-bos.

Beginning, second side of record: E minor...

5

Kad a-yil shab-to, i-hi is-

8

yach-das ve - is par-shas mi-sit-ro acha-ro, kad a - yil shab - to...



## Samuel Fordis (1921-2010)

*We are fortunate to have in writing Sam Fordis's considered thoughts on the relationship between "singing and string playing," which he first expressed to your editor privately during a lull between sessions at a CA convention in the 1960s. He later formulated these ideas in a letter that appeared in the MAILBOX section of JSM 2006. The Journal staff expresses its deepest sympathies to Sam's wife, Mary, and the entire family. [JAL]*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were only two great violin soloists—Winiawsky and Joachim—and none from Russia. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century most great violin soloists were Russian, and most of them were Jews.

Why? Social reasons. Because of Russian restrictions, the only way a Jew could get to Moscow or St. Petersburg was with special permission. Since higher education was a closed door for Jews, the natural detour was via the arts, whose patrons—through their connections—could bring talented young Jewish violinists (easier to carry around than a piano) into the big city conservatories, salons and halls.

Israel in the 1950s was like America at the turn of the last [19<sup>th</sup>] century, so the European tradition of violin playing as a key to social climbing still prevailed. Hence: Izhak Pearlman, Pinchas Zukerman and Gil Shajam. And

Pearlman didn't really blossom until he appeared on Ed Sullivan's show, got a Juilliard scholarship and studied with Ivan Gallamian.

In my own childhood (ca. 1930), when Jewish immigrants were beginning to make it economically, my *zeyde* nixed a musical career for me: "there will be no *klezmerim* in this family!"

But singing came naturally, so I became a child *hazzan* in Los Angeles, where I grew up, even though what I wanted most was to study violin. Ironically, this push/pull worked well for me throughout my career as a professional musician/clergyman. Violinists always considered me as a cantor, while cantors always thought of me as a violinist. Result: no professional jealousy!

As for the connection between singing and string playing, when the cellist Lynn Harrell was starting out on this career, he confessed to his teacher that he just couldn't bring out the tone of his instrument. The teacher advised him to go buy a record by Cantor Pierre Pinchik, called *Raza DeShabbat* (The Mystery of the Sabbath). When Harrell played it for the first time, he broke into tears at the passage, *ve-khol shiltanei rugzin u-marei de-dina* (and all the forces of evil and powers of severe judgment). When he related this to his teacher he was told: "It's not the technique—fingering and bowing in your case—that should concern you. Pinchik wasn't interested in whether or not his coloratura was perfectly even or whether he should be singing *forte* or *piano*; he sang from his soul, and this is the secret that all great artists know."

I heard Pinchik daven one *Pesah*, and all through *Shaharit Hallel* and the Torah service the man did nothing. But in the prayer *U-mipnei hata'einu* (Because of our Sins) of Musaf he took worshipers to a different world. In eight minutes he had that congregation eating out of the palm of his hand.

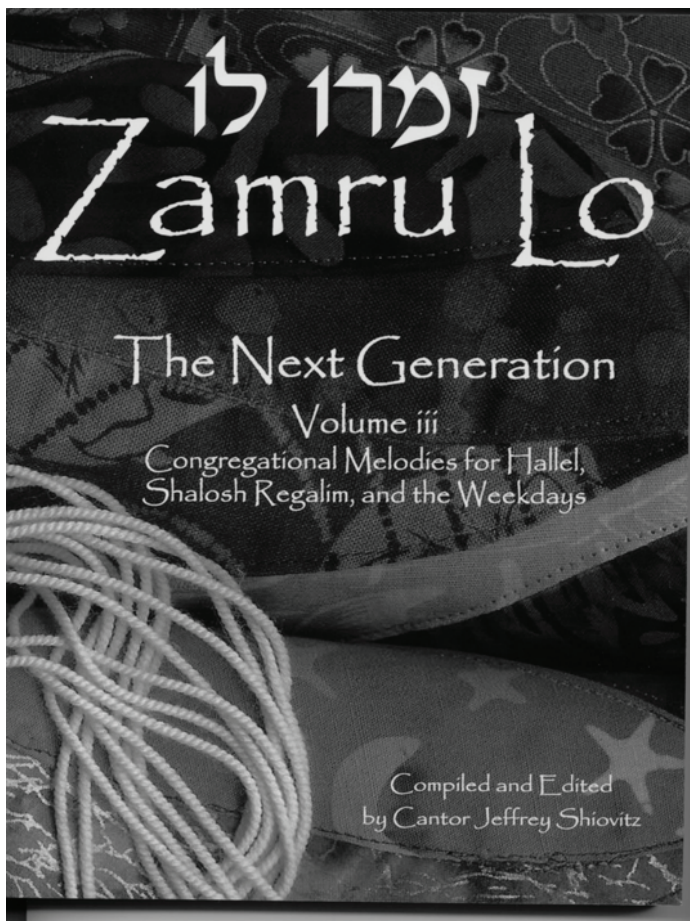
My friend Abe Salkon (z"l), who was cantor at Beth Am in Los Angeles, later introduced me to Pinchik: "Khazn, I want you to meet a *m'nagen godol* (great musician). I asked Pinchik: "What do you look for in a concert?" Pinchik answered, "What *not* to do."

What ties singing to string playing is the flow, the *legato* (literally: "tie"). After Lynn Harrell had played Pinchik's *Raza DeShabbat* a dozen times he told me: "I don't go anywhere without taking a tape of that recording with me; every night it's at my bedside and I listen to it before falling asleep.: In fact, Harrell always tells students at his master classes: "Now play it again, and this time, *sing* with it."

The reverse is true of voice teachers; they usually tell young students to think if a violin while singing...

[JAL}

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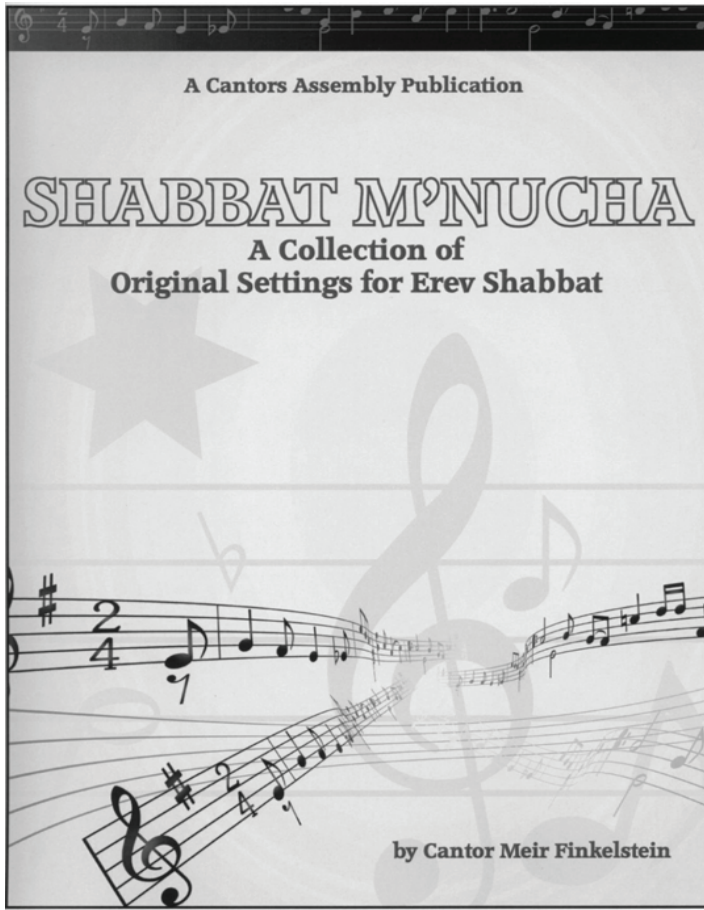
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The logo for the Journal of Synagogue Music features the title in a large, elegant, black cursive font. The text is set against a background of a musical staff with five lines. To the right of the title, there are three musical notes: a quarter note, an eighth note, and a sixteenth note, all in black. The entire logo is set within a light gray rectangular border.

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