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A YIDDISH LIEDERABEND

— AN EVENING OF YIDDISH SONG —

YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

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PRESENTS

A YIDDISH LIEDERABEND

— AN EVENING OF YIDDISH SONG —

Devised and directed by Neil W. Levin

ANNE E. LEIBOWITZ MEMORIAL CONCERT

Tuesday Evening, December 13, 2017

Ida Rae Cahana, SOPRANO

Elizabeth Shammash, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Raphael Frieder, BARITONE

Simon Spiro, TENOR

Yehudi Wyner, PIANO

CAMEO APPEARANCE: Robert Paul Abelson

INTRODUCTION

by NEIL W. LEVIN

FOR MOST OF US in the twenty-first century, allusions to “Yiddish song” have come typically if not ipso facto to connote the popular, folk, quasi-folk, theatrical and other entertainment, and even commercial realms. Rarely now, especially outside circumscribed Yiddishist circles, do unmodified references to Yiddish song evoke association with the artistically cultivated, classical vocal genre known as *Lieder*, or ‘art song’—the intimate, introspective expressive medium that interprets, animates, and musically reflects as well as explicates serious poetry. Yet, classically oriented Yiddish song recitals such as this evening’s presentation—whether in appropriately modest public recital and chamber music venues or in the *Liederabend* context of domestic, quasi-salon social gatherings—were once commonplace components of Jewish cultural life in cosmopolitan environments; and nowhere more so than in the New York area.

The German word *Lied* (pl., *Lieder*) translates generically in musical terms simply as ‘song’. The precise German equivalent of ‘art song’ is *Kunstlied* (as opposed, for example, to *Volkslied* for folksong), but that term is not actually invoked in general references to the ‘art song’ genre with which we are concerned here. *Lieder* came long ago to signify on its own and by implication the post-18th-century German art song. And in the 20th century it entered the English language with the same meaning. This refers to the vocal genre, which, forerunners and antecedents notwithstanding, was born and rose to prominence in the first quarter of the 19th century as a creature of the early Romantic era in German-speaking Europe. Throughout the 19th and into the 20th centuries, it was subjected to late Romantic, post-Romantic, neo-Romantic, modernist, and other treatments and influences. Meanwhile, this genre was in effect adopted and pursued outside the German cultural orbit in a multiplicity of musical styles, aesthetic-national orientations, poetic literatures, and languages (including, eventually, Yiddish and modern Hebrew) by French, Russian, Czech, Norwegian, English, American, and other composers of various ethnicities, nationalities or cultural backgrounds.

Although many of the composers represented this evening used the term ‘art song’ in their publications to prevent misconstruction as folksong arrangements or popular songs, that nomenclature is probably best avoided now. It tends to convey an unwanted affectation and an uninviting stodginess. We resort to it here only for clarification and in the absence of a universally accepted alternative. In any case, a liberally conceived lieder recital today—even if so labeled, especially in America—could include with only minimal purist resistance some French or Russian songs, for example, in addition to the programmed German lieder. But how we should title an evenly mixed recital of classical songs from a variety of sources—in which German lieder occupy only one segment that is not more prominent than the others—might be an issue whose resolution remains open. If the so-called classical music context is understood from the outset by virtue of the artists’ reputations or the nature of a particular concert series and its context, then “song recital” might suffice.

The lieder genre was a product of the confluence of literary, sociological, aesthetic, commercial, and even technological developments that had emerged in Europe by the 19th century. Among these were the steep escalation of interest in lyric poetry as part of a wider, heightened attention by the educated public to serious literature; the growth of middle and upper-middle classes for whom participation in music in the home became an important activity; the increased availability of music through commercial publishing; and the technical progress and improvements in the piano. Its greater range of sonorities, variety of fresh coloristic possibilities, tonal depth, and dynamic facility now suited it well to interplay and partnership with the human voice as part of a balanced dyad in which the piano parts are no longer merely accompaniments. Rather, like the vocal lines, they express and interpret the sentiments, evocations, and symbolic references of the poetry.

Yiddish songs by composers such as Moses Milner, Joel Engel, Ofer Ben-Amots, and of course Lazar Weiner meet that pianistic standard to near perfection. They are paradigms for the quintessential lieder model, not only in their sophistication and intricate probing of the poetry, but also in their fusion of voice and piano in synergetic expression. Yiddish songs by many other composers may be more simple in both their vocal lines and their piano writing. But that does not necessarily negate their

artistic persona. They, too, are lieder in the classical song tradition because of their literary basis and their intended function.

The classically cultivated song canon is commonly exemplified by the German lieder of Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, or Brahms; the French songs of Debussy, DuParc, or Ravel; Russian songs by Rachmaninoff or Mussorgsky; English songs by Britten or Vaughan Williams; American songs by Copland, Barber, or Ned Rorem; and those in other languages by composers such as Grieg, Dvorak, or Sibelius—to name only a few. That this canon has a Jewish cultural counterpart in serious Yiddish (and, for that matter, modern Hebrew) lieder nearly always comes as a jolting surprise now to classical music aficionados, Jewishly-educated circles, ardent adherents of secular Yiddish or Hebrew cultures, and otherwise informed performers of and audiences for Jewishly-related music alike. Typical of spontaneous responses to mention of classically oriented Yiddish song on Western lieder or art song models is the question: “Is there such a thing?” Equally enlightening is the revelation that a significant part of this aggregate Yiddish repertoire, although it originated in Imperial Russia, is an offspring of the American Jewish experience.

The treasury of cultivated Yiddish and modern Hebrew lieder, based on Jewish literary sources and modeled on Western artistic structures—often infused with harmonic and modal departures—dates to the first decade of the 20th century. The genesis was a function of the New National School in Jewish music that was born in Imperial Russia, and which was embodied by the *Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik* in St Petersburg. Founded in 1908, it had branches in Moscow, Riga, Odessa, and other cities. Consistent with its mission and goals, composers such as Moses Milner, Joel Engel, Mikhail Gnessin, Alexander Krein, Solomon Rosowsky, Jacob Weinberg, Lazare Saminsky, and a host of others even less known today in the general music world, began the road from folk to art song by fashioning artistic piano parts for their own well-crafted arrangements or even refined versions of Jewish folksongs and folk motifs. This folklore material had been collected from large swaths of the Pale of Settlement. In those transformed states, genuine Yiddish folksongs (as well as Hebrew liturgical melodies and Hassidic tunes) could be presented successfully on classical concert stages as settings with the dignity of art songs; and they could be appreciated within the non-Jewish Russian conservatory milieu.

The natural next stage of the mission became original composition of Yiddish and Hebrew songs, inspired by the same newly emerged Jewish national-cultural consciousness that had driven the folk-song projects. Some of those composers turned for the first time in music history to serious Yiddish and modern Hebrew poetry.

The American expansion of the Yiddish lieder repertoire was pursued by a number of immigrant composers, albeit independently of the New National School or the *Gesellschaft*—and, except for Lazar Weiner, with virtually no awareness of that development or its affiliated composers. The Russian episode—including its short lived extension in Berlin and Vienna—appears almost entirely to have escaped notice in America until well after mid-century. Even by the turn of the century it had gained only marginal attention among a small handful of scholars and graduate students pursuing theses or dissertations, as well as among the relatively limited number of students at the two cantorial schools whose curricula once included required courses that emphasized songs of the New National School. (To this day, the general classical music world remains largely ignorant of the subject, and unfamiliar with the relevant composers.) A 1918/1919 North American concert tour by the Zimro Ensemble—a sextet of New National School/ *Gesellschaft* veteran emigrés—briefly introduced a few American audiences to the work of some of the principal composers of that movement. But the focus was on instrumental rather than vocal music; and Zimro dissolved itself shortly afterward. Only a few of the New National School composers resettled in the United States following the Bolshevik Revolution—in most cases with intermediate sojourns in what was then Palestine. But in their newly adopted country they concentrated primarily on the larger forms: symphonic works and instrumental chamber music, with songwriting a secondary concern at best.

Even Lazar Weiner, whose oeuvre displays a level of sophistication unmatched by any of the other American immigrant composers of Yiddish songs, was unaware of the New National School development or its repertoire when he first began to set Yiddish poetry. Early on his path, however, he made a point of acquainting himself with the work of its composers—especially Milner, Engel, Gnessin, and

Achron. He would later acknowledge that they were an important influence on his own art. But his initial inspiration to compose lieder came directly, even exclusively, from his discovery of Yiddish poetry, and from the ignition of his lifelong love affair with Yiddish language and literature. His songs were eminently suitable for the Liederabend format, which—often interwoven with poetry readings and literary discussions—provided the inaugural occasion for many of them.

While Yiddish songs by many of the other immigrant composers of his time were aimed at broader segments of the Jewish public, Weiner was content with a smaller but intellectually and artistically curious following that was open to digesting his more complex, enriched musical vocabularies. Still, the literary basis of classically intended Yiddish song as a whole is underscored by the fact that many of the more popularly targeted songs by others are settings of verse by the same poets to whom Weiner turned for his.

In recent decades Yiddish poetry as well as prose has begun to attract the attention of younger generations of composers. This is in part due to an overall renaissance that allows for and encourages a diverse array of styles, techniques, and even experimental procedures. This suggests that, in Jewish cultural as well as classical music terms, the Yiddish lieder genre—along with Yiddish poetry itself—retains the power to resonate with contemporary sensibilities. ■

PROGRAM

— PART ONE —

LAZAR WEINER (1897-1982)

A nign

SOLOMON ROSOWSKY (1878-1962)

Ikh bin a balogole

■ RAPHAEL FRIEDER

LAZAR WEINER

Yidish

Unter dayne vayse shtern

Volt mayn tate raykh geven

■ IDA RAE CAHANA

JANOT ROSKIN (1884-1946)

Mayn ru'e plats

LAZAR WEINER

Ikh hob far dir a sod

Baym bentshn likht

Shtile tener

YEHUDI WYNER (b. 1929)

S'iz nito keyn nekhtn

■ ELIZABETH SHAMMASH

MOSES [MIKHAIL] MILNER
(ca. 1953-1956?)

From *Tsen lider* on poems by
Itzhak Leib Peretz;

Vigliid

Oyfn grinem bergele

Ketsele shtil

Breytele

■ ENSEMBLE

LAZAR WEINER

Ergets vayt

■ RAPHAEL FRIEDER

SOLOMON GOLUB (1887-1952)

Toybn

Ikh ken es nit farshteyn

■ IDA RAE CAHANA

MOSES [MIKHAIL] MILNER

In kheyder

■ SIMON SPIRO

LAZAR WEINER

A maysele

■ ROBERT PAUL ABELSON

— INTERVAL —

— PART TWO —

KLEZMER FANTASIES

LAZAR WEINER

Yosl klezmer
Der yid mitn fidl

■ RAPHAEL FRIEDER

YEARNINGS AND LONGINGS OF THE JEWISH SPIRIT

MAURICE RAUCH (1910-1994)

Shifreles portret
Ikh un di velt

■ IDA RAE CAHANA

ECHOES OF YIDDISH FOLKLORE

OFER BEN-AMOTS (b. 1955)

From Shtetl Songs:
Bistu mit mir broyges?
Klip, klap

■ ENSEMBLE

arr. ALEX WEISER

Strange Happenings – The Holyday
Calamities of Avremele Melamed

■ SIMON SPIRO

FROM THE BEST OF SECOND AVENUE — A NOSTALGIC GLIMPSE OF YIDDISH THEATRE:

ALEXANDER OLSHANETSKY (1892-1946)

Eyn kuk af dir (from Di eyntsike nakht)

■ ELIZABETH SHAMMASH
AND SIMON SPIRO

DAVID MEYEROWITZ (1867-1943)

Vos geven iz geven un nito

■ ROBERT PAUL ABELSON

JOSEPH RUMSHINSKY (1881/79?-1956)

Shloymele, Malkele
(from Dos galitsiyaner rebele)

■ ELIZABETH SHAMMASH
AND SIMON SPIRO

BELOVED SONGS OF THE FOLK — A MEDLEY FOR ALL

arr. ALEX WEISER

Oyfn pripitshik
Ale brider

— MEET THE ARTISTS —

With Hanukkah Candle Lighting

PROGRAM NOTES

by NEIL W. LEVIN

Born in Haifa, Israeli and American composer **OFER BEN-AMOTS** gave his first piano concert at the age of nine, and at sixteen he was awarded first prize in the Chet Piano Competition. Following composition studies with Joseph Dorfman at Tel Aviv University, he was invited to study at the Conservatoire de Musique in Geneva, where he was a student of Pierre Wismar and Alberto Ginastera. He received degrees in composition, theory, and piano from the Hochschule für Musik in Detmold, Germany, and in 1987 he came to the United States to begin studies with George Crumb and Richard Wernick at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received his Ph.D. in composition (1991).

Ben-Amots's music has been performed by such orchestras as the Zurich Philharmonic, the Munich Philharmonic, the Austrian Radio orchestra, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Moscow Camerata, the Heidelberg, Erfurt, and Brandenburg Symphonies, the Filarmonici di Sicili, the Colorado Springs Symphony, and the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra. Some of these orchestras, and many others — including the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig — have recorded his works.

Ben-Amots was the winner of the 1994 International Competition for Composers, in Vienna, where his chamber opera, *Fool's Paradise*, was premiered. He is also the recipient of the 1988 Kavannah Prize for his composition *Fanfare for Orchestra* and the Gold Award at South Africa's 1993 Roodepoort International Competition for Choral Composition. His *Avis Urbanis*, for amplified flute, was awarded first prize at the Kobe International Competition for Flute Composition. In 1999 he was awarded the Aaron Copland Award and the Music Composition Artist Fellowship by the Colorado Council on the Arts.

Ben-Amots is a Jerusalem Fellow of the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity and a member of the Editorial Board of the Milken Archive of Jewish Music. He is a professor of music at the Colorado College, in Colorado Springs, where he is also chairman of the music department and, in addition to composition and music theory, he teaches a wide variety of liberal arts subjects. Among his works that appear on CD on the NAXOS label in addition to *Shtetl Songs* are *Celestial Dialogues*, *Hashkivenu* — *Song of the Angels*, and his setting of Psalm 81. Many of his other Jewishly-related pieces are also included among the commercially-available recordings of the Milken Archive.

His work for soprano, male-voice chorus, and clarinet, *Mizmor: Seven Degrees of Praise*, an imaginative setting of Psalm 150, received its world premiere at Lincoln Center in New York in 2003.

In 2004 he won the Festiladino, an international competition for Judeo-Spanish songs that is part of the Israel Festival in Jerusalem; and in 2015 he won first prize at the Fourth Smareglia International Composers Competition in Udine, Italy. Ben-Amots's innovative multimedia opera, *The Dybbuk*, has had ten productions thus far in the United States, Germany, and Israel. The opera was reviewed as "a uniquely beautiful and powerful new work . . . a service to music and to what is best in our humanity."

"Growing up in Israel just a few years after the state was born," Ben-Amots has reflected, "Yiddish was unknown to me — especially as the son of a Bulgarian Sephardi mother and a father from Libyan Jewry — erroneously as a 'vanished tongue' of a bygone era and a distant place."

Indeed, many of the younger generation of Israelis then, like their predecessor *halutzim* before them in what was, until 1948, Palestine, had attached to the Yiddish language the opprobrium of association with the "old order" and the Old World; and thus in their eyes and ears it was a cultural artifact of bitter memories: exile, ghettos, pogroms, disenfranchisements, poverty, and helplessness. Those perceptions, however historically skewed but manufactured, planted, and driven by some (but not all) Zionist ideologists — many of whom knew better — were at odds with the new spirit and desiderata of youthful regeneration, a fresh start, national pride, and statehood. Thus was fostered the notion that Yiddish represented and encumbrance of the past that deserved shedding, if not extinction. Even the very sound of the language appeared in that naively arrogant perception to clash with the modern image of a proud, strong, and free *sabra* — a native of Theodore Herzl's "old-new" land.

There were also political overtones. Those among the establishment who had come from German-speaking Jewry sometimes had an aversion to Yiddish as the aural-cultural symbol of eastern European

Jewry — a false language, moreover, that some of their forebearers had once dubbed with contempt as “the jargon”. And to those, like Ben-Amots, from non-European backgrounds altogether — Sephardi, Yemenite, Persian, Babylonian, Syrian, Bukharian, and other Jews from the Arabic world and the Jewish orient — Yiddish and its culture were simply foreign.

“In retrospect,” Ben-Amots has recalled, “many of us chose simply not to be aware of the proud legacy of Yiddish high culture and Yiddish-speaking Jewry during the previous hundred years.” By that he meant, among other things, the defiance and assertiveness of the Arbayer Bund (the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), the sophisticated Yiddish artistic life that had reigned in many cosmopolitan European cities, the rich body of secular Yiddish literature, and the heritage of Yiddish song.

True, Yiddish remained the language of most Hassidic dynasties and the non-Hassidic haredim in Israel. But their connection to Yiddish had to do with daily communication and religious study, not Yiddish culture. And in any case, Ben-Amots’s circles had little or no contact with those self-segregated groups.

Ironically for a young Jewish composer, it was in Germany, while he was a student there in the 1980s, that Ben-Amots really “discovered” Yiddish. “My introduction to German culture and language during that sojourn,” he remembered, “provided me with the key to one of the two basic original linguistic components of Yiddish. I began to acquaint myself with that Jewish language as well, and soon I gained access to a wealth of eastern European works by many of the giants of Yiddish literature.”

It was also in Germany that Ben-Amots stumbled by chance upon an old, almost tattered, copy of a collection of Yiddish folksongs that had been published in Europe decades before. He was intrigued by the simple beauty of those tunes and the mixture of pain and humor in the poems. His instinct was to rearrange the songs with a fresh artistic and personal interpretation, elevating them from their natural folklore milieu to an art form. Thus was born his idea for his song cycle, **SHTETL SONGS**. In addressing this project, he has explained, he sought out the harmony and form suggested by each song. Without too much tampering with the received vocal lines, he has nonetheless provided dissonance, clusters, and chromatically oriented runs in the piano parts. Thus, overall, the piece is far from a traditionally tonal one. But passages and sections can be quite modal, depending upon the specific tune. The complete cycle contains nine songs, of which **BISTU MIT MIR BROYGES?** and **KLIP, KLAP** are two.

Bistu mit mir broyges? (Are You Upset with Me?) describes a typical moment in the interaction of a married couple in many religious or even quasi-religious circles of small-town eastern European Jewish life of that period — especially among those attracted by Hassidic beliefs and superstitions. The piano part consists of a set of variations depicting the mood of each strophe.

The vagueness of the text could also invite other, complementary as well as colliding, planes of interpretation — including modern psychological, psychosexual, or sociological constructions. Gender-driven contemporary readings might intuit a cynical inference in the husband’s attempt to placate his wife; and some might interpret the visit to the rebbe, and especially the suggestion of his supposed powers of intercession, not merely as an innocent reference to a common folk practice, but as a satirical jibe at what many outside the Hassidic world would perceive as foolishness. If accorded that interpretation, the song would join an entire category of 19th- and early 20th-century satirical, so-called anti-Hassidic Yiddish songs. These typically mock Hassidic ways and superstitions and poke fun at the nonintellectual orientation and alleged self-righteous charisma of certain Hassidic rebbes. But that intention is not always so simple. It is not always certain in some of those songs whether the words actually bespeak a satirical agenda, whether they simply extol or perhaps romanticize perceived Hassidic virtues or attributes — or whether the very ambiguity is itself part of the satire. *Bistu mit mir Broyges?* presents us with these many possibilities.

KLIP, KLAP can be interpreted as a humorous interchange, in a slow waltz tempo, presumably between a young man and the woman he courts. He implores her to open her door and let him in from a rainstorm, but either she is too shy and hesitant or she thinks it improper — and improper for him to ask. On the other hand, perhaps they have had a quarrel and her response is purely sarcastic. One might also infer erotic overtones.

STRANGE HAPPENINGS: The Holyday Calamities of AVREMELE MELAMED is a paraphrase of a familiar satirical motif in eastern European Jewish folklore. Recounting examples of his comical misfortunes while feigning commiseration, the song pokes fun at Avremele, a hapless village Jewish school teacher and elementary religious and Hebrew instructor who either manages to blunder or whose luck seems always to be against him — particularly at holyday times. Avremele (“Little Avram”, which itself suggests condescension or mockery when applied to an adult as a diminutive in this context) is portrayed as the typical mishap victim who might be described in contemporary American terms as a “loser” or a fortune’s fool, constantly finding himself in some predicament through no fault of his own.

First, one of the five originally prohibited grains during Pesah finds its way into matza balls at his seder. Then, for the Festival of Shavuot when dairy foods are traditional, he cannot prepare the customary (in many traditions) cheese crepes, or blintzes, because the cat has devoured the required butter. And then on Rosh Hashana morning he apparently mis-timed — or overstayed — his religiously required visit to the ritual bath/*mikve*, so that the shofar service was over by the time he returned to the synagogue and he missed observing one of the central and most meaningful commandments of Rosh Hashana: to hear the sounding of the shofar.

But then the pièce de résistance: Avremele’s observance of a custom in spiritual preparation for Yom Kippur is thwarted when his rooster dies before time to procure a replacement. This refers to an old custom known as *kapporot* — *kapore* in Yiddish — whereby a fowl (typically a chicken or rooster, and preferably a white one as a symbol of purity and holiness) is substituted symbolically for one’s sins and, as a mark of atonement, slaughtered in symbolic (only) substitution for punishment — and then consumed at the meal just prior to the fast. This custom is not mentioned in the Talmud, and its origin has been described by some rabbis as a pagan ritual. Some connect it to the scapegoat (*azazel*) ritual in antiquity in which a goat was sent from the Temple in Jerusalem into the desert on Yom Kippur, symbolically carrying away the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:20-22). However, some rabbis have opposed *kapores* on these very grounds, since even symbolic animal sacrifice was forbidden after the destruction of the Temple. Although in the 16th century Rabbi Joseph Caro, in his *shulhan arukh* (Code of Jewish Law), called *kapporot* a “stupid custom”, it gained wide currency in some Jewish communities; and most orthodox rabbis have been reluctant to outlaw it. More recently, and in many modern but observant circles, a token monetary sum is substituted for the fowl and then offered to charity.

The basic melody as well as the story belong to folklore. This arrangement is based on the choral setting by Maurice Goldman.

Among the immigrant composers of Yiddish songs with wide popular appeal to Yiddish-speaking audiences during the first half of the 20th century, **SOLOMON GOLUB** (1887-1952) was one of the most beloved figures. He was also a kind of performing bard who sang his own songs in formal classical concert formats with piano parts that he fashioned as integral components. Many of his songs became familiar to larger audiences as well during his lifetime, from radio broadcasts, recordings, and public performances by other singers.

Golub was born in Duveln [Dubelen; Dobeles], near Riga, Latvia, where his father was a local *ba’al t’filla* (lay cantor) and *ba’al k’ri’a* (Torah reader). His mother was a singer known for her attachment to the famous Jewish bard Eliakum Zunser (1836-1913), who was perhaps the most celebrated Yiddish folk poet and singer as well as elevated *badkhn* (wedding entertainer) in the northern part of the Czarist Empire. But she was equally versed in the canon of German Lieder by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, and other classical composers, and she passed this Western cultural heritage on to her son.

At the formal, modern-leaning, and partly Westernized Great Synagogue in Riga, Solomon sang in the choir of the esteemed and learned Cantor Borukh Leib Rosowsky (1841 - 1919). That experience was a large part of the young Golub’s vocal and musical training, and it introduced him not only to the liturgical spirit and melos that he would later incorporate into his own secular songs, but also to general Western musical awareness that Rosowsky had acquired during his studies in Vienna and St. Petersburg.

Golub immigrated to the United States in 1906. By about 1915 he had become involved in the musical life of educated and cultured Yiddish-speaking Jewry in New York, participating in early Yiddish

choral ensembles and beginning to compose.

The Yiddish musical culture that Golub encountered on his arrival in America and during the ensuing decade was dominated largely by popular, mass-oriented musical theatre and vaudeville — the so-called Second Avenue variety. Given his more highly cultured background, he was disappointed in — even repulsed by — the coarseness and primitive pandering of much of that music of Second Avenue's early days. He later recounted that he resolved then to create an alternative Yiddish song repertoire on a higher literary as well as musical plane — one that would espouse taste and dignity while still having popular emotional appeal and still resonating with the Yiddish-speaking audiences of the day.

Before he was able to search out and find sufficient poetry of the type he felt would suit his mission — and when the corpus of that level of poetry had yet to be expanded — Golub often wrote his own poetry for his songs. And he continued to do so even after he had embraced a wide array of verse by others. Eventually he turned to the work of a broad spectrum of Yiddish poets who were making increasingly significant contributions to American Jewish literature. He thus came to be considered an advocate for serious Yiddish poetry. "Many of the poems would have remained unknown or become forgotten," wrote the Jewish music publisher (also songwriter) Henry Lefkowitz in his introduction to a 1936 collection of Golub's songs, "if Solomon Golub had not written music for them."

Golub's songs and recitals met with accelerating acceptance during the 1920s, and by the 1930s and 1940s his popularity reached its zenith. His 1932 tour abroad included London and Berlin, among other cities.

He also attained recognition in Zionist-oriented circles — not only among those whose language was still Yiddish, such as the Labor Zionists, but also among committed modern Hebraists. Some of the Yiddish poems he set reflect, obliquely or directly, Zionist sympathies and sensibilities. But he also set some poetry by modern Hebrew poets, including the two most familiar names in America: Saul Tchernikovsky and Haim Nahman Bialik; and he often created alternative Yiddish versions of such poetry as well. At some point he began providing singable version in modern Hebrew for some of his Yiddish songs. "For the first time," Lefkowitz commented, "two Jewish languages (Hebrew and Yiddish) are merged in the music of one composer." (It was not, however, the "first time." Lefkowitz was obviously unaware of the work of the composers associated with the New National School in Jewish music and the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg and its branches in Moscow, Riga, Odessa, and other cities. During the first two decades of the 20th century, many of them had addressed both Hebrew and Yiddish poetry in their art songs and folksong arrangements, often publishing Yiddish and Hebrew — as well as, in some cases, German and Russian — versions of the same song.)

Golub's songs are not sophisticated Kunstlieder with the equality and interdependence of roles for voice and piano that this genre demands; nor are they harmonically or structurally intricate. Rather, they are simple, forthright expressions with piano accompaniment whose charm resides in their absence of pretension. Many are folk-like in character, but none are folksongs. They are accessible and easily appreciated, but never wanting for taste. They invite serious artistic interpretation, classical rendition, and careful consideration of the poetry. Yet one cannot fail to observe that they are unapologetic harmonic and melodic echoes of mid-19th-century clichés and creative approaches, with no reflection of 20th- (or even late 19th-) century harmonic enrichment or rhythmic imagination — almost as if nothing further had occurred in the progress of Western music. From the perspective of Jewishly-related art music development, any perusal of Golub's opera would suggest either that he was unaware of the New National School and the Gesellschaft composers or that he was disinterested in that development. Nor does it appear that he took any interest in the progressive path that Lazar Weiner had already begun to hew and follow in his artistic devotion to Yiddish Lieder. Indeed, apart from several shared poets, there is little if any overlap between Golub's and Weiner's different but equally valid cultural worlds.

"He doesn't come to us with much pretension as a self-anointed writer or composer," acknowledged Leo Low, a celebrated choral conductor and dominant personality in both the Yiddish music world and the cantorial arena of that time:

Golub is first and foremost a man of "the folk," but one with an artist's soul and an artist's intuition. When Golub beholds the image of Jewish folk life, he feels the people's pain and joy,

and he clothes it in a song . . . Golub set his songs simply, without much involved harmony or counterpoint in the accompaniment.

Golub resisted collegial suggestions concerning editorial revision of his piano parts and even some judicious harmonic as well as pianistic improvements. “This is how I feel,” he responded. “This is how I put it together, and this is how it will stay.” With some reservations, Low was inclined to defend that attitude: “Perhaps he [Golub] may be right from a certain perspective. Why seek what was never there in the first place? Better to wear one’s simple *kapote* (kaftan; robe) than the fine silk one of another.”

During his lifetime and after, Golub’s songs were recorded by such leading exponents of Yiddish Lieder as Emma Shaver, Mascha Benya, Sidor Belarsky, and even the revered world-renowned Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt, who included Golub’s *Tankhum* among his most frequently sung encore numbers.

By 1932 it was estimated that Golub had composed some 340 songs; and over the next two decades, or until his fatal illness overtook his energies, he added dozens more — many of which remain unpublished. His *Toybn* (Doves) even became known in Poland, where it was sung by Jews preparing to make aliya (immigrate to Israel, or Palestine, as the Land of Israel was known before statehood). It was also sung by Bundists (members of the Jewish labor movement in Poland) who arrived in the United States after the war having survived the Sho’a.

It is not merely the use of Yiddish poetry that renders Golub’s songs music of Jewish experience and distinctively Jewish in their persona. Many are infused with melodic and modal elements (even quotations) of eastern European Hebrew liturgical traditions and melos, which, when interwoven with the styles of the Romantic-era German and Central European Lieder traditions, yields a synergy that — in composers’ jargon — “works”. And the poignant sentiments, Judaic references, and Jewish sensibilities of the poems are successfully mirrored in Golub’s opera.

Among Golub’s most famous songs, in addition to the two on this evening’s program, are *Der bekher*, *Tankhum*, and *Baym Taykh*. Although they are settings of poems by two different poets, **TOYBN** and **IKH KEN ES NIT FARSHTEYN** both employ birds in their imagery. At first reading (or on first hearing), these may appear childlike, if not frivolous, especially if the birds are taken at face value rather than as symbols. But beneath the surfaces lie deeper, more introspective contemplations: about human inability to understand life and the world, and about the prevalence of gloom. The composer has given life to these musings with grace and wit.

MOSES MIKHAYEL MILNER (ca. 1886? - 1953?), whose original family name was Melnikoff, was one of the key figures in the birth and early development of the New National School in Jewish music; and he was one of principal members of that phenomenon’s seminal organization, the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg. By most accounts he was born in Rokitno [Rakitne], in Kiev Gubernia. Orphaned at about the age of eight according to what has been learned thus far about his life, he became a boy alto in the travelling choir of the celebrated Cantor Nissan Spivak — better known by his sobriquet, Nissi Belzer. Despite his fame throughout the Pale of Settlement, his flair for ornate cantorial improvisation, and his gift for engaging melodic invention (often drawn from Hassidic inspiration), Belzer is reputed to have had an inadequate vocal instrument as one of the then so-called “voiceless hazzanim”. That shortcoming often meant that their choirs acquired greatly expanded roles, supposedly as compensation; and gifted boy soloists such as the young Milner were in increased demand — even, according to cantorial legends, subject to “theft” by rival cantors or choirmasters.

At some point in the 1890s Milner found his way into the much more sophisticated choir at the Brodsky Synagogue in Kiev, where his choirmaster and de facto music teacher was Abram Dzimitrovsky — a learned musician with a solid command of the Western musical canon. Aided by some of the wealthy members of that relatively modern synagogue, Milner entered the conservatory in Kiev for the first few years of the 20th century (some sources give the date as 1902). His initial focus was on piano studies, which he had already begun under Dzimitrovsky; but he also began composing during that period and among his student works there was a two-piano concerto. In that same time frame he became attracted to the notion of Yiddish song as serious Lieder. If we accept the recollections of his close friend in Kiev,

Moscow Opera tenor Vitaly Koretsky, it was during that early stage in his development that Milner wrote two Yiddish Lieder that remain to this day among his most widely known songs: *In kheyder*, for which he also wrote the words; and *Unter di grininke beymelekh* (Under the Little Green Trees), to a poem by Bialik.

In 1907, this time with the sponsorship and financial assistance of Kiev Jewish banker Baron Vladimir Guinsbourg [Gintsburg], Milner went on to study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

Some Jews were admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory beginning in or shortly after its founding in 1862. But, until much later, that was the exception rather than the rule. Since the late 1880s, however, Russian conservatories had been open — even welcoming — to Jewish applicants. Some of them were grounded from childhood either in what was then typically eastern European synagogue music — especially the cantorial styles prevalent in small or medium-size towns within the Pale of Settlement and unmodernized transplantations to larger cities — or in the melos and techniques of klezmer or similar Jewish wedding band musicians, or both; and they had only recently been introduced to Western classical music, for which they had exhibited natural gifts. But most came from already urbanized families that had risen or were in process of rising to the small but growing Jewish middle classes. As such, those applicants had had at least some degree of exposure to Russian secondary education (usually on the European gymnasium model) and some preliminary classical music training. And they had acquired Russian rather than Yiddish as their primary language (in some cases German as well).

That late 19th-century openness to Jewish enrollment in conservatories was largely a byproduct of the progressive efforts of world-renowned virtuoso pianist, prolific composer, and music educator Anton Rubinstein, who, since mid-century, had advocated successfully for a modern approach to musical training. One of the chief results of his campaign was the system of conservatories and other types of professionally-gearred music schools across much of the czarist empire. Apart from Rubinstein's overall liberal attitudes toward cultural progress, however, his project was not intended specifically to benefit Jews per se. It was, rather, in the interest of advancing Russian music culture as a whole — Jews included. Rubinstein was born a Jew, but his parents had him converted to the Russian Orthodox Church as a baby. Throughout his adult life he neither advertised nor denied his Jewish birth and heritage. (There are suggestions that he did harbor some interest in his Jewish ancestry — perhaps, for example, in some of his opera subjects.) Even though he was officially a Christian and a member of the state church, his artistic career did not entirely escape contention concerning his Jewishness, including related critical attacks — especially by some in the pro-Russification movement. They could be antagonized as much by his espousal of the primacy of the German music tradition as by the presence of a perceived Jewish interloper. But for the most part he was embraced as a Russian artist. He founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory and served twice as its director. His brother Nikolay, also an illustrious pianist who was converted to Christianity as a child, was the director of the Moscow Conservatory.

Based on post-Soviet-era scholarly research, it is now estimated that by the early 20th century and in the years leading up to the First World War, Jews accounted for approximately half of the total enrollment at the St. Petersburg Conservatory — and nearly eighty percent at the conservatory in Odessa. This has been cited partly as a function of government policies aimed at eventual full assimilation of Russian empire Jewry as one solution to the “Jewish problem”. Yet, between 1887 and 1905 there were severe restrictions and quota systems pertaining to Jewish enrollment in secondary schools and universities. The arts appear at least in some respects to have been an exception, deemed to be of benefit to Russian empire officialdom and Russian society.

One of Milner's teachers in St. Petersburg was the composer Anatoly Lyadov, who was an important personality on the Russian music scene — now considered by some music historians to be in the tradition of the Russian Five. Among his other pupils were Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Milner completed his composition studies at the conservatory in the year that Russia went to war with Germany and the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires, and the following year he received his diploma as a “free artist”. According to the extant tangible evidence, his debut concert as a composer took place in 1917 at the conservatory, followed by a second one there in 1921; and a program devoted entirely to his music was presented in 1922 by the State [Leningrad] Philharmonic.

In 1923, actor and theatrical director Mendl Elkin reported in the New York Yiddish periodical,

Te'alit, that Milner's Yiddish opera, *Ashmoday*, had been produced earlier that year by the State Opera in Leningrad with the composer conducting. With a title derived from the Talmud and Milner's own libretto, the story concerns 19th-century conflict in Europe between Hassidism and the Haskala. If Elkin was correct, this was the first Yiddish opera ever produced in St. Petersburg — and probably the first anywhere in Russia. (It was not, however, the first Yiddish opera. That honor belongs to Samuel Alman, whose *Melekh akhaz* is still considered to be the first full-length opera in Yiddish — notwithstanding a large repertoire of Yiddish light operettas, musical comedies, and musical melodramas that preceded it. *Melekh akhaz* was first produced in London in 1912.) Cantor Moshe Rudinov, who occupied the pulpit at New York's Temple Emanu-El for many years, reported that a 1924 letter from Milner to Dzimitrovsky related that the opera received only two performances and was then forbidden by the "authorities", even from concert versions, because of its association with mysticism.

Unlike numerous artists who vacated Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution — including several who had been associated with the Gessellschaft and the New National School in Jewish music — Milner chose to remain in the new Soviet Union. In the 1920s and 1930s he devoted a good deal of his gifts to writing incidental music for plays. He composed two such scores for Habima Theatre productions: Leivick's *Der Golem* and Richard Beer Hoffman's *Jacob's Dream*; at least seven for the Ukrainian Jewish State Theatre in Kharkov, including one in 1928-29 by the American author and "muckraker", Upton Sinclair (*American Gods*) and another in 1930-31 by Yiddish poet and playwright, Peretz Markish; at least one in the attempted but eventually aborted autonomous Jewish region, Birobidzhan, for the Jewish State Theatre there (for a Sholem Aleikhem play, *Goldgreber*, as reported in a Soviet Yiddish newspaper, *Emes*, in 1936); and a few for general Russian theaters. In addition, a 1947 article in the New York Yiddish periodical, *Yidishe kultur*, referred to Milner's having contributed some incidental music to a Moscow State Theatre production of a play by the famous but subsequently doomed Yiddish poet, Itzik Feffer (still "in favor" with the Party prior to his reversal in favor of Zionism and a Jewish state), directed by Solomon Mikhoels — probably the greatest serious Yiddish actor of his day, and then the de facto spokesman for Soviet Jewry. (Both had been placed at the head of Stalin's bogus Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee during the war; and both were later murdered on Stalin's orders as "reactionary nationalists", "rootless cosmopolitans", and enemies of the state and the Revolution.)

Milner's direct involvement with the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg began in the year of its founding and the granting of its charter, 1908. According to fellow member Solomon Rosowsky, he was introduced to the organization by one of its founding members, the pioneering Jewish folksong collector and arranger, Sussman Kisselgov. The Gesellschaft was the first to publish a work of Milner's, his artistically sophisticated setting of a central *piyyut* (inserted liturgical poem) of the High Holyday liturgy, *un'tane tokef* (1913). In 1914 the Gesellschaft published three of his songs: *Iber di heyfn* (Over the Countryside), along with the two he is said to have composed earlier while still a student in Kiev. But he went on to compose many more *Lieder* during the Soviet era — Hebrew as well as Yiddish. Among the best examples are *El hatzipor*, *Ad Ana* (Psalm XIII), *Shulamit*, *Al hash'hita*, *Der eytsl un der solovey*, *Es broyst a shvere arbayt*, *Ikh bin a furman*, and *Di bobbe mit zikh dermont*. The last three are known to have been recorded and issued in the Soviet Union, probably in the late 1920s or early-to-mid 1930s.

Some of his songs (as well as other music) were published by state-affiliated organs such as institutes of "proletarian" or "Jewish proletarian" culture. So long as there was no recognizable link to Judaism as a "religion", such publications could present Yiddish titles, sometimes texts, and other information in Hebrew characters. During certain periods, however, and most likely for reasons now obvious to any serious student of the Stalin era, at least a few of his Yiddish or Hebrew songs were published secondarily only in Russian — with no visible indication of any Jewish connection. In addition, a handful was published outside the Soviet Union — in Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, or Palestine; and then in Israel. Only *In kheyder* crossed the Atlantic via Germany as early as the 1930s and was published in New York in 1933.

Now that formerly sealed archives have been open since the collapse of the Soviet Union, researchers occasionally find a previously unknown Milner song or instrumental piece in manuscript (only), or even in Soviet-era published sheet music that eluded Western awareness. Such discoveries do not necessarily

tell us, however, anything about performance history. Until further exploration might yield tangible evidence, there is usually no way to know whether or not such unearthed music was ever performed — even if only in the Soviet Union.

Milner's opera includes a number of solo piano pieces, many of which are virtuoso paraphrases (some as themes and variations) on Yiddish folk tunes in the tradition of Franz Liszt, Paul Pabst, Leopold Godowsky, Ignaz Friedman, and Moriz Rosenthal; or of pianists such as Alexis Weissenberg and Vladimir Horowitz, who created pyrotechnical paraphrases and transcriptions primarily if not exclusively for their own use. Milner's *Baym rebn tsu m'lave malke* (With the Rebbe at the Close of the Sabbath), which was published by the Gesellschaft in 1914, is one such piano paraphrase in the form of a theme and variations — with the theme drawn from a folksong. His *Agada* (Legend) was published in Vienna and Leipzig in 1923, as part of a series. It belongs to that group of his completely original piano pieces that betray admittedly diluted influences of Rachmaninoff, Balakirev, and Anton Rubinstein.

Since the end of the Soviet era, additional, all but hidden piano pieces of overt Jewish connection have been discovered. The Jewish elements are secular, viz., usually related to Yiddish folksong. Yet in these, as in better-known circulated pieces, one can also frequently detect traces of Hebrew liturgical modalities, synagogal melos, and cantorial clichés as well.

At his extraordinary program of Yiddish poetry and music at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York in 2014, for example, Evgeny Kissin — widely regarded as the supreme pianist not only of his generation but, thus far, of the 21st century — gave what may have been the world premiere of Milner's *Farn opsheyd* (Before parting). Published in Kiev in the early 1930s, the existence of the piece was unknown to Albert Weisser when he published a catalogue of Milner's works in 1954 in New York. Kissin, who commands nearly the entire gamut of the standard classical piano repertoire in addition to hundreds of little-known works by composers throughout the world — announced that this was the first time in his life that he would be playing a piece of Jewish music. What the audience did not realize, however, was that this piece is Milner's pyrotechnical paraphrase on a song of the same name by Efraim Skliar, which was published by the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg in 1914. Skliar, who was among its founding committee, had in turn based his song on a Yiddish folksong that had been discovered in the Pale of Settlement.

A 1933 article in a Yiddish journal published in Buenos Aires, *Di pres*, referred to a second opera that Milner was said to have completed the previous year. The author of that article also announced that it was to be produced later in 1933 in Leningrad. But it remains uncertain whether or not any such plan materialized, or, if so, under what circumstances. (The composition of the opera, though not its performance, is also mentioned in Zalman Zilberzweig's *Leksikon fun yidishen te'ater* in an entry by Zalman Zilberblatt.) Apparently the libretto was cobbled together by several writers. Its plot concerns a quasi-utopian ideological desiderata of the "Jewish masses" of the Soviet Union "returning" to agriculture — perhaps in some ways a kind of Soviet counterpart to the agriculturally-oriented enterprise in Palestine.

Milner's other large-scale works include his Symphony on Jewish Themes, Symphonic Suite, *By the Rivers of Babylon* for chorus and orchestra, and a piece identified by Mendl Elkin, *Choreographic Symphony: Queen of Sheba*. In 1949 Gdal Saleski, a cellist as well as an amateur and frequently misinformed chronicler of Jewish composers, claimed to have visited Milner in Leningrad in 1936. He reported that Milner had been working at the time on an oratorio for vocal soloists, chorus and orchestra. Whether or not he ever completed such a work, or whether the work in question might be one of those listed here, will probably never be known.

There are large gaps in our knowledge about Milner's life and work, much of which are still shrouded in uncertainty — even mystery. Even his birth and death dates continue to be open to question. We have at least some evidence, however thin, concerning his activities prior to the mid-1930s. About the next two decades we know almost nothing; and this has contributed to speculation and spawned various myths. A 1948 article in a then state-sanctioned Soviet Yiddish newspaper, *Eynikayt* (shut down not long afterward), contained favorable mention of him in terms of his music, but nothing of his whereabouts or what he was doing at the time. The degree to which, like a number of other composers (and especially

Jewish ones) during that dangerous time frame, Milner may have been in or out of favor with the Party, has yet to be ascertained. In any case, a serious study remains to be undertaken, even though the opening of archives following the demise of the Soviet Union has facilitated the task.

In search of preliminary information for a graduate thesis, one Russian-speaking student visited Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg at the beginning of this century. She located a few Russian language sources unavailable in the United States, and she interviewed some family members. It appears from those investigations that Milner continued to compose music for the theatre — Russian as well as Yiddish. But the latter may have involved a type of cabaret rather than actual theatre. All of this was a worthy first step, but inconclusive and insufficient for comprehensive treatment. A proper biography of Milner, together with a thorough study of his oeuvre, is both deserved and long overdue.

The word *kheyder* (from the Hebrew *heder*, lit., “room”) generally implies an old-fashioned elementary-level Hebrew school, where children are first introduced to the Hebrew alphabet, then to the phonetic reading of liturgical Hebrew followed by basic familiarity with the prayerbook. In Milner’s most famous song, **IN KHEYDER**, however, it seems unclear (perhaps deliberately so) whether the exchange is strictly between teacher and pupil or between father and son. The repetition of the names of the letters together with their various possible vowels or vocalizations, although now commonly considered passé as a method outside the most traditional orthodox circles, was a standard procedure in Europe as well as in America until well into the second half of the 20th century. Milner incorporates the traditional Ashkenazi sing-song learning and memory aid that was also part of the typical *kheyder* experience. Also used for Talmud learning in yeshiva contexts, this repetitive chant is known as the *lernshtayger*, or “study mode”. Milner obviously knew it from childhood. Partly due to the nostalgia it used to evoke, this song was once a prominent part of the concert repertoire of Yiddish recitalists as well as cantors.

VIGLID, OYFN GRINEM BERGELE, KETSELE SHTIL, and **BREYTELE** are four excerpts of a ten-song cycle of settings of poems by Yitzhak Leib Peretz. The cycle was published in Kiev in 1921 by the Kultur Verlag (and subsequently in Berlin) under the title *Tsen Kinderlieder*. These songs, however, are more about children than for children. They are simple but hardly simplistic, childlike rather than childish. To some extent an analogy may be drawn to Robert Schumann’s *Kinderszenen*, a suite of ten solo piano pieces that depict children’s moods, innocent concerns and experiences, but which are every bit as much repertoire for adult audiences as any of his music. In Milner’s cycle, we find him toying delicately with chromatic subtleties in both the vocal lines and the piano parts.

For many decades, the composer and conductor **MAURICE [Moyshe] RAUCH** (1910 - 1994) was one of the principal figures on the Yiddishist music scene in the United States and Canada. He was born in Anykst, in Kovno Gubernye, now part of independent Lithuania but then in Russian Poland as part of the Czarist Empire. Shortly after his release from Siberian exile and imprisonment for revolutionary activities and associations, his father immigrated to the United States ahead of the rest of his family. Maurice (the name he was given only in America) was brought to America with his mother when he was nine months old. He had a solid education in New York City public schools, and he attended Yiddishist cultural schools and summer camps. Upon graduation from high school he entered the Institute of Musical Art in New York (later renamed The Juilliard School). There he focused on composition, which he pursued subsequently in Paris for about a year under the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Impressed with his talent but understanding of his circumstances, she was willing to accept whatever small payments he felt he could afford. In the United States he studied conducting with Albert Stoessel, and one of his piano teachers was the virtuoso pianist and composer who was soon to become the supreme avatar of Yiddish Lied: Lazar Weiner.

Rauch’s father was an ironworker involved in labor struggles and protests in New York. Though he quickly thought better of the idea, he even mused aloud at one point about returning to the newly minted Communist state in Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution. Both parents were frequently at the forefront of rent strikes and other typical working-class disputes. That family history, the circles of like-minded friends and acquaintances who frequented their home, and young Rauch’s exposure to the moderately leftist persuasions of his Yiddishist schooling combined to cultivate in him a Yiddish-

speaking, working-class orientation and Volksgeist. He remained committed to that spirit throughout his life — even long after those currents had lost much of their political viability and currency in terms of Jewish culture. It was a bent that he expressed in much of his music.

Throughout most of his adult life, Rauch was associated with various Yiddishist cultural organizations and choruses that were tied to (in some cases born of) politically leftist Jewish circles, including those of the Far Left and even some with overt Communist orientations or predispositions. In 1945 he became involved with *Der yidisher muzik-farband* (The Jewish Music Alliance, not to be confused with the unrelated Educational Alliance, which, while it leaned naturally toward liberal worldviews and some basic progressive ideals, could never be characterized as pro-Communist or even Far Left per se). And he conducted its affiliated choruses in New England.

Unlike the socialist-infused but adamantly anti-Communist Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) or the left-leaning, Yiddish-speaking Labor Zionist Farband, the Jewish Music Alliance tended toward the extreme Left. It supported affiliated choruses (some of which were either self-styled or perceived with some reason as Communist); and it sponsored the dissemination, programming, and publication of workers', revolutionary, and even pro-Bolshevik songs and arrangements in Yiddish — some in open praise of the Soviet Union and its leaders as late as the 1950s. During the 1930s the Music Alliance had eliminated the politically charged reference to "workers" from its original name (*Der yidisher musikalisher arbeter-farband*, known in English then as the Jewish Workers Music Alliance). But that step had been taken only because of the dangerous connotations of that reference in that time frame. Its mission, character, and political sympathies (though not officially tied to any one leftist party or to any one of several party lines) remained unchanged. It continued its links to yet another otherwise distinct organization with the term, farband: the Jewish National Workers Alliance. And much if not most of its membership saw hope for the future in proletarian internationalism.

In 1953 or thereabouts (surviving but haphazardly kept records are vague, confusing, and beset by inconsistencies), Rauch became the conductor of the Frayhayt Gezang Farayn (Freedom Singing Society) in New York, the largest of the Far Left, Communist-leaning Yiddish folk choruses, which also later became known as the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus. Founded officially (by most accounts) in 1923, the Frayhayt Gezang Farayn had roots in a Yiddish-speaking workers' chorus that was formed during the First World War, if not earlier, in Chicago. That rather primitive Chicago chorus appears to have been the first of such groups in any major city — older Yiddish folk choruses in Jewish farming communities or communes notwithstanding, such as one in Petaluma, California, which may have been the first Yiddish chorus of any stripe in America. The Gezang Farayn was also partly a product of an ideological split within a chorus in New York that had been organized prior to 1923. By the late 1920s, its members became vehemently divided over Communist versus non-Communist (but still socialist) support and diverging attitudes toward the still nascent Soviet Union. After that split, the more moderate faction proceeded to develop as the Arbeter Ring Khor — the Workmens' Circle Chorus.

Just prior to Rauch's engagement as its conductor, the Frayhayt Gezang Farayn had merged with the Yiddishist-oriented International Workers Order (IWO) choruses — a network of more than thirty choral groups and mandolin orchestras that was founded in the 1920s, and which, by the 1940s, had spread throughout Greater New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and several Midwestern and Great Lakes area cities. These had also been known in Yiddish as the Ordn Khorn because of their affiliation with the Ordn — the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, which itself was at times aligned quite transparently with the Soviet Union and with Communist Party ideals and programs. Rauch directed the merged chorus until his retirement in 1977, and he composed many cantatas and dramatic chorales expressly for it.

Rauch also composed and conducted a good deal for modern dance, encouraged by his wife, the former Lillian Shapero, who was a dancer in the original Martha Graham Dance Company. But his conducting stints in the pits of Second Avenue Yiddish theaters were marginal to his career. His theatrical conducting was linked instead to the more sophisticated and less popular forms and venues: the Yiddish Art Theatre; ARTEF (a politically oriented serious Yiddish theatre); and the Federal Jewish Theatre Project, an affiliate of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration.

By the late 20th century, Rauch's history of wholehearted involvement with Far Left Jewish orga-

nizations, together with the 1964 publication of his essay, “The Yiddish Worker Sings,” had won him a still lasting albeit relatively mild badge of opprobrium among some in the music world. Even if his associations could now be understood in the context of those former times, the label could still adhere. But it should be emphasized in retrospect that the Far Left’s appeal for most of those within his circles was probably more often emotional rather than purely ideological — and typically romanticized as a result of cleverly contrived propaganda. Moreover, the focus of those choruses and other related groups was primarily cultural. As was the case with so many non-Jewish as well as Jewish artists of that period who were drawn in by the Left’s visions, few if any of the Far Left Yiddishist choristers, conductors, or composers possessed any real intellectual command or historical understanding of political, economic, or social theory — nor any realistic grasp of the ramifications of Left-linked totalitarianism. They could thus be easy targets for well-aimed campaigns of persuasion, which in turn could ignite momentum in the context of group (in this case choral) psychology and peer reinforcement. For them, their cultural mission was inseparable from the human values that were tethered to the promotion of social and economic justice. It was through the Yiddish language itself as well as its literature — which in turn informed their music — that those choristers and the composers who wrote for them were able to express their humanistic concerns for societal progress.

It is more likely that this combination of cultural and social commitments drove naively acquired political sympathies than that pre-existing political ideologies generated musical articulation as a matter of required doctrine or demands of “the Party”. “Culturally left, essentially,” was how those choruses and their leaders (along with their affiliated mandolin orchestras) were defined later in life by Itshe Goldberg, Rauch’s librettist for many of his works. Goldberg had been intimately involved for more than seven decades with the Ordn (head of its culture and education department), the IWO choruses, the Jewish Music Alliance, and the Frayhayt Gezang Farayn. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, he stressed that those Far Left Yiddishist groups had actually viewed their musical calls for socioeconomic repair and their depictions of social struggle as patently American — as anything but “un-American”. This was, he recalled, something they knew they could not have done publicly, freely, and relatively safely in Europe. And indeed, despite performances of pro-Bolshevik songs and even odes to Stalin, that positive sentiment about America found resonance in some of those choruses’ concert repertoire. Under Rauch’s direction, for example, the Jewish People’s Philharmonic Chorus performed *Ikh aykh amerike* (I, Too, Sing ‘America!’). That title was taken from a line in a poem by the eminent black American poet, Langston Hughes; and the choral work’s lyrics contain both praises and constructive criticism, emphasizing the synergy between Yiddish and American cultures and their mutual contributions.

Among Rauch’s many choral cantatas and other large works are his *Oyb nit nokh hekher* (If Not Higher, with a libretto by Itshe Goldberg based on the well-known story of Yitzhak Leib Peretz); *Esther hamalka*, to a text by Wolf Younin; *Hudl*, an operetta based on Sholem Aleikhem’s character, Tevye; *Gedenk mayn folk*; a setting of Yevtushenko’s “Babi Yar” in Yiddish translation from the original Russian; *Binyomin hashlishi* and *Fishke*, both based on stories by Mendel Mokher Sforim; *Bontshe shvayg*, to another famous Peretz story; and *Sholem aleikhem dir, amerike!* — an operetta based on Sholem Aleikhem’s *Motl peyse dem khazns*.

While Rauch may be remembered primarily for his choral works, he also had an abiding interest in Yiddish Lieder. He wrote numerous simple but well-crafted Yiddish art songs, and in pursuit of this genre he was particularly drawn to the poetry of Itzik Manger. Other serious poets attracted him as well, such as Zishe Weinper [Weinperlech], Avraham Reisen, and Mordkhe Gebirtig.

IKH UN DI VELT places the speaker at one with a suffering world. Neither he nor the world can help each other; neither has happiness or even understanding to offer: “As we both suffer, the world has nowhere to come, and I have nowhere to go.” Any initial sense of childlike frivolity is deceptive, giving way to the sense that they are mutually forlorn — a sense of despair that is well reflected in the music. **SHIFRELES PORTRET** is probably Rauch’s best known and most enduring song. A brokenhearted father longs for his daughter and speaks to a picture of her. He is sustained only by imagining that the two will be reunited eventually, although the mood of the poem — reinforced by the tone of Rauch’s setting — tells us that her assurance to him is only an hallucination. He will not see her again in this world.

JANOT ROSKIN (1884 - 1946) was born in Rezekne, Latvia. Traversing a typical path for vocally talented young Jewish boys throughout eastern and East Central Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, he began his musical life as a boy chorister in cantorial choirs. He later attended the conservatory in Riga, after which he received a scholarship to study at the prestigious Klindworth-Schwarzenka Conservatory in Berlin. While there, he also studied with Hugo Riemann and Siegfried Ochs. He continued his involvement in liturgical music with posts as choirmaster at various Berlin synagogues; and for nine years he directed the Hallenseer Conservatory.

As a young student in Latvia, Roskin developed a lifelong interest in collecting and arranging Yiddish folksongs. He continued and expanded this pursuit in Berlin while also composing his own classically oriented Lieder to texts drawn from Yiddish poetry.

To disseminate his arrangements and compositions, Roskin established the Musikverlag für Nationale Volkskunst, which was later renamed Verlag Hatikvah (1921) — the same name he used for his own publishing house (Hatikvah Music Publishing Company) in Boston when he emigrated there in 1937. Before relocating to Indianapolis in 1940, he served consecutively as music director of two Boston area congregations: Temple Israel, and Temple Emanuel in Newton; and he founded and directed the Roskin Art Choir. In Indianapolis he served as music director of that city's principal Conservative Movement-affiliated synagogue, Temple Beth-El Zedeck.

During the 1950s and 1960s several of Roskin's compositions for cantor and choir were familiar among many Reform and Conservative synagogues in the United States, particularly his settings of the liturgy for Kabbalat Shabbat and Sabbath eve services. This music largely eclipsed his earlier Yiddish Lieder, which, however, could still be heard in the repertoires of Yiddish Lieder recitalists. In their unapologetic conservatism, his songs reflect almost nothing of post-Schubertian stylistic or harmonic developments. Especially for music emanating from the early 20th century, they can sound as if frozen in a former time and overly grounded in the Germanic Lieder tradition. Artistically crafted nonetheless, they still exhibit a measure of charm in their deliberate simplicity.

Roskin's little-known concert setting of **MAYN RU' E PLATS** (My Resting Place) as an original art song is completely unrelated to the relatively familiar but anonymous quasi-folk melody to which this same poem is usually sung. As in much of his verse, the poet expresses poignantly the harsh realities of working class Jewish immigrant life, bemoaning the disillusionment and despair that accompany the long and trying but necessary hours eking out a meager living in factories and sweatshops. For this worker, the only resting place will be the ultimate one: the grave, to which the poet gives a double meaning by employing the German-tinged (but valid) term, *ru'e plats*, rather than *kever* as drawn from the Hebrew and as would have been more common in eastern European usage. It is possible, of course, that the melody was known previously to Roskin as a folk tune (either in eastern Europe or in Germany), although it has not been located in any folksong collection. But the absence of any identification as a folk tune or folksong in the published folio — something Roskin was careful to do for his folksong arrangements — suggests an original composition. In any case, the vocal line and piano part, when considered as a unit, may allow us to imagine how at least one approach to classical Yiddish Lieder might have sounded in the Central European sphere, had the genre been pursued as a Jewish art form as early as the 1830s.

Like Moses Milner, **SOLOMON ROSOWSKY** (1878 - 1962) was one of the principals in the early development of the Russian-born New National School in Jewish music. But he was also among the small coterie of musicians responsible for the founding of the organization that would solidify that movement, the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg.

A son of the esteemed and learned Cantor Borukh Leib Rosowsky, who occupied the pulpit of the modern but traditional Choral Synagogue (also known as the Great Synagogue) in Riga, Latvia for forty-eight years, Solomon Rosowsky commenced the serious study of music only after he had received a law degree from the university in Kiev. Then, as his father had done, he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where his teachers included Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, and Lyadov. After his graduation in 1911 he obtained a position as a music critic for the St. Petersburg newspaper, *Dyen*; and he also contributed articles to two other periodicals: *Novy Voshkhod* and *Rasviet*.

Beginning around 1906, Rosowsky joined with fellow composers and conservatory colleagues Lazare Saminsky and Efraim Shklier to formulate a plan for a formal society to promote the cause of a Jewish national music. They soon attracted fellow composers Mikhayel Gniessen [Gnesin], Pesakh Lvov, Lyubov, Streicher, Alexander M. Zhitomirsky, and Moshe Shalit, along with the folksong collector and music educator Susman Kisselgov. Operating as a committee, this group then lobbied successfully for the foundation and official chartering of what became known as the Gesellschaft für jüdische Volksmusik in St. Petersburg. Throughout its brief existence, Rosowsky took an active part in its deliberations, in-house debates, programming, and various administrative work. The first of his compositions and folksong arrangements to be published by the Gesellschaft (1914) were *A viglid*, *Lomir zikh iberbetn*, and *Ikh bin a balagole* — all for voice and piano — and a piano trio, *Fantastisher tants*. In 1917 the society published four more of his works: *Der shuster moyshe* and *A nign on a sof*, both for woodwind quintet; Hassidic nign, for English horn or viola; and another Hassidic nign for cello and piano.

Rosowsky did not leave Russia or the new Soviet Union until several years after the Bolshevik Revolution. According to his own accounts offered during his American years, he directed an experimental Jewish Chamber Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1918 and wrote incidental music for two of the plays it produced: Sholem Asch's *The Sinner* and a play originally in German by Karl Gutzkow, *Uriel Acosta* (which eventually attracted a translation into Hebrew and more than one into Yiddish). In 1924 he returned to Riga to organize and direct the "Jewish Conservatory" there. But, after five years working on that project, he decided to emigrate to Palestine as several fellow Gesellschaft (or former Gesellschaft) members had done or would do. There, he was involved with a conservatory in Tel Aviv and taught for a while at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

In 1948 Rosowsky immigrated to the United States, and he served on the faculty of the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York beginning in its inaugural year. In addition to the Gesellschaft publications, his works include a piano suite and other small piano pieces; folksong and liturgical arrangements for orchestra; and theatre music written for Habima and the Ohel Studio in Israel. His magnum opus for which he will probably be remembered more so than for his compositions, however, is a major study of biblical cantillation.

IKH BIN A BALAGOLE is presumed to have originated as a folksong, to which Rosowsky has given his typically appropriate artistic treatment. The piano part reflects with judicious energy and detail the wagon driver's sentiments. The song belongs to an entire special category of Yiddish (as well as Russian) folksongs about — or as if sung by — coachmen, carters, and wagon drivers. There is probably a sufficient number of such known "coachmen's song" to justify an entire volume.

LAZAR WEINER (1897 - 1982) will always be most widely remembered as the supreme exemplar and advocate of the Yiddish art song, or *Lieder*, genre. Through his opera of more than two hundred songs, he elevated that medium to unprecedented artistic sophistication. Without in any way minimizing the artistic value and importance of the respectable body of serious Yiddish *Lieder* that had its genesis prior to his cultivation of the genre — in particular, the work of the composers associated with the new, culturally national school in Jewish music that was born in Russia — it must be acknowledged that, ultimately, it was Lazar Weiner under whose pen the Yiddish art song attained its fullest and richest bloom. Yet his devotion to Yiddish choral art preceded his focus on the solo song as his primary endeavor, and it is only because of the waning of Yiddish choruses throughout North America that Weiner's significant body of Yiddish cantatas and other choral works may be less known today. He also wrote a substantial amount of serious liturgical music, mostly for the American Reform worship format, as well as incidental theatre music, an opera, orchestral works, and miscellaneous vocal and instrumental pieces — including some for piano that reflect his own brilliant virtuoso pianistic gifts.

Weiner was born in Cherkassy, in the Ukraine, where his musical talent was discovered at a young age. He was admitted to the choir of the prestigious Brodsky Synagogue in Kiev when he was only nine years old, where the choirmaster was the well-known Abram Dzimitrovsky. Like many such modern eastern European so-called Choral Synagogues, the Brodsky Synagogue had a secular school attached to it, where the young Weiner received a modern Russian elementary education — in addition to exposure

to classical liturgical and cantorial repertoire in the choir. By the age of eleven he began singing in the Kiev Opera chorus, and then studied piano with Dzimitrovsky before entering the State Conservatory of Kiev to study piano and theory. His general music education was furthered by the rich concert and operatic offerings in that city.

In the aftermath of anti-Judaism and Jew hatred that followed the infamous Mendel Bellis blood-libel trial (despite his acquittal), the Weiner family emigrated to the United States in 1914. At that point Weiner's musical goals centered around his pianistic gifts, unrelated to any Jewish interests. The future avid Yiddishist was, during that impressionable period of his life, still oblivious to high Yiddish culture. In New York, he was engaged as a pianist for the studio of a well-known voice teacher. He soon acquired a reputation as an expert artistic accompanist and vocal coach, eventually with his own lucrative coaching studio. He also found work as a pianist and librarian for an amateur community orchestra in Brooklyn, the Mendelssohn Symphony Orchestra, of which he later became the conductor. It was during that period that he began experimenting with composition, although his primary ambitions still centered around the piano.

The Mendelssohn Symphony position turned out to be fortuitous for Weiner's ultimate artistic and Jewish paths. A violinist in the orchestra, Nahum Baruch Minkoff, was one of the coterie of Yiddish poets who espoused a modernist introspective literary approach based on personal experience and who were known as the *In zikh* poets — a school, or movement, whose core founders also included three other poets whose verse would later be the basis for some of Weiner's most admired songs. Minkoff introduced Weiner to his own literary circle and to the world of modern Yiddish literature and poetry in general — to which he was instantly and powerfully attracted. The seeds were thus sown for Weiner's subsequent devotion to Yiddish language and culture and, eventually, to both the Yiddish choral medium and the Yiddish art song. That newfound, rather sudden fascination with an aspect of Jewish culture of which he had not been aware reversed his gravitation toward alienation from even secular Jewish identification.

Weiner's immersion in the American Yiddish literary milieu was not confined to the *In zikh* poets. Minkoff brought him to literary-intellectual salon evenings of poetry readings and discussions, where he met some of the significant poets of the older European generation, as well as younger adherents of other, divergent orientations and movements — especially *Di yunge*, an earlier school (founded in America in 1907) of young immigrant writers who had sought to remove Yiddish literature from association with social, political, or moral agendas and ideologies and to free it from restriction to specifically Jewish subject matter. Their focus was more on form than content, with the desiderata of Yiddish literature as pure art for its own value — and as a potentially universal expression, enhanced and refined by an infusion of elements found in the work of major European and American figures in the world of belles lettres. Works of these poets, too, as well as poems by many others not specifically associated with either movement, would, at various periods in Weiner's creative life, find expression in his songs.

Those salon evenings also provided Weiner's initiation into the realm of Yiddish folksong — an entire tradition that had eluded him in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Kiev. He later acknowledged that nearly all the many folksongs and folk-type songs he had come to know were heard by him for the first time at those gatherings.

An event that ignited Weiner's Jewish musical interests at the end of the second decade of the century was the North American tour of the Zionist-oriented and inspired Russian emigré group, the Zimro Ensemble, which played at Carnegie Hall and elsewhere in New York. Founded in Petrograd (St. Petersburg, prior to its change of name to the Russian equivalent when Russia went to war with Germany) by clarinetist Simeon Bellison, its six members had all been part of the new national movement in Jewish music to one degree or another; and its Jewishly-related repertoire was drawn from the collective oeuvre of the Gesellschaft-affiliated composers — sophisticated and classically constructed chamber music based on Jewish folk or liturgical themes and modes. Weiner had been unaware of that movement and of the Gesellschaft. Until his attendance at Zimro's first Carnegie Hall concert, his own context and associations of "Jewish music" had been confined to either the synagogue or the theatre.

He was instantly fascinated with the new genre and school advocated by the Zimro ensemble. The

very notion that serious, cultivated secular music expression of Jewish life and experience could be built melodically and harmonically on elements of genuine Jewish folk melos and tradition — secular or liturgical — and could have universal aesthetic appeal, turned out to coincide with his own artistic instincts. As a result of that initial exposure, he began a correspondence with Joel Engel, who had been at the helm of the Gesellschaft's Moscow branch but was then living in Berlin. (Engel subsequently immigrated permanently to what was then known as Palestine and became — in most judgements — the first important serious classical composer of modern Israel.) Engel offered him valuable advice about composition of Yiddish Lieder.

In the 1920s Weiner began his affiliation with secular Yiddish choruses. In 1923 he was appointed conductor of the Frayhayts Gezang Farayn (later known also as the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus), an unabashedly Far Left workers chorus that had communist sympathies and, later, more direct Communist Party links as one of thirty such choruses throughout the United States that were federated under the umbrella of the Jewish Workers Musical Alliance (with the all-too-transparent reference to "workers" eventually dropped) and the Ordn — the Jewish People's Fraternal Order. Like so many artists and intellectuals of that period and through the 1930s, Weiner was drawn initially to some of the avowed social ideals of the Communist Party, its utopian spirit, and the principle of organized labor. But he was never a Party member. He later became staunchly opposed to communism ("ferociously so," in his son, Yehudi's, characterization), especially after an eye-opening visit to the Soviet Union in 1927 that disabused him of any notions of truth to the propaganda that had been circulating in America. Also, his wife, Sarah Naomi, recalled that he had become repulsed by "the party's" attempted interference with his artistic freedom. Shortly after his return to New York from the Soviet Union, Weiner severed his ties to the Frayhayt Gezang Farayn, which, in any case, could not have provided him an artistically rewarding experience. Its repertoire in the 1920s consisted mainly of workers', labor movement and other Yiddish songs in simple if not trite choral arrangements, and occasional Yiddish translations of some standard Western classical choral literature that the roughly thirty-five members were ill-equipped to handle musically or vocally. The days of its large-scale Yiddish cantatas and pageants, and its growth to more than one hundred members, were yet to come.

Weiner's humanistically and culturally related, moderately leftist and socialist leanings remained with him. But these could easily be accommodated by other fully American and patriotic Jewish choruses and their parent organizations — most especially the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle). Its New York chorus (the Arbeter Ring Khor) became Weiner's principal performance vehicle for thirty-five years beginning with his appointment as its conductor in 1931. He accepted its invitation, however, on two basic conditions: that he have a full year of rehearsals without concerts in order to rebuild the group according to his musical standards; and that he would be permitted without interference to unify its Yiddish pronunciation and diction according to "high" or literary Yiddish (now cited as YIVO Yiddish) — eliminating other, regional or colloquial, dialects. Under his direction the chorus was elevated into a first-class performing ensemble, with an eventual membership of nearly one hundred. It came to be considered a part of New York's general cultural life, and critics referred to it in the general as well as Jewish press as one of the city's best amateur choral ensembles.

Most of Weiner's choral music was written expressly for the Arbeter Ring Khor. Among his important choral cantatas are *Amol in a tsayt* — *Legend of Toil*; *The Last Judgement* — *Bontshe shvayg*; *Hirsh lekert*; *In kamf far frayhayt* (subtitled a "choral ballet"); *Amos*; *Mentsh in der velt*; and *Tsu dir, amerike*. At the same time, however, he began devoting increasing energies specifically to Yiddish art songs for voice and piano, continually refining his techniques and expanding his pool of literary sources. By the time he left the Workmen's Circle Chorus, in 1966, having determined that its artistic level was no longer sustainable, Yiddish Lieder had become his priority.

Weiner often rebuked others for simplistic quotations of undeveloped Jewish folk or traditional tunes, and in his own art songs he never included an existing folk melody — even when the poem might have suggested one. "If I need a traditional melody," he was fond of telling students, "I create my own." Only in his liturgical music did he sometimes lean on traditional material when he felt it appropriate, but only as a cue. And he respected the tradition of certain obligatory synagogue melodies of the Ashkenazi

rite. But he developed that melodic material with the polyphonic and advanced harmonic techniques that he had avoided in his secular Yiddish choral pieces, in part because his liturgical music was always intended for fully professional choirs.

For Weiner, the poetry he set was sacrosanct, deserving of his undiluted respect, so that — as his son, Yehudi Wyner, has explained, “he allowed himself no departure from the text,

no elisions, no prolongations, no cuts or repetitions. He followed the changes in the mood or action within a poem with meticulous care. Rarely would he permit himself a decorative melisma or a brilliant high note for dramatic effect alone. Piano introductions were kept brief, and interludes and postludes were avoided. His focus was on economy and on natural flow of diction.

Nonetheless, inventing an instrumental setting that could provide an interesting musical texture appropriate to the mood and spirit of the poetry, while not obscuring the character of the melodic line, was an equally vital concern. The piano parts are not accompanimental. Rather, they form an inseparable unity with the poetry and with the vocal lines. The pianistic component is highly varied in style as well as texture, and it plays a major role in punctuating and reflecting the changes in the poetry of each song.

There was a phantom model for Weiner’s approach: his admiration for the music of Modest Mussorgsky was boundless. For Mussorgsky, song emerged directly from language with a minimum of artificial invention . . . Weiner absorbed Mussorgsky’s approach, adapting it to the particular qualities of the Yiddish language and allowing it to evolve.

After his retirement from his music directorship at Central Synagogue in New York in 1974, Weiner abandoned liturgical music altogether. He had become disgusted with the appalling introduction of pop and other entertainment music in American synagogues since the late 1960s —initially echoing, if unintentionally, some of the lowbrow informal musical dimensions that had become fashionable in certain populist churches outside the mainstream denominations and in related broadcast formats, but also imitating Jewish summer camp ambiances. “I want a *m’hitza* (a division, referring to the required gender separation in orthodox synagogues) between the sacred and the profane, between the mundane and the spiritual,” proclaimed this Jew who insisted to the world that he was nonreligious. “And I do not want to bring the musical comedy into the synagogue. Each has its place, but” For the next eight years he dedicated himself exclusively to art songs.

In his devotion to Yiddish, Weiner did not necessarily choose sides with the Yiddishists against the Hebraists of the Haskala. Nor did he believe that the modern revival of the Hebrew language and literature was any less an authentic Jewish expression than Yiddish culture.

Apart from their literary content (which in only some cases involves overt Judaic references), Weiner’s art songs are manifestly Jewish first and foremost because of the Yiddish language itself, and because of the way he instinctively understood and interpreted its subtle nuances, inflections, accentuations, internal rhythms, cadences, and turns of phrase. For Weiner, Yiddish was in and of itself an authentic Jewish expression. Like many of the poets he most admired, he did not treat Yiddish as an ideological or sociopolitical vehicle, as did so many Yiddishists of his generation, but rather as a literary and musical art that took on the passionate character of a mission. Yet he was always conscious of the irony that his devotion to Yiddish — in fact to things Jewish — was an American phenomenon, not a personal carry-over from Europe. In an interview only a few years before his death, he recalled Engel’s response to his first songs: “That letter marked the beginning of my Jewishness,” he mused. “All my life [prior to 1919] it was Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Schubert. . . Here in America I discovered the Yiddish song!”

The Yiddish term, *nign*, is derived from the Hebrew *niggun*, whose generic meaning is simply a tune or melody without confinement to any particular type, origin, or association. Weiner's song, **A NIGN** (1969), however, refers to the Hassidic connotation that the word has acquired: viz., a wordless tune or even monodic composition to which meaningless syllables (derisively called "nonsense syllables" by Hassidism's opponents) are attached. In Hassidic circles, this practice is believed to transcend the limitations of words — often as a perceived way of facilitating mystical communication. (Some Hassidic *niggunim*, however, are in fact sung to words — usually from the liturgy or the Bible.) The *nign* in Weiner's art song is not quoted from any Hassidic repertoire; it is his own creation. But it implies the style and spirit of many Hassidic or quasi-Hassidic tunes. The image of quarreling with God, and the power attributed to song, are both Hassidic reflections. While the specific types of attached syllables vary by tradition from one Hassidic dynasty to another, "tshiri-bim" is not found in any authentic Hassidic practice — which may be why Weiner chose to employ it.

YIDISH (1946) is self-evident as an expression of Weiner's almost religious devotion to the Yiddish language and its culture, which, for him, had the status of so-called religious belief or commitment. The poem contains references to four well-known Hassidic masters or rebbes — rabbinical-type charismatic spiritual leaders of their adherents.

UNTER DAYNE VAYSE SHTERN (1950) is a setting of a poem by Avraham Sutskever, who is believed to have written it in the Vilna Ghetto. There, it was originally set to a haunting melody by Abraham Brudno and sung by Zlate Katcherginsky in a theatrical production of the play *Di yogn in fas* (The Hunt in the Barrel — a parody of Diogenes in a Barrel). Brudno was eventually deported to a camp in Estonia, where he was murdered by the Germans and their collaborators (Sutskever survived the Sho'ah after joining the Partisan fighters). His version, however, is entirely unrelated musically to Weiner's song. Yehudi Wyner has pointed out that the "harmonic maneuvers and elaborate piano writing suggest a continuing development of his [Weiner's] style;" and he has observed that the song concludes in a key one half tone higher than that in which most of the song proceeds — but "without any sense of strain."

VOLT MAYN TATE RAYKH GEVEN (1918) is representative of Weiner's early and still evolving attachment to Yiddish song. Especially notable is the virtuoso piano writing that mirrors the spirit of the poem.

IKH HOB FAR DIR A SOD (1945) is one of the many love songs that Weiner wrote to his wife, Sarah Naomi. Yehudi Wyner has drawn a comparison to techniques of Debussy in this song's "enriched diatonic harmony" and in its use of the whole-tone scale.

With its reference to Jewish women kindling the Shabbos candles, **BAYM BENTSHN LIKHT** (1974) was dedicated to the memory of Weiner's two mothers, Gisse-Malke and Khassia. Their grandson, Yehudi Wyner, has commented on the song's "touching melancholy," observing in it a "mixture of hope, regret, and reminiscence":

The murmured chant, suffused with Yiddish melos is enveloped by a texture of slow-moving chords that dissolve into a quiet stream of melody at the end of each strophe.

SHTILE TENER (1918) is also from Weiner's early songwriting period. Uncharacteristically for Weiner, it concludes with an eight-bar postlude that Yehudi Wyner finds "deeply affecting". The simplicity of this song can be deceiving at first hearing.

ERGETS VAYT (1936) concerns, on the face of the poem, the Czarist regime's infamous practice of Siberian exile or imprisonment for perceived revolutionary or other protest activity in imperial Russia. But there are also layers of meaning in the poem that explore aspects of inner loneliness, suffering, and yearning inherent in the human condition. Leivick wrote the poem in 1914-15 in Philadelphia, where he was working as an apprentice cutter in a garment shop while writing on his own time. He is said to have considered *Ergets vayt* his first "authentic" poem, which he therefore placed in the opening pages of his first published collection (1918). His biography describes his subsequent recollection of the circumstances surrounding the poem's genesis — on a cold, wintry night in his tiny attic room, where, after a long day's work in the shop, he lay in bed by the light of a small gas lamp. Looking through the window at a snow storm, he felt "lonely, foreign, and forlorn in this big new world." And he noted in his

poem a shift in emphasis from the “forbidden land,” with its unreachable covered treasures, to suffering humanity, concluding that an additional observation was necessary: “Somewhere far away a prisoner lies alone.” While this song may seem simple, and its piano part relatively conventional, Yehudi Wyner has observed that it is as if that simplicity “understates — perhaps masks — the intrinsic pathos of the poem, and, by so doing, intensifies the tragic nature of the exile.”

A MAYSELE (1953) is one of Weiner’s most beloved and frequently sung songs. In some ways it offers another example of Weiner’s “creating his own folksong.” Hirshbein’s poem, with its theme of greed that leads to a couple’s reversion to its earlier state of poverty, has parallels in many folk cultures and fairytales.

Although the melody of **YOSL KLEZMER** (1939) is Weiner’s original creation, it is derived deliberately from the structure and overall melos of the music of eastern European wedding-band musicians — klezmerim and their imitators. Naftoli Gross’s poem contains an intermediate stanza that Weiner chose not to include. “The robust energy of this song,” Yehudi Wyner has commented, “with its elaborate piano part and its expressive contrasting middle section, transforms the folk-derived character into a more complex artistic statement.” The song finds a kind of partner in Weiner’s **DER YID MITN FIDL** (1956), in which, however, Yehudi Wyner finds more intricate development of the basic material. Lutsky’s [Aaron Tsuker] poem reflects a stereotypical interchange in humorous Yiddish folklore.

Yehudi Wyner’s **S’IZ NITO KAYN NEKHTN** was written in 1964 in response to a commission from the Cantors Assembly as part of a project involving seven other composers. The mission was to “frame simple but beautiful Yiddish folksongs in a new musical setting.” The text reveals a cynical bitterness, relieved only by flashes of hopeless humor: “Grab what you can today; in the next world you’ll do no better.” It echoes, though probably unwittingly, a famous German folk proverb: “In heaven they don’t have beer, so drink it while you’re here.” Wyner’s motoric dissonant setting reflects the embittered mood of the poem and the joylessness of the tune. The harmonies and the contrapuntal intrusions may sound arbitrarily imposed on the melody, but they are in fact derived from the song and its underlying modality.

FROM THE BEST OF SECOND AVENUE — A Nostalgic Glimpse of American Yiddish Theatre

ALEXANDER OLSHANETSKY (1892-1946) and **JOSEPH RUMSHINSKY** (1881 [1879?] - 1956) were two of the most significant songwriter-composers and conductors for the immigrant era, mass-oriented Yiddish theatrical entertainment vehicle now known generically as “Second Avenue”. This geographically-born umbrella association is used to distinguish the manifestly popular institution from other, more circumscribed and more sophisticated forms of American Yiddish theatre, such as the Yiddish Art Theatre or the politically informed ARTEF. While today most musical theatre productions of the Second Avenue variety would be identified from the outset as “musical comedies”, “musical shows”, or simply “musicals”, in their own day they were frequently called operettas. That sometimes artificially elevated terminology followed on the nomenclature adopted earlier (perhaps more appropriately) for his own works by Abraham Goldfaden, who is generally and legitimately if sometimes a bit too broadly regarded as the European founder of Yiddish musical theatre as a unified stage genre.

Initially, beginning in the 1880s, American Yiddish musical theatre relied heavily on Goldfaden. But the institution that was to become Second Avenue soon developed its own specifically American Jewish stamp under the pens of immigrant songwriters, composers, lyricists, producers, playbook authors, and playwrights as well as singer-actors and actresses who created alluring roles. From a relatively primitive gestation period (admittedly often crude in retrospect, even by later Second Avenue popular standards) in the 1890s and well into the 1910s, the phenomenon developed and proliferated rapidly from the First World War through the 1920s. It reached its qualitative as well as commercial zenith from the late 1920s through the 1940s. But by about 1950 it had already begun its steep, irreversible decline, hastened inevitably by a combination of sociological, generational, and cultural forces.

OLSHANETSKY was born in Odessa, where he had both a traditional Jewish and a modern Western-oriented Gymnasium education. Typically, he sang as a boy in synagogue choirs. He began violin studies at the age of six, and then learned several other instruments as well. As a young man he played in the resident Odessa opera orchestra and toured with it throughout Russia and Siberia before becoming the choral director for a Russian operetta company. While in the Imperial Russian army as a regimental headmaster, he traveled to Kharbin, Manchuria, in northeast China, where he encountered a Yiddish theatre group. When its director emigrated to America, Olshanetsky replaced him and also began writing his own Yiddish songs and other music for Yitzhak Kaplan's play, *Tsurik sheym kayn tsien* (Going Back Home to Zion). After touring Siberia, Japan, China, and India with another Russian operetta company, he returned to Kharbin in 1921 to find all Yiddish theatre gone. About a year later he emigrated to the United States, where his uncle, Hyman Meisel, had preceded him. Meisel eventually became his father-in-law as well, when he married his Yiddish actress-singer cousin, Bella Meisel [Myself].

Olshanetsky had some brief involvement with the Yiddish Art Theatre and then travelled to Cuba to direct a theatre company there. When he returned to New York he served successfully in two Yiddish theaters (the Lenox, in Harlem, and the Liberty, in Brooklyn) before "graduating" to the more prestigious Downtown National Theater and writing many successful operettas. From 1925 on, throughout the 1930s, and until his untimely sudden death in 1946, his name was ubiquitous in the Second Avenue world; and his operettas played in nearly all its major venues. He also became the first music director of the Concord Hotel in the so-called "Borsht Belt" Jewish vacation region in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains. There, he directed periodic concerts as well as choirs for cantors officiating at holyday services. Some of the most learned cantors of the time considered him among the best synagogue choirmasters. He also composed a small amount of liturgical music — unabashedly theatrical in character and style — which remains mostly unpublished.

Olshanetsky had a particular gift for elegant melodic invention and a well-developed dramatic sense. He was able to fashion these elements into vehicles that spoke to popular taste; and his experience with European operetta is reflected transparently in much of his own music for the American Yiddish stage. His senior colleague Joseph Rumshinsky, though a commercial rival, wrote in his memoirs that Olshanetsky understood intimately the musical yearnings of the immigrant Jewish masses and introduced both "dreamy romances" and a perceived Russian Gypsy idiom to the Yiddish theatre.

His last operetta was *Ale viln khasene hobn* (Everyone Wants to get Married), which contains several engaging numbers. But his most enduring and most familiar song is undoubtedly *Ikh hob dikh tsufil lib* (I Love You Too Much), from the 1933-34 lavish musical comedy, *Der Katerinshtshik* (The Organgrinder). In the years immediately following the show's run, the song — in instrumental as well as vocal arrangements — was a favorite of Jewish wedding bands and other popular entertainers, for whom it became completely divorced from its original theatrical context and story line. *Ikh hob dikh tsufil lib* also achieved recognition in the general popular music world as "I Love You Much Too Much", an English language version whose lyrics, however, did not constitute an actual translation and were unrelated to the song's theatrical or even Jewish — much less Yiddish — origin. That English version, which utilized only the principal melody without the introductory recitative, was recorded commercially in a host of styles and arrangements by star vocalists such as Bob Zurke and his Delta Rhythm band, Gene Krupa, Ella Fitzgerald, Connie Francis, Dean Martin, and Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians — in a choral setting. At a memorial tribute to Olshanetsky at the Concord Hotel shortly after his unexpected death at the age of only fifty-two, a large banner poignantly expressed the feelings of so many there who had known him: "Olshy, we loved you too much!"

EYN KUK AF DIR (Just One Look at You), with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, is one of the principal songs from Olshanetsky's 1929 operetta, *Di eyntsike nakht* (The One and Only Night). It ends happily for all concerned, as did nearly all Second Avenue musical shows despite whatever trauma or even potential tragedy might have preceded the final outcome — and as such shows were typically all but required to do to meet audience expectation and demand. But, as was also the clichéd order of the day for many such productions, the joyful, satisfactory conclusion comes only with an eleventh-hour revelation that reverses in a single stroke what had been presented until then as a heartrending, inescapable predica-

ment with potentially excruciating lifetime consequences. Yet, trite and shopworn as much of the plot and its upshot are, the overall dramatic level of this play is a bit higher, the historical backdrop a bit more legitimately founded, and the situation a bit more plausible than in most Second Avenue storylines. For, surrounding the action — with its usual share of convoluted plot twists, concealed identities, predictable routines, unlikely coincidences, and in this case a recycled love-at-first-sight convention — is a vivid recollection of the brutal Cantonist episode in Imperial Russian Jewish history.

Under the Cantonist decrees, which were operable from about 1827 (when, under Nicholas I, military service was made compulsory for Jews) until their abolition under Alexander II in 1856, Jewish boys from age twelve on were subject to seizure according to a quota system. Those rules were often ignored, as in this play, resulting in seizure of much younger boys who in many cases never saw their families again. They were placed in military-type schools and given Christian religious instruction with inducement to conversion; and at age eighteen they were automatically conscripted into the Imperial Army or Navy for a period of twenty-five years. That policy was part of an overall imperial scheme to address the “Jewish problem” by forcing assimilation into Russian society, which was thought to be facilitated by separating the seized boys as far as possible from Jewish life or associations. The laws also served as a secondary vehicle for encouraging Jews to conform on their own to Russian norms. Thus, Jewish boys whose parents enrolled them in state-sponsored Russian language rather than Jewish schools were protected from seizure and exempt from conscription.

The action in the play occurs between 1830 and 1850. A famous young Russian general in the Imperial Army, Vitalin, happens to have both a naturally sympathetic attitude towards Jews and an explicable attraction to Jewish songs. He intercedes with local authorities to free a group of Hassidim who have been arrested on typically trumped-up spying charges. In that process he meets Esther, the adopted Jewish daughter of one of the detained Hassidic families — headed by a rebbe — and he falls instantly in love with her. She succumbs eventually to the same emotional force — not least because she is moved initially by the attraction of so prosperous and powerful a Russian officer to a poor Jewish girl; and their love becomes mutual.

General Vitalin’s infatuation is sparked and then intensified by hearing some of the detained Hassidim — and then Esther, at his request — singing *Az got iz mit mir* (When God is with Me), another of the operetta’s most successful songs. It ignites an internal echo. He thinks he has heard the song before, but cannot recall where or when; and he is strangely affected by it. The typed prompt script (all that has been located for this operetta) indicates an unidentified duet here, and it is likely therefore that *Eyn kuk af dir* was sung at least initially at this point.

After his departure from the region, General Vitalin remains preoccupied with and with Esther. He returns to see her, but she is about to wed someone else. Proclaiming his love again, he recalls that the night of their first meeting was “the one and only night” he ever felt true love. Hence, the title of the operetta. The known lyrics of *Eyn kuk af dir* certainly apply to this moment, most especially with the words: “Everyone knows that because of you I am a changed man.” So the duet could have been sung here as well, as a repetition from the earlier act — a frequent practice in these operettas. In any case, they now sing that they know that they must be permanently separated, but without stating the reason that was obvious to any audience: viz., that a Jewish girl, much less the adopted daughter of a Hassidic rebbe, could never marry a non-Jew — whether a Russian officer or any man of lesser position in Russian society.

To save the day, General Vitalin’s ‘father’ — General Rudinsky, a senior Russian officer — arrives in the nick of time and reveals to Vitalin the latter’s true identity. Vitalin is actually the biological son of the rebbe who had adopted Esther. He had been seized as a child under the Cantonist procedures and adopted and reared by General Rudinsky as his own son with a newly given Russian name. As Rudinsky’s presumed son, he had risen to his present rank without ever knowing he is a Jew, and recalling nothing of his early childhood. Moreover, not only is he indeed a Jew, but he and Esther — although they had been childhood playmates — are not really brother and sister. So, now they can marry. “The story is more fitting for an opera,” wrote a favorable reviewer for the Yiddish press in 1929, “than for an operetta.”

From the time that he arrived in America, whenever **JOSEPH RUMSHINSKY** was asked where he had been born he replied, evasively, “near Vilna”. And that was how he completed his entry forms upon immigration. He never specified just how “near”, or, for that matter, how far. We can assume, however, that it was in Lithuania, where he exhibited musical talent at an early age and began piano lessons locally. He soon acquired the affectionate sobriquet, *Yoshke der notn freser* (the [musical] note devourer). He had some formal Russian secular schooling, but his initial practical exposure to “Jewish music” came with his immersion in the typical eastern European cantorial-choral apprenticeship system as a *meshorer*, viz., a cantorial assistant as a chorister. During a stop in Grodno (then in Russian Poland) while on tour with an itinerant cantor and choir, he first encountered not only Russian but Yiddish theatre through the professional touring productions of the famous Kaminski [Kaminska] theatrical company. He was instantly attracted to the Yiddish musical stage upon hearing his first Goldfaden operetta, *Shulamis*. First as a chorister and then as a conductor, he toured with the Kaminskis and other troupes. He became familiar with numerous Goldfaden operettas and enamored of the genre that he would eventually seek to implant and emulate in New York as the basis for a new American brand of Yiddish musical theatre. Rumshinsky arrived in New York as an immigrant in 1904, after two years in London preceded by three in Łódź as the inaugural conductor there of the Hazomir Choral Society. That ensemble, with branches in Warsaw, Czernovich, and other cosmopolitan eastern European cities, was a culturally Zionist and Haskala-oriented chorus that performed classical repertoire such as Beethoven, Brahms, and Verdi, in Hebrew.

He dismissed the Yiddish theatre he found in New York as “elevated vaudeville” — badly in need of development into a form in which music, plot, and dialogue would at least be interrelated. He was later instrumental in promoting that process, even if he was only able partially to fulfill his aims. But for a good while he had to be content with resetting his sights and desired standards to contend with and conform to the often crude and primitive but viable recipe for popular appeal that had already been established and proven commercially successful by Boris Thomashefsky. Generally and appropriately regarded as the founder of Second Avenue’s first, long running homegrown phase, Thomashefsky had demonstrated time and time again that what those immigrant audiences wanted was not legitimate operetta on any European model, but sheer diversionary entertainment saturated with local topical themes, artificial (and artificially manufactured) nostalgia, romanticized Old World folk motifs, and immigrant situations and characterizations with which they could identify — all in productions with little if any dramatic unity or music emerging from plot or character development.

Meanwhile, Rumshinsky’s career began to fall into place by the 1908–09 season, when the famous “matinee idol” Jacob P. Adler — one of the giants among serious dramatic actors — invited him to conduct and compose at the Windsor Theater in which he was a partner and co-manager. An ardent advocate for a higher artistic and literary plane of Yiddish theatrical experience even for the popular realm, a sort of “*kunst* for the people” — though his was ultimately a losing battle — and a voice of opposition to the almost institutionalized literary “trash” (*shund*) approach, Adler naturally appreciated Rumshinsky’s long-range goals as well as his superior musical endowments and dramatic sense.

It was at the Windsor that season that Rumshinsky wrote what he considered to be his first operetta-type score: *A yidish kind*, for Bernard Wilensky’s revision of an earlier operetta by Shomer [Nohum Meir Shaykevitsch]. He also wrote the songs that season for another Wilensky operetta, *Nosn hakhokhem* (Nathan the Wise), based on the German (non-Jewish) dramatist and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s famous but perplexing play, in which the relative merits of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are argued.

Shortly afterward, Rumshinsky teamed up with Anshel Schorr to write the show he later described as the first “modern” Yiddish musical comedy: *Dos meyd l fun der vest*. It was followed by his operetta *Shir hashirim*, which Rumshinsky himself — a bit boldly — characterized as nothing less than “the first romantic Yiddish opera.” He hooked up with Thomashefsky in 1916 in an official professional affiliation as composer and conductor at the latter’s highly lucrative Downtown National Theater, but he severed that association three years later when he felt it was time to “move on”. Nonetheless, the two remained friends and had mutually respectful collegial contacts for many years.

One of Rumshinsky's most far-reaching innovations — begun while still with Thomashefsky — was his insistence on a full pit orchestra with a minimum of twenty-four professional musicians. Thus he upgraded the entire orchestral element for the future of Second Avenue beyond the small dance-band or modestly expanded wedding band formats that had sufficed for most earlier productions and to which audiences were accustomed. Indeed, it is in the size, quality, and instrumentation of the pit orchestra for full-scale Yiddish theatrical productions that Rumshinsky made one of his most enduring contributions. Some of his innovations caught on and became standard (harp, for example) while others — such as double-reed instruments — did not. But if he was unable fully to achieve his symphonic ideal, he at least advanced toward it on the order of operetta composers such as Franz Lehár, Emerich Kalman, Victor Herbert, and Sigmund Romberg — and 1940s-50s Broadway. He also insisted on fully trained singers with legitimate light operatic voices — on the models of Central European operetta. That, too, became the desiderata and the standard thereafter.

In the thirty-five years following his leaving Thomashefsky's theater, Rumshinsky wrote, produced, or co-produced, and conducted an unprecedented — and since unequalled — number of shows at many of New York's principal Yiddish theatres. They must be acknowledged to vary in quality. But his position as *de facto* musical dean of Second Avenue by the mid-1920s is indisputable.

In 1931, the Yiddish theatre world celebrated Rumshinsky's fiftieth birthday (when ever it actually was) with a gala concert and banquet and with publication of a Festschrift titled *Rumshinsky bukh* — an honor accorded no other composer in that milieu before or since. That Rumshinsky bukh contained numerous testimonial articles and messages by colleagues as well as critics. Maurice Schwartz, the most visible avatar and advocate of Yiddish art theatre nonetheless congratulated Rumshinsky on not being "ashamed to write for 'the people'," and conductor Edwin Franko Goldman dubbed him "the second Victor Herbert" — a "sort of Victor Herbert with a yarmulke", as Isaac Goldberg added. And Abe Cahan, editor of the *Forverts*, the largest circulating Yiddish daily newspaper, placed Rumshinsky squarely in the pantheon of such theatrical pillars as Goldfaden, Adler, Kessler, and Jacob Gordin.

There were also critical assessments that lamented the commercial practicalities of public demand that had prevented Rumshinsky from rising above mass entertainment and further realizing his artistic aims for Yiddish musical theatre. For despite his advancements in terms of musical continuity, in the end most of the books, plays, and librettos for his successful scores were not of much higher quality than those of his contemporaries, and they continued to contain some of the same clichés, vaudeville residues, and other weaknesses that he had criticized from the beginning. No less an intellectual than Jacob Shatsky, however, with no predisposition to forgive diluted standards, praised Rumshinsky for his vision, his initial quest for worthy librettos, and his cosmopolitanism "even when depicting [musically] a *kley n shtetl* story" with *kley n shtetl* — folk oriented — sensibilities.

At first glance, Rumshinsky and Isadore Lillian's love duet, **SHLOYMELE, MALKELE**, from the 1937 musical production *Dos galitsyaner rebele* (The Little Galician Rabbi), presents a perplexing scene that is bound initially to raise eyebrows. The lyrics appear to reveal a brother and sister openly expressing romantic love for each other. Yet, even without knowing anything whatsoever of the storyline, one thing is certain: Shloyme and Malke are not really — and could not possibly be — brother and sister. For all the crudeness of Second Avenue at its worst (which this play was not, despite its shortcomings), nothing so hideous as incest would ever have been considered. What these lyrics tell us is that these two have become "crazy [*meshuge*] for each other" only upon confirming that they are biologically unrelated, and that until then, their strong quasi-brother/sister relationship had been confined (or, for future pseudo-Freudians, repressed) to the level of friendship. Still, a rare consensus among reviewers was that — apart from the music — the plot and storyline were among the weakest, most implausible, most incongruously juxtaposed, ("a mishmash of situations and types from other Second Avenue pieces"), and least coherent of all Second Avenue shows.

What we can ascertain about this musical from secondary documents is that it concerns a Hassidic rebbe's son (the rebele, who we assume is heir to his father's court) who was somehow separated in childhood from his family and home. His young adult identity is later assumed by a survivor of a shipwreck in which the actual rebele, Shloyme, is thought to have been drowned, and it is the imposter

who returns home as Shloyme to the rebbe's court. He is accepted and "welcomed back" by the family, and he becomes close to the real Shloyme's sister, Malke. But they are close on a brother-sister plane, which, for him, grows into an attraction on another level, since he knows that Malke is not his sister. By the time this song occurs within the action, the truth has obviously been revealed. Malke seems to have begun to suspect it already, so the mutual feelings might at least subconsciously have begun to develop.

In the end, the real Shloyme, who has in fact survived the shipwreck and has been taken in by Second Avenue's favorite fantasy: Gypsies — which provides the stage opportunity for the romanticized Gypsy motifs, music, dance, and visual paraphernalia the audiences so adored — surfaces and returns home. The result is a doubly "happy ending".

All reviewers praised Rumshinsky's music for this show, even though Der tog referred to it as good music adorning an unappetizing story: "Here, in this piece, the music is everything."

DAVID MEYEROWITZ (1867-1943) was best known in his day for his parody lyrics, so-called speciality ditties, and nostalgic songs for the early Yiddish "Bowery" revues and quasi-vaudeville or minstrelsy shows prior to the 1930s. **VOS GEVEN IZ GEVEN UN NITO** (What Was, Was, and Is No More), one of his most familiar songs, was made famous initially by the Yiddish theatrical star, Nellie Casman.

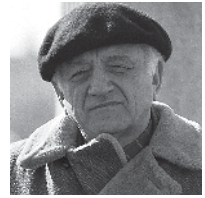
A NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION and DICTION

The pronunciation and vocalization of Yiddish in these theatre songs, unlike the rest of this evening's program, differs from standard literary / YIVO Yiddish. It follows the sometimes less-than-learned mixture of Volhynian, Galician, and southern Polish dialects prevalent on Second Avenue stages, according to which lyricists created rhyme schemes that cannot be made to fit literary Yiddish pronunciation. The variety of performers' backgrounds and geographical origins in the heyday of Second Avenue, however, also yielded occasional words sung in northern Polish and Ukrainian dialects — without consistency even in the same song. Recalling and observing all this contributes to — in fact is required for — the period authenticity of American Yiddish theatre performance, whether songs or dialogue.

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ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Throughout the second half of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st for nearly two decades, Brooklyn native **ROBERT PAUL ABELSON** has been one of the supreme interpreters of Yiddish Song. His repertoire ranges from art song (Hebrew as well as Yiddish) to theatrical genres, and from Hebrew liturgical to Western classical music.



A member of New York City Opera for many years, Abelson has also sung with orchestras such as the Seattle Symphony and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra; and he has appeared with the Goldovsky Opera Theatre and at the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York. A frequent performer in Yiddish productions — in film, on stage, and for television — he starred in the musical review, *On Second Avenue* and in the 1990 Broadway musical, *Those Were the Days*. He also sang a lead role in the original Yiddish version of David Schiff's opera, *Gimpel the Fool*. In 1990 he made his London debut at the Royal Festival Hall in *Voice of Jewish Russia*, devised and directed by Neil Levin.

Abelson is also one of the most beloved cantors in Reform circles. Having served the pulpit at New York's Temple Israel, in Manhattan, for many years, he remains active as its Cantor Emeritus. He has also taught for decades at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. Nearly all bona fide cantors in Reform congregations today have benefitted from his classes there.

In addition to dozens of recordings for various labels, Abelson appears on many CDs of the Milken Archive of Jewish Music — on the NAXOS label. These include his renditions of many of Lazar Weiner's most important Yiddish lieder as well as songs from Second Avenue Yiddish theatre productions, musicals, and operettas.

Known for her mastery of classical Yiddish and Hebrew lieder genres as well as solo cantata and oratorio roles, **IDA RAE CAHANA** is also one of today's foremost cantors within Reform synagogue circles and the Reform-affiliated American Conference of Cantors — on whose governing board she has served with distinction. She began her synagogue music life first as a chorister and then as a cantorial soloist at the age of sixteen in her family's home city of Pittsburgh. Following cantorial investiture in 1993 from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, she served pulpits in Toledo, Sun Valley, Providence, and New York City at Central Synagogue. She has been scholar-in-residence at various congregations across America; and she has sought to transmit her knowledge, artistry and experience to future generations of cantors through her coaching and mentoring positions at the Jewish Theological Seminary and at HUC-JIR. In her student years at the latter, she was introduced to Yiddish lieder in her classes with the eminent veteran expositor, teacher, and still active patriarch in the field, Robert Paul Abelson, who makes a cameo appearance in this evening's Liederabend. Later, she became a protégé of the venerable doyenne of Yiddish and Hebrew song, Mascha Benya (z"l), under whose tutelage she learned the intricacies and subtleties of these repertoires.



Cahana made her London concert debut in 1996 at the Barbican Centre in a *Kristallnacht* commemorative production, *Vanished Voices*, devised and directed Neil Levin. Her Lincoln Center debut followed a year later in a concert celebrating the legacy of German Jewry, *Voice of Ashkenaz*; and she returned to Lincoln Center in 2003 for her solo role in the world premiere of Ofer Ben-Amots's *Seven Degrees of Praise*, which was commissioned for the occasion. Other New York appearances have included one on Broadway with Phyllis Newman, another at Alice Tully Hall with Leonard Nimoy, concerts at Merkin Hall and the 92nd Street YMHA, and a Carnegie Hall debut in 2012. In 2013 she sang with the Oregon Symphony, and two years later at Disney Hall in Los Angeles. She has distinguished herself in numerous recordings of liturgical music as well as secular Yiddish and Hebrew lieder for the Milken Archive of Jewish Music on CDs on the NAXOS label as well as additional digital albums on the Archive's website. And she is a featured soloist on Transcontinental Music's double-CD set devoted to music of the High Holydays, *Yamim Noraim*.

In 2012 Cantor Cahana was appointed Senior Cantor at Portland, Oregon's Congregation Beth Israel, whose pulpit she shares with her husband, Senior Rabbi Michael Cahana. She has become a highly regarded

fixture of Portland's musical and religious life, recording a holiday album in 2010, *Joy to the World*, with Thomas Lauderdale and Pink Martini; organizing the musical offerings of a 50th anniversary ecumenical commemoration of Nostra Estate by Portland's Roman Catholic and Jewish communities; and performing with the local chamber music ensemble, "45th Parallel". With Portland's Jewish Theatre Collaborative, she has created the role of "Paulinka Bim-Bam" for the staging of a new work about the life of Jewish painter Charlotte Salomon, as well as a musical exploration of "Davita's Harp".

A sabra with a rich baritone voice and musical artistry, **RAPHAEL FRIEDER** is widely recognized both in America and in his native Israel. At home equally with classical (especially oratorio and lieder), Israeli, and other Jewishly-related music, he has sung with all of Israel's major orchestras as well as with the Israeli New Opera. He has appeared in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall to Tel Aviv's Mann Auditorium, and from Vienna's Volkstheater to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. And he has collaborated with some of the world's leading conductors, including Zubin Mehta, Roger Norrington, and Leonard Bernstein, who chose him to sing the world premiere of his *Arias and Barcaroles* in Tel Aviv — followed by its British Isles premiere in London.



Among the many works that feature Frieder as baritone soloist on recordings of the Milken Archive of Jewish Music on the NAXOS label are David Tamkin's opera, *The Dybbuk*, Max Helfman's *The Holy Ark*, liturgical settings by Lazar Saminsky, Ernest Bloch's *Avodath Hakodesh*, and a number of Lazar Weiner's Yiddish lieder. He has also made many recordings for Israel National Radio, and he played and sang the role of the cantor in the hit film, *Keeping the Faith*.

Frieder is also an accomplished cantor, who has served the pulpit as hazzan of Temple Israel of Great Neck, New York, for a quarter of a century. He has appeared in cantorial concerts throughout the world, including at New York's Lincoln Center. He received his degree in voice and choral conducting at the Rubin Academy of Music in Tel Aviv, after which he served as cantor of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue in London. He has taught hazzanut at the Academy for the Jewish Religion in New York, and he currently teaches and coaches at the H.L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The daughter of a mother with roots in Latvian Jewry and a Baghdad-born father of Babylonian Jewish tradition who emigrated to America in 1947, mezzo-soprano **ELIZABETH SHAMMASH** feels the proud inheritance of two rich Jewish lineages. Her work in opera has taken her to major roles with companies including New York City Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Berkshire Opera, Palm Beach Opera, Israel Vocal Arts Institute in Tel Aviv, and the Beijing Music Festival. Concert appearances have included the China National Symphony, the Israel Philharmonic, the Mostly Mozart Festival, the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, the Berlin Radio Symphony, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Baroque, and Early Music Vancouver.



Highlights of Shammash's recitals and chamber music performances include those at Tanglewood, Marlboro, the Ravinia Festival, the Gardner Museum in Boston, and Lincoln Center's Great Performer's series. During the 2015-16 season she gave a recital of Yiddish lieder at the University of Oklahoma. She has recorded extensively for the Milken Archive of Jewish Music and appears on many of its CDs on the NAXOS label. These include her renditions of Yiddish lieder by Lazar Weiner and others; a number of Yiddish theatre songs; and lead mezzo-soprano roles in David Stock's *A Little Miracle* with the Berlin radio Symphony Orchestra, and Thomas Beveridge's *Yizkor Requiem* with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields. In 2003 she sang one of the principal roles in a concert version of Kurt Weill's *The Eternal Road* in New York. The Newport Classical recording of Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti* features her in the leading role of Dinah, and she is also heard as the alto soloist in Handel's *Messiah* on Telarc with Apollo's Fire, Cleveland's Baroque Orchestra.

In 2006 Shammash made her debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Gerard Schwarz at the Disney Hall, in which she starred in a Yiddish theatrical revue narrated by Theo Bikel.

Now also Cantor Shammash, she received ordination as hazzan and a Master of Sacred Music degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2007. Prior to that she earned her masters degree in music and voice performance from Manhattan School of Music, an artist diploma from Boston University's Opera Institute, and a B.A. degree in Italian Studies from Brown University. In April (2017) she celebrated her 10th anniversary as the cantor of Tiferet Bet Israel in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

Born in London to refugees from German-occupied Europe, **SIMON SPIRO** grew up in a home filled with the strains of Yiddish song. His father became a noted actor-singer in the Yiddish theatre on London's East End, and his mother was an accomplished singer. A descendant through both parents of the Gerer Hassidic tradition, whose dynasty was based originally in Poland, Spiro's path to his own multi-faceted callings in both sacred and secular music of Jewish life and experience emerged naturally from his family's combination of Hassidic and Yiddish cultures and the cantorial traditions of its earlier generations. He has become a leading interpreter both of cantorial art and of Yiddish song, with repertoires ranging from classical renditions of eastern European hazzanut to Yiddish folk, popular, and art song genres, and from contemporary liturgical styles to theatrical entertainment.



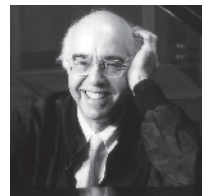
Spiro studied at Jews College, London, where one of his teachers and mentors was the locally prominent cantor, Reverend Leo Bryll. His first cantorial pulpit was at London's prestigious orthodox St. John's Wood synagogue, for many years the seat of the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire. Positions followed at major synagogues in North America. Concert tours have taken him to South Africa, Australia, Israel, South America, and the Far East. He is also a gifted composer and arranger, and he has sung in numerous musical theatre productions — including *Phantom of the Opera* in the Orient. Spiro has appeared together with such well-known show business personalities as Kenny Rogers, Cliff Richard, Sheena Easton, Johnny Mathis, Joan Rivers, Red Buttons, and Tim Rice; and he has represented the United Kingdom twice in the "Song for Europe" finals. Examples of his creative liturgical arrangements in contemporary idioms can be heard on several highly successful recordings, including *Adom Olam*, which reached the pop charts in Israel, and "To Hear the Song and the Prayer."

Among Spiro's many recordings for the Milken Archive of Jewish Music on the NAXOS label are three devoted to music of the American Yiddish stage — theatre, radio, and vaudeville; numerous virtuoso cantorial interpretations; and an entire CD devoted to his art.

In 2003 Spiro made his Lincoln Center debut in a Richard Tucker Memorial tribute concert that was part of a five-day international conference-festival, Only in America. His debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Disney Hall followed in 2006 in an evening titled One People - Many Voices, devised and directed by Neil Levin and conducted by Gerard Schwarz. That event included a mini-revue of Second Avenue songs narrated by Theo Bikel, in which Spiro played and sang a star role.

In 2016 Cantor Spiro founded a new, traditionally-oriented synagogue in Toronto that is dedicated to an emphasis on cantorial art: The Song Shul. That year, and again in 2017, his choral *s'lihot* service preceding Rosh Hashana enjoyed nation-wide live broadcast.

For more than six decades, **YEHUDI WYNER** has been recognized as one of America's most gifted composers. Born in Calgary, Alberta (Canada), he grew up in New York and throughout his youth he was exposed to his parents' Yiddishist milieu. His father, Lazar Weiner, the leading exponent of high Yiddish music culture and the prime exemplar of Yiddish art song, had the spelling of his sons names — though not his own — changed to preclude a common, annoying mispronunciation. By the age of four or five, Wyner began improvising short pieces that had an eastern European Jewish folk or Hassidic character. He started his musical life as a pianist — and has remained, like his father, a brilliant pianistic artist. But while a piano student at The Juilliard School, he became increasingly attracted to composition, which he then studied at Yale with Paul Hindemith and Richard Donovan — and at Harvard with Randall Thompson and Walter Piston.



After completing his undergraduate work, Wyner spent a summer in residence at the Brandeis Arts

Institute in Santa Susana, California, a division of the Brandeis Camp where the music director was Max Helfman, one of the seminal American figures in music of Jewish experience. That summer, Wyner came into contact with some of the most creative and accomplished Israeli composers and other artists of that period, and he was introduced to new artistic possibilities inherent in modern Jewish cultural consciousness. The Brandeis experience had a lasting impact that would later emerge in many of his works. And he was profoundly affected by the founder and director of the institute, Shlomo Bardin, whom he credits with instilling in him and his fellow students there a fresh appreciation for Jewish cultural identity.

In 1953 Wyner won the Rome Prize in composition, and he spent three years at the American Academy in Rome — composing, performing, and traveling. Since then he has garnered numerous other honors — including two Guggenheim Fellowships as well as commissions from the Koussevitsky and Ford Foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and many other performing organizations and universities. In 1998 he received the Elise Stoecker Award from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for his lifetime (up to then) contributions to chamber music, and he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters — of which he is now president.

Wyner joined the faculty of Brandeis University in 1986, and four years later he was appointed to the Naumburg Chair in composition. Previously he taught for fourteen years at Yale, where he was head of the composition faculty, and he was also dean of music at the Purchase campus of the State University of New York. He was on the chamber music faculty of the Berkshire Music Festival at Tanglewood from 1975 to 1997, and he has been a visiting professor at Cornell and Harvard Universities.

Although his public persona rests primarily on his contributions as a composer, Wyner also enjoys an enviable reputation as a pianist and conductor. He has been both a keyboard artist and a conductor of the Bach Aria Group, and he has also directed two opera companies and many chamber ensembles in a wide range of repertoire. He is the leading pianistic interpreter of his father's vast body of Yiddish lieder.

A number of Wyner's mature vocal works were written expressly for his wife, Susan Davenny Wyner. Among these are *Intermedio* (1976), a lyric ballet for soprano and string orchestra; *Fragments from Antiquity* (1978-1981) for soprano and orchestra; and *Oh the Most Voluptuous Night* (1982) for soprano and chamber ensemble. Orchestral works include *Prologue and Narrative for Cello and Orchestra* (1994), commissioned by the BBC Philharmonic; *Lyric Harmony* (1995), commissioned by Carnegie Hall for the American Composers Orchestra; and *Epilogue* (1996), commissioned by Yale. His chamber music works have been performed throughout Europe and America. His Horn trio (1997) was commissioned for forty ensembles in the United States and abroad.

Prominent among Wyner's many works that have been informed by Jewish experience and heritage are *The Mirror*, a suite from his incidental music for the play by Isaac Bashevis Singer; *Passover Offering*; *Tants un Maysele*; *Dances of Atonement* for violin and piano; and two major liturgical works: a Torah service and a Sabbath Eve service.

In 2006 Wyner was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his piano concerto.

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