

# Journal of Synagogue Music

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JOURNAL OF SYNAGOGUE MUSIC, *Volume XVIII, Number 2*  
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## FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the Journal of Synagogue Music represents, in a sense, the “first fruits” of my stewardship as Editor. I have sought to encourage my hazzanic colleagues as well as scholars in related fields to submit materials for the benefit of our readers. This sort of endeavor takes some time. Happily, I am beginning to receive a number of fine personal histories and research papers. The full flowering of these efforts should be seen in the next issue, but the benefits can begin to be appreciated in the pages of this issue.

Travel is a theme touched on by several articles. This includes Lippman Bodoffs appreciation of the Cantors Assembly 40th Anniversary Convention in Israel, Max Wohlberg’s tribute to the music of the Jews of Aleppo after his trip to Israel, as well as David Bagley’s rhapsody over this concert tour of the Soviet Union with several colleagues during the past year. Also, a fine article by Velvel Pasternak on hasidic music.

A special piece of this issue is Saul Meisels’ autobiographical sketch. This is a gem of an oral history which will be appreciated by many colleagues. For young hazzanim like me who did not grow up in a “deeply Jewish” environment, it provides a glimpse at the genesis of an accomplished hazzan and leader. For some of our older colleagues, it provides an opportunity to reminisce about times and personalities gone by. At the same time, however, one can’t help but notice that the concerns of Saul Meisel’s career from even his earliest days in Cleveland coincide with the concerns we discuss each time we convene today.

I want to encourage more of our senior colleagues to pen such autobiographical sketches. We need to know your stories. And the next time someone decides to write a book about the American cantorate, your memoirs will provide a wonderful source of information and inspiration.

You will also find Robert Strassburg’s review of Michael Isaacson’s “Cradle of Fire” and Baruch Cohon’s review of the new Reform hymnal “Shaarei Shirah: Gates of Song” edited by Charles Davidson.

Finally, our Music Section includes two arrangements by Charles Heller of recitatives by Rapoport. Thanks to Benjamin Maissner for sending these along, and to Mr. Heller for his permission to use them.

Enjoy. And write! We need your letters, your papers, your music.

– Jack Chomsky

## IF I FORGET THEE.. .

MAX WOHLBERG

The plane leaving Lod Airport, flying westward, seemed to be trying to keep pace with the morning sun. While it did not quite succeed, it did manage to extend the daylight hours for an exceedingly long time. Since it flew high above the clouds. There was nothing in sight to interfere with my thoughts as I tried to sort out the experiences and impressions of a three-week visit in Israel. These were spent mostly in beautiful, exciting, magical, inspiring Jerusalem.

One painful sight, the burnt fields — work of vicious arsonists — I saw between Lachish and Bethlehem. I tried to erase from my memory, but the annoying vision kept reappearing.

While I cannot possibly name the many friends, colleagues, students, and interesting people in diverse fields whom I met, neither can I omit mentioning some, such as the renowned author Chaim Potok with whom I was privileged to share my journey; Rabbi Yakov Rosenberg, vice-chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary who, I am convinced, is the most beloved Conservative Jew in the world, and his precious wife Devorah: the fine scholar and author Abraham Ezra Millgram (*Sabbath: Day of Delight Jewish Worship*, etc.); the educator Dr. Shimon Frost, acknowledged authority on Polish Jewry who, with his wife Peggy, is now teaching at the Hebrew University; and the prominent musicologist Dr. Israel Adler.

Above all, I was overwhelmed by the Eternal City, Jerusalem: its cosmopolitanism, its multifaceted society, multilingual population, and its varied interests. Its newsstands display newspapers in multiple languages (including a Hungarian *Ujkelet*).

On the radio, you can hear programs and news reports in Hebrew, English, French, Yiddish, Arabic and other languages. One of the best news hours, in perfect Hebrew, that I heard on television, came from Jordan.

Quite unexpectedly I heard on the radio a fine rendition, in Hebrew translation, of the beautiful Yiddish song, "*Margaritkes*." "At another time, I heard a fine baritone intone "*Iz geven amol a pastuchel*." "One late evening, a musicologist (whose name, alas, escapes me) delivered a fine lecture on the way *Shir Hushitirn* is chanted by various Sefardi as well as Ashkenazi communities.

On the streets, you can hear conversations in all languages. I was frequently delighted to hear Russian.

A visit to Yad Vashem is, of course, expected; a must, and heart-rendering. The quote from Ezekiel (36 and 37) over the million names of victims, is poignant in the extreme: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you and ye shall live. And I will take you and gather you from all the lands and will bring you into your own land."

Many visitors, alas, fail to walk through some of the halls containing paintings and art work by the inmates of the deathcamps. It was especially painful for me to see paintings by someone with my own given first name (Miklos), identical in age to me, whose residence was in Budapest and Cluj, cities I knew so well.

Speaking of art work. in the magnificent Music and Theater Complex in the Sherover Building, there was an exhibition of recent portraits of Polish Jews, Holocaust survivors. It is a most impressive collection. The pathetic surroundings in many of the pictures speak with a tragic eloquence.

Incidentally, the high artistic level of the Israel theater and its musical organizations fills one with pride. The quality of programs and performance by the Israel Philharmonic. Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv symphonies, sundry chamber orchestras, and choral groups may safely be compared to the best heard in foremost western capitals.

As for religious institutions, I attended services at the Western Wall. at *Morshet* Israel (the Conservative synagogue on Agron Street), the Great Synagogue, Jeshurun, *Har El* (progressive). and *Mevakshei Derech*. I also visited Neveh Schechter where our rabbinic and cantorial students spend one year; and Hebrew Union College. which has built a most impressive complex.

Meetings and lectures I attended included an Ephros memorial with my friend, Professor Irving Cohen. as the speaker at Apron Street; a one-sided debate on the political situation at the Van Lear Institute. two lectures at Hebrew Union College, two lectures at the (Orthodox) Israel Institute, and a concert (violin and tenor) of Hebrew, Italian. and Yiddish songs at the **Merkaz** *Letarbut Amim Lenoat*.

It was the Koran which first named us the "*Am Hasefer*", the people of the book. It seems to have been a well-chosen appellation. for wherever one turns in Israel one encounters books. Bookstores abound in every direction. Impressive libraries are to be found at Van Lear Institute, at the Museum, at the universities, and at the Schoeken Institute. The latter deserves a special article.

A truly inspiring sight was the recent book fair in a Jerusalem public park with a seemingly endless number of publishers exhibiting (and selling) books of all sorts. The many stalls were crowded day after day and night after night by adults and by children, looking at pages of contents, assiduously perusing volume after volume. And this leads me to the subject I wish to discuss in this

article. . a subject which is truly fascinating, the legacy of the Jews of Aleppo.

For a proper appreciation of this matter, I must preface our discussion with some comments on the Syrian city of Aleppo and its synagogue. Here, I must also express my indebtedness to Meir Ronnen for his article: "Crown of Aleppo," which appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on June 17, 1988. and to Z. Zohar, E. Meyer, and A. Shamosh for their articles in "Treasures of the Aleppo Community," a bi-lingual pamphlet published by the Israel Museum, May 1988.

The existence of a Jewish community in Aleppo dates back to the 4th century B.C.E., the period of the Second Temple. The main synagogue is named after Joab Ben Zeruiah, commander-in-chief of King David's military forces, who built here a commemorative fortress, remains of which are still believed to exist.

After the close of the Talmudic period and a subsequent Islamic conquest, the community was firmly established. Life between the 7th and 10th centuries was fairly peaceful. With the advent of the 11th century, Aleppo became known as a center of scholarship. Maimonides praised it for its devotion to study. One of his scholarly pupils settled here. In the 12th century, considerable immigration took place. The noted traveler. Judah Al-Harizi (1217), speaks highly of the local Jewry. The Mongolian and later Mameluk invasions of 1260, 1300, and especially 1400, disrupted the generally peaceful life of the populace, but with the influx of coreligionists from Spain, and during the Ottoman and following French occupations, the situation improved.

Yeshivot were established and a fairly prosperous community thrived. In the 18th and 19th centuries, however, as new centers of trade and trade routes developed, economic deterioration took place. The 20th century witnessed a period of mass emigration. Currently, it is estimated that of the approximately 18,000 Jews who lived in Aleppo 40 years ago, only about 700 are left.

As to their synagogue, a magnificent Byzantine structure, it dates back to the 5th century (C.E.) making it the oldest functioning synagogue in the world. It is a most remarkable building containing seven Arks, one named the "Cave of Elijah", three *bimot* (pulpits), two large prayer halls, and a large courtyard with a *bimuh*. Scrolls and crowns are kept in the various Arks. Following Israel's Declaration of Independence, riots broke out and on December 1, 1947, the building was damaged by fire.

Prior to the fire, however, a most fortuitous event took place. Sarah Shammah, a local housewife, had the sudden (and for us, fortunate) desire to have the synagogue photographed from every possible angle, covering every nook and cranny. For this purpose, she engaged a well-known, talented Armenian photographer. The latter lived up to his reputation, and Mrs. Shammah, who

now lives in Israel, cherished these pictures in the privacy of her home.

These masterful photos, now beautifully enlarged, next to an exquisitely-constructed wooden replica of the synagogue were exhibited in June and July 1988 in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, surrounding what to me, as a Jew and a Hazzan, is one of the most precious objects in the world.

Here reference must be made to a seemingly remote subject which, however, is the hub of my story. The subject of cantillation has been dealt with by many musicians and musicologists, but still remains somewhat nebulous in the minds of many otherwise well-informed people.

It is generally acknowledged that our system of Biblical cantillation is based on the work of one Aaron Ben-Asher who lived in Tiberias in the 10th century. It is a fact that Maimonides, in his Mishnah Torah, (section *Ahavah Hilchot Sefer Torah 8:4*) refers to Ben-Asher's work as the authentic version on which he relies. It is also a well-established fact that over a thousand years ago, one Shlomo Ben-Buya wrote down the complete Bible as we have it today. This carefully written text was then critically examined, verified, vocalized, and provided with the signs of cantillation by Ben-Asher, the last and most prominent member of the **Ben-Asher** dynasty. This became the "Textus Receptus", our Holy Bible. As Amnon Shamosh puts it: "A time-honored tradition invests the codex with a unique aura of authority, reverence and holiness." It is believed that the codex (called *Keter* by our Syrian brothers) is the first complete manuscript of the Bible ever written and represents the final codification of the Masoretic text.

Written in Palestine in the early 10th century, it most likely was looted and taken to Egypt at the end of the 11th century where it stayed until the end of the 14th century, when it was returned to Aleppo. There it was jealously guarded in the synagogue's Cave of Elijah.

It should be noted here that in 1943, Judah L. Magnes and Ben-Zvi (later president of Israel) sent Yizhak Shamosh to Aleppo to try to persuade the elders of the community to have the codex moved to Jerusalem. The elders declined to part with it. On a second mission, Shamosh received permission to have the renowned Biblical scholar Moshe David Cassuto examine and study the codex. At the end of 1943, Cassuto did so, but regrettably died shortly thereafter before he could organize his notes.

As a result of the fire in 1947, only 295 of the original 487 leaves survived. These were safely concealed by the elders for ten years, when they authorized one Mordechai Faham to smuggle them out of the country into Turkey. This was accomplished after Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi invalidated the curse which applied to the codex: "Cursed be he who steals it, sells it, or mortgages it. It may never be sold or redeemed."

On January 23, 1958, it was brought to Jerusalem, deposited at the Ben-Zvi

Institute where it is preserved to this day. Recently, agreement was reached with the Israel Museum to have it exhibited there during the period described above.

Opened at Jeremiah (23-25) and resting on a glass-covered stand. this beautifully written, historically invaluable, miraculously-surviving manuscript could be observed and studied. One's appreciation of this ancient volume is heightened when one reads such an item as appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* on July 10, 1988: "Hundreds of paintings, decorative art objects, and artifacts that the New York Historical Society is storing in a deterioration that some may be permanently lost."

Standing in awe and admiration before this sacred masterpiece, I experienced no difficulty in following text, vocalization and signs of cantillation. The tropes are clear: *Kol (mahpach) sason (pashto) v'kol (munach) simcha (katon) Kol (mercha) chatan (tipcha) v'kol (munuch) kalah (etnachta)*.

A verse from Psalms occurs to me: "A thousand years are as yesterday in Thy sight." These millenium-old signs are as fresh as those of yesterday. And I silently utter a *shehecheyanu* for the privilege granted me.

With closed eyes, I silently pray for this City of God, where beauty and history, mystery, and inspiration intermingle, creating a Heavenly Presence; where the impossible is commonplace, the miraculous routine, and where man may reach angelic heights. As I pray for this blessed land, three words from Jeremiah appear in my thoughts and on my lips: *Yisrael yishkon lavetach*. may Israel dwell in security.

And I close with a gentle, "Amen."



## HASIDIC MUSIC AND MODZITZ A SHORT OVERVIEW

VELVEL PASTERNAK

Among the many legends which serve to highlight the unique position of song in Hasidic life is the story concerning Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov known to the world as the Sassover Rebbe. This rebbe took upon himself the duty of financially assisting poor brides and attending their weddings. At the nuptial ceremony of an orphaned bride the processional melody so impressed him that he openly expressed the wish that this same tune accompany his burial.

Many years later the rebbe died and hundreds of hasidim journeyed from all parts of eastern Europe to accompany this sainted being to his eternal rest. At a crossroad, the funeral cortege beheld a group of musicians on its way to perform a wedding. With unexpected suddenness their horses broke and galloped off into the distance. When the procession arrived at the entrance of the cemetery it was met by the same group of musicians. Because they assumed that the *klezmer* had come to jest, the hasidim were angered. Suddenly a very old hasid remembered the rebbe's wish of long ago that a specific tune be played at his burial. There was consternation among the group, for hundreds of years of Jewish tradition proclaimed that no music be played at a funeral. A rabbinic court (bet din) was hastily formed and after serious deliberation issued its tradition-shattering verdict that the wish of the Sassover rebbe be honored. The old hasid was asked if he could recall the nigun and he sang several bars to the musicians. They took up the strains of the melody and the rebbe was laid to rest with the same tune that had accompanied an orphaned bride many years before.

Of all the stories related to Hasidic music emanating from the Masters, no other story has quite the force and emotional appeal for the musician as the one related above. The reason is that in this instance the musician's wish and dream that music indeed become paramount in all devotional and philosophic postures is fulfilled in the existential encounter of man in the face of his ultimate position in life, namely his death. Thus music for Hasidim. is not only the accompanying motif of one's life but the companion of the hasid's eternal journey. The soul, in returning to its original source, the Maker, is ascending to the strains of a melody.

**VELVEL PASTERNAK is a well known music scholar and lecturer. He is also the only remaining commercial publisher of Jewish music, under the name of Tara Publications.**

The *Baal Shem Tov* (1700- 1760), founder of the Hasidic movement, arrived on the East European scene at a time when Jewish morale was extremely low. The long-awaited and hoped-for Messiah in the person of Sabbtai Zvi had proven false, and Jews had been left despondent and totally disheartened. The Jewish community was divided, so to speak, into a caste system, the Torah scholars heading the list, the non-learned individuals at the bottom. The *Baal Shem Tov* realized that this system and the general depressed mood of the Jewish community made Judaism unappealing and divided the community. A system had to be developed within whose framework the lowly unlearned as well as the scholar could feel assured of worth and dignity. The movement which he founded, a movement appealing to the masses, was the answer.

The system of prayers, ritual observance of *mitzvot* and *muusim tovim* had by his time, become an arid and lackluster habit. The return to a meaningful and vibrant Judaism, he felt, must contain an ingredient too long denied it. The ingredient was *simhu* (joy), and it became the cornerstone of the Hasidic movement. Had not the Psalmist said “Serve the Lord with joy, come before Him with singing”?

The *Baal Shem Tov* insisted that a revitalized Judaism must do away with the existing self-imposed custom of fasting, the wearing of sack cloth, and the denial of worldly things. Since he believed that a lively and joyous manner was more acceptable to God than asceticism, melancholy and morbidity were, to him, sinful. “Only through *simhu* can we attain communion with God,” he said. He also realized that when one is happy he views life through a bright and clear looking-glass. He therefore returned to Judaism the joy of living and the vision of a new world and a new people: a people of *sason v’ simha, ahava v’ ahava* (joy and gladness, brotherhood and fellowship).

The *Besht*, while he founded a movement, in no way minimized or discarded any of the spiritual foundations which had become part of Judaism during its early development. This is especially true of the *nigun*, which could serve to warm the heart and spirit and bring unbounded joy. Hasidism knew the power of the *nigun*, that it had within itself the ability to purify and bind together the soul and to elevate it to great heights. This also was not a new thought, for it had already been stated by the Kabbalists: “Access to certain temples can be achieved only through song.”

From the many writings, legends and stories of his followers, we learn that song was a natural part of the *Baal Shem Tov*’s body and soul. We find that he spent much time in the fields among the shepherds, and doubtless absorbed many of their melodies which he regarded as possessing a *nitzutz shel k’ dusha* (a spark of holiness). The strains of shepherd melodies evident in this music in no way harmed the sanctity of the melody, for the essence of a *nigun*, according to Hasidism, is the sound, and if the sound is derived from impure sources,

there is a duty to elevate, purify and sanctify it until it is worthy of the responsibility for which it was created. Like the zealous Christians of the Middle Ages, some Hasidic leaders considered it a holy duty to use secular tunes for sacred purposes. Many leaders felt that this was a greater virtue than creating an original melody.

The act of making the secular holy had long been common to Jews of the diaspora. Influenced by the surroundings of their “host” countries, they borrowed liberally such items as language, taste in foods and clothing. That which they adopted however was also adapted and given meaning within a Jewish framework. Thus, for example, functional Russian and Polish head-gear created for winter wear, the *shtreimel*, became infused with religious meaning, while the frock coat was modified and transformed into the *kupote*. It was quite natural then that nationalistic and folk melodies of the host culture should find its way into the Jewish repertoire.

Those who opposed Hasidism, and many music scholars who made little effort to understand the soul of Hasidic music, never failed to emphasize that foreign elements can be found within its melodies. However, even the borrowed motifs never remained as they had been originally. They were re-worked and reshaped into a new form, the form of the hasid. From this a new melody resulted born of spiritual Judaism, which became the individualistic melody known as the Hasidic *nigun*.

The majority of the early hasidic songs had no words. Such wordless songs are not overly common to any other people. There are to be sure, modern songs which have wordless interludes and many of the classic art songs too, have such moments. In addition, one can find this type of singing among some African groups and of course, in a number of nursery songs for children. Among the Hasidim this type of song is a special favorite. Songs without words but full of religious ecstasy were created on the premise that a song without words is much better than one with words. King David of old had stated this premise: “Words alone cannot relate the greatness of God.” “Melody is the outpouring of the soul,” said the first Lubavitcher Rebbe. “Words interrupt the stream of emotions.” A melody with text, according to him, is limited in time, for with the conclusion of the words the melody, too, comes to an end. But a tune without words can be repeated endlessly.

As one will readily acknowledge it becomes extremely difficult to produce melodic lines for any sizeable lengths of time with closed mouth humming. This is especially true of metrical melodies, In order to fill the need created by the absence of text, the Hasidim invented a group of vocalized syllables which aided in the production of the song. The syllables comprised of “*bim bam*,” “*yadi-da-di*,” “*aha aha*,” “*oy vey*” etc. had no order or specific pattern. The singer was at liberty to vocalize as he felt the mood of the music itself. It was

common practice for various Hasidic groups to accept a specific group of vocalized syllables. Thus, the Lubavitcher Hasidim sing with different syllables than, let us say, the Hasidim of Ger. It sometimes becomes easy, therefore, for a musicologist to pinpoint the area of origin and the general authorship of a song on the basis of the syllables employed.

It is worth noting that the musical compositions of the first Hasidim were not distinguished by their length. They were, in the main, short with few sections. Chabad expanded on this by adding to the typical nigun several movements. Polish Hasidim went further in lengthening the nigun, and this style was then taken over by Galicia, until some nigunim became so lengthy that they were given the title 'operas.' (See below.)

Basically, Hasidic *nigunim* can be placed within three distinct categories. (Latter-day Hasidim added several other types.) The three are the *rikkud* (dance), the *tish nigun* (song sung at the rebbe's table) and the *dveykut* (slow and rapturous melody). The earliest dances were usually in an A B C B form, that is to say, a three section song with the second section repeated. Many of them were in the major scale and even those in the minor had a happy lilt to them. These dances would sometimes last as long as half an hour, until the dancers would be spent or would introduce a new melody. The *rikkud* was also used at the *tish* and the synagogue service as a *nigun* applied to some religious text.

The *tish* song is a long, slow, meditative melody sung at the rebbe's table, usually not by him but by his son or one of the Hasidim. The *nigun* has several parts, often in varying moods, with a refrain appearing toward the end. Between sections may be found a *wolloch* which is often characterized by coloratura like the sound of a shepherd playing his flute. The *dveykut* melody is a slow, introspective, soul-stirring song, usually lengthy and sung with deep feeling. Hasidim often sang this type of song when they were absorbed at the study-desk just before the rebbi would begin his Torah discourse.

As Hasidism developed, two other styles were employed, the march and the waltz. Hasidim came into contact with the military and were wont to hear and absorb the various march melodies. In like fashion the waltz was permeating European society. It is true that militaristic songs were quite foreign to the entire spirit of Judaism at the time. They also did not have much opportunity to engage in ballroom-type dancing. Placed in the mouths of Hasidim however, these melodies became true Hasidic *nigunim*

With regard to these borrowed motifs and styles, it is worthwhile to remember that Hasidim created their music in foreign cultures and that no creation can be called original if it does not grow in its national homeland. Only through the spiritual homeland which the Hasidim created were they able to infuse into some of these foreign currents an individual soul. With less success

later on did Hasidim, notably those of Ger and Kotzk, make use of the melodies of Schubert, Chopin and Verdi. That these melodies have been completely forgotten by the Hasidim is the best indication that they did not lend themselves to a reworking into the Hasidic mold.

Most of the original Hasidic melodies were composed by the rebbes themselves. Those leaders who did not possess the ability to create music appointed talented Hasidim to compose new *nigunim*. It was their duty to study the mood, emotions and thoughts of the rebbe and give utterance to them through song. The court-created melody was usually credited to the Hasidic dynasty. Some rebbes were opposed to tunes from “yesterday.” The Tzadik of Kuzmir (1806- 1856) proclaimed that a Sabbath without a new *nigun* was not truly a Sabbath. Following their inspiration, the Hasidim would invent new meditations and set them to tunes.

Rather amazingly, a specific *nigun* could, within a relatively short period of time, become well-known throughout a large area of eastern Europe. Each major dynasty had its own “court,” as the residence of the rebbe was known. Devotees of various leaders would often travel great distances by foot or primitive transportation, leaving family and home, to spend the festivals or the high holidays in the rebbe’s court. There in the presence of the rebbe and in the midst of joyous fellowship the Hasid would forget his daily worries and anxieties and could, at the conclusion of his stay, return home spiritually revitalized.

It was on the Sabbath and festivals during the services and at the communal meals that new melodies were introduced and old ones resung. By means of constant repetition the melodies were learned by the Hasidim and most of them returned home equipped to introduce the *nigunim* to family, friends and neighbors. Thus, without being written down, these songs became familiar throughout the entire Jewish pale of eastern Europe. That so many songs have come down to this day in this oral manner is truly wondrous.

Nowhere within Hasidism did music assume a greater role than in the dynasty of Modzitz. Music and Modzitz became synonymous. In his book, *Lahasidim Mizmor*. (Jerusalem 1955) the eminent authority on the music of the Hasidim, M.S. Geshuri, compares the city of Modzitz and its influence on the musical life of eastern European Jewry to Bayreuth and its affect on the devotees of Richard Wagner. The music of the Modzitzer rebbes became well known and beloved in almost every city and hamlet in which Jews could be found. The Modzitzer rebbes, unlike many of their predecessors did not engage in “miracle workings,” nor did they formulate new ideas or philosophies within Hasidism. They did, however, create a true spiritual center, a center built primarily on music. Although small in comparison to such grand courts as Ger, Lubavitch, Sanz, Belz and others, the name Modzitz became a house-

hold word throughout the Jewish pale.

Modzitzer philosophy gives reasons for its emphasis on music. The rebbes pointed to the word "haboher" as found in the texts preceeding the Barkhu prayer of the Shaharit service and in the blessings recited immediately before the reading of the haftarah. In the first instance the text reads "haboher b'shi-rey zimra" (Blessed art Thou o Lord our God who art pleased with songs and hymns); the second text contains the words "*haboher batora*" (Blessed art Thou o Lord our God who hast chosen the Torah). These two "*haboher*," Torah and *neginah* together became the foundation of the Modzitz dynasty and its contribution to Hasidism.

Modzitz Hasidism was founded by Rabbi Israel Taub, (b. 1848, Ratcoinz, Poland; d. 1920, Warsaw, Poland.) In 1888, upon the death of his father, Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu of Zvolyn, he assumed the leadership of Kuzmir-Zvolyn Hasidim. In 1891 he settled in Modzitz and resided there until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when he fled to Warsaw. He remained there until his death. Rabbi Israel was also known as the Baal *Divrey Yisrael* (after the book of Torah commentaries) which he wrote. Rabbi Israel's output of *nigunim* came to more than two hundred. Many of his melodies are still sung today by all Hasidic groups the world over. One of his most famous, the "*Heimloz Nigun*" (the Song of **the** Homeless, also sung to the text of Psalm 123) has become a classic. In it the rebbe expresses musically the feelings of a Jew torn from his home due to war.

His most famous *nigun* is the "*Ezk'ru Hagadol*" (the Great Ezk'ra). Hasidic legend relates the following with regard to its creation.

In 1913 the rebbe traveled to Berlin for medical treatment. His doctors felt that his life could be saved only through the amputation of a leg. While awaiting the operation the rebbe could see the surrounding Berlin area through the window next to his bed. The architecture and color of the buildings was reminiscent of certain parts of Jerusalem and the poem "*Ezk'ru Elohim*" written about the holy city and recited during the closing service on Yom Kippur came to his mind. The rebbe agreed to the operation but with the proviso that no form of anesthesia be used. During the removal of his leg he composed this majestic and lengthy *nigun* comprised of 36 sections each contrasting **in nature**. This *nigun* is sung by Hasidim each year on the rebbe's yahrzeit (anniversary of death) both in Israel and the United States. The complete notation of the *nigun* which takes approximately one half hour to sing, may be found in *Bais Kuzmir*, MS. Geshuri, Jerusalem, Israel.

Rabbi Israel's love for music also found expression in a number of his published *maamorim* (sayings). One especially is rather remarkable for a Hasidic rebbe. In "*Divrey Yisrael*" he compares man's ascent on the ladder of life to a musical scale. Just as the eighth tone is a repetition of the root tone one octave

higher, so too, he says, is man's climb through life. Although he progresses ever higher, becoming complacent in his achievement, he must be aware that ultimately he must return to the root.

Rabbi Saul Yedidya Elozor Taub, the second Modzitzer Rebbe was born in 1886 in Ozorow, Poland. He assumed the leadership of Modzitz Hasidim in 1920. From 1940 until 1947 the rebbe resided in the United States where he traveled extensively bringing Torah and *neginah* to many communities. Rabbi Saul was the most prolific Hasidic composer of all time with the total output numbering more than 700 compositions. Because of his prodigious creation it was not uncommon for many to assume that he had been trained musically. In his book, "Yiddishe *Musik in Poilen*" (Jewish Music in Poland-between the two wars), Yisacher Fater states that Rabbi Saul Taub was a "*geniter noten leyener*" (a proficient music reader) and had also been a student of music theory. This is inaccurate. No Modzitzer rebbe had any musical training whatsoever. Rabbi Saul's melodies which appear in several publications were initially notated by Cantor Joshua Weisser and later on by Ben Zion Shenker, a Modzitzer Hasid, who became the "musical secretary" for Rabbi Saul.

The second Modzitzer Rebbe was, in a true sense, a composer. His *nigunim* were not merely the simplistic folk type melodies of many of his predecessors. A number of them were intricate, musically structured and quite lengthy. He thought in terms of instrumental colorations and often suggested that accompaniment of strings, winds and horns would enhance his *nigunim*. In rather naive fashion both he and his father referred to some of their lengthier compositions as "operas." To this day Hasidim sing these *nigunim* as the "*ershte opera*" (the first opera), the "*tzveite opera*" (second opera) and so on.

In keeping with a tradition established by his father, Rabbi Saul created new melodies for the *Hallel* text *B'tzet Yisrael* which recounts the Exodus from Egypt. The style was varied for each festival celebration so that the *rikkud* march or waltz form would be employed. The rebbe was especially fond of march tempi although as a practical matter the Jews of the ghetto had little use for militaristic sounding melodies. When Hasidim questioned both the composition and singing of such march tunes by a people without country, flag or military, the rebbe's prophetic response was that a Jewish State would soon come into being and marches would also be needed.

The third Modzitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu Taub, (b. 1906, Lublin Poland, d. 1985,) emigrated in 1935. He continued the tradition of Modzitz both as a composer and Torah scholar. He succeeded his father in 1947 and composed more than 400 *nigunim*. He is also the author of a collection of Torah essays found in the Journal, *Kuntres Tiferes Yisroel* Tel Aviv, Israel. Rabbi Samuel was the spiritual head of several Modzitzer synagogues in Israel and in Brooklyn. His *nigunim* are sung throughout Israel and many of them have appeared on records.

## REFLECTIONS AND REMINISCENCES

SAUL MEISELS

J.L. Peretz describes in one of his stories, “*A Gilgul fun a Nigun*,” the power of a musical thread to weave itself into the lives and dreams of those who hear it and leave a lasting imprint on their soul. So is it with religious chant. From the moment it entered my subconscious it became a force that seemed to direct my very existence and destiny.

Born in Mosti Vielke, Poland, and reared under the observant tutelage of my sainted father, a hassidic *ba' al t'filah*, I soon absorbed from him the beauty and piety of the music of the synagogue. I can still recall, when I was little, my father buying me a brick to place in the cornerstone of the new synagogue of the hassidim of the Belzer tzaddik. From my father I learned the fundamentals of nusah, and although I do not consider myself a hassid, I nevertheless feel that I still bring to my chanting a great deal of hassidic fervor.

I came to the United States when I was twelve and soon began to sing as a “boy soloist” with some of the outstanding cantors of that time — Yossele Rosenblatt, Berele Chagy, Mordecai Herschman, etc. Max Nadler was the choir director then at many of the synagogues. I also recall singing alto in the choir at the Clinton Street Shul **where Yisroel Schorr officiated, as with Yehoshua Lind who followed him**. The music was taught to us by rote by a brother of the celebrated Abraham Ellstein, who was later followed by the gifted Max Helfman.

Many were the days I would stand in the street with a group of people, listening to and drinking in the magnificent voices of celebrated hazzanim whose recordings were being blared over a loudspeaker. Few people could afford a phonograph in those days, and so the only means of hearing these eloquent chants was to congregate in front of the record store.

My contacts with Max Helfman proved most providential for me and led to the awakening of my musical life. We went to concerts together at Carnegie Hall, attended art museums and listened to great music wherever it was being performed. He took me under his wing and taught me solfege by making me sing the lieder of Schubert and Schumann via the names of the notes, not the words. **He** taught me harmony, composition and conducting, until I became proficient enough to be sent as his substitute to several of his choruses. At that time I also attended New York University and received my vocal training from Paul Reimers of the Juilliard School of Music.

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At first I began to sing on radio station WEVD in New York, sharing my songs with commercials by Zvee Scooler about the “*glentzendike geshmake*” peanut oil. Scooler eventually went on to Hollywood to appear in several films.

I then began preparing for a concert career. My first concert, scheduled for the 92nd St. “Y” in Manhattan, was to be a program of Yiddish folk and art songs in costumes that would depict each character. We had discovered a wonderful artist, Moi Solotaroff (whose son went on to become a leading contemporary artist), who proceeded to paint watercolor sketches of my costumes, which he also designed. Benjamin Zemach, one of the founders of the celebrated Habima Company in Russia, became my choreography mentor and tutored me in movements that made each character of the song seem to come alive. Max Helfman wrote the accompaniments for the songs. We spent the summer in his cabin in the Adirondacks preparing for the concert.

Finally the night of the concert came and, during the intermission, there was a knock at my dressing room. When I opened it, there stood Victor Chenkin, world-renowned master of the folksong style. He came into the room, spoke encouragingly, and handed to me two original songs which he said were from his own repertoire. “You will be the next one to follow in my place,” he declared. I like to think that history has proven him to be correct, because I went on to become a popular singer of Jewish folk and Hebrew music, concertizing throughout the United States, Canada and Israel, as a leading interpreter of Yiddish song.

Our concerts carried us over great distances. In Canada, for example, our WIZO commitments took us from Nova Scotia in the east to Moose Jaw, Calgary and Regina in the west. I was an artist for the Jewish Welfare Board’s Concert Bureau, and appeared for many major organizations in the United States. In 1965, after a concert for the Hadassah Convention at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, Hubert H. Humphrey, then Vice-President of the United States, who was present that evening, wrote: “My compliments to you on your inspiring recital and magnificent renditions.”

My accompanist was a young and talented girl whom I had met while attending an organ recital. We were introduced by a mutual friend who suggested that I use her as my accompanist. This soon led to marriage. Ida has been accompanying me ever since! Ours has been a wonderful union of love and music. Together we embarked on a concert career which involved dragging heavy suitcases of costumes along with us to the various cities where we appeared for our folksong recitals. Needless to say, we soon abandoned the costumes and decided to place the emphasis on delineating the characters through voice and movement. I am sure Victor Chenkin would have approved.

My first cantorial position was at the Astoria Center of Israel, in Long Island, where I remained for four years, until Professor A. W. Binder, the well-known composer and musicologist, urged me to accept a vacant post in Cleveland, Ohio. Temple on the Heights was then one of the largest Conservative congregations in the United States. How well I recall our qualms at leaving our friends and family to “journey west.”

One evening we were visited by Moshe Rudinov, the distinguished cantor of Temple Emanu El in New York, who urged us to pursue the opportunity in Cleveland. So in 1942, we packed up and moved there, where we remained happily for thirty-seven years. I have to smile when I remember that my beginning salary was \$3,000 a year (depression times). This was soon supplemented with concerts though, and we found much happiness and fulfillment there.

Upon coming to Cleveland, I began to put into effect changes in the music curriculum of the Hebrew School and the synagogue choir. It was an arduous schedule. The Hebrew School had over five hundred pupils, the confirmation assemblies numbered over 150, there was Cantor’s Club (a group of about forty or fifty young boys and girls who also officiated at the Sabbath Morning children’s services). I produced numerous cantatas, such as Judith Eisenstein’s “Seven Golden Buttons,” “What is Torah,” a first performance of Arthur Yolkoff’s “Shirat Atideynu,” and so on. There were also adult choirs and large Sisterhood choir.

But my greatest pride was in the synagogue choir, a group of highly trained professional singers from whom I demanded most intensive rehearsals. I was fortunate to have not only a superb choir but also an appreciative congregation, who gave me the freedom and the resources necessary to exercise my musical aspirations. Early in my career I began to realize that our Shabbat services deserved more than the routine traditional chanting of the prayers. I was filled with an unquenchable desire to express these prayer chants in a manner which would give greater meaning to our sacred texts. The “*gilgul*” that musical soul within me, was struggling for still greater expression and this yearning, this impulse, this need to seek out and develop fresh and innovative musical idioms for our religious prayers, has stimulated and given both direction and impetus to my life.

I have always felt that the responsibility of a hazzan towards the synagogue’s musical traditions is not only to safeguard them but to enhance and add to them the colors and nuances of the time in which we live. Toward this end, I sought out the most gifted composers of our time and commissioned them to write music that was at once moving, inspiring and exalted. With the financial help of a number of concerned friends and encouraging congregants, I established grants, subsidies and prizes for the creation of new music.

Through these commissions and their gala performances, some profound contributions to synagogue music were created, and more than a dozen new works were added to the treasure-house of synagogue music.

Every year the celebration of Jewish Music Month became the vehicle for the presentation of an important new work, and each five-year anniversary of my coming to serve in Temple on the Heights became the occasion for the commissioning of a new service. One of the most memorable of these occurred in 1967, my twenty-fifth anniversary, and celebrated Israel's success in the Six-Day War. At that time I had journeyed to Israel to make arrangements with Shlomo Kaplan, head of the Israel Composers League, who would select the composers to write the first Sabbath Eve Service to come out of Israel since the creation of the Jewish state. "Shabat Mitzion" was the result of this commission, written by fourteen of Israel's leading composers.

Those collaborating on this historic project included: Mordechai Ze'ira (Mah Tov), Yehezkiel Braun (Psalm 98), Leib Glantz (L'Cha Dodi), Marc Lavry (Mizmor Shir L'Yom Hashabat), Shlomo Hoffman (Bar'chu), Nissan Cohen-Melamed (Ahavat Olam), Emanuel Amiran-Pugatchov (Sh'ma Yisrael and V'Ahavta), Leib Glantz (Mi Chamocha), Benyamin Bar-Am (Hashkiveynu), Emanuel Amiran-Pugatchov (V'Sham'ru), Issachar Miron (Kaddish), Menachem Avidom (Interlude and May the Words), Efrayim Ben-Haim (Magen Avot), Karel Salomon (Kiddush), Moshe Wilensky (Aleynu L'Shabeyach), and Issachar Miron (Adon Olam).

Miron, who guided this service from its inception and had himself composed two major settings for it, came to Cleveland for the world premiere and conducted his own compositions. In the program notes for the performance he wrote: "When those heavenly windows which respond only to the sound of music are opened, Cantor Saul Meisels will be the fortunate one to earn the merit for raising his voice to the Kingdom on High in the sacred melodies of the Israel Sabbath Service, which was composed with his encouragement and in his honor." Other conductors who participated in this gala premiere were Lazar Weiner, A.W. Binder, and Sholom Secunda.

The Cleveland *Plain Dealer's* music editor wrote: "The music of this service revealed a new, fresh melodic and harmonic treatment of the synagogue chants, while infused with a religious fervour and the dignity, peace and beauty of the Sabbath. Inspiration for these prayers was drawn mainly from Oriental tradition, combined sometimes with the East European styles used mainly in the American synagogue." The late Jochanan Boehm, music editor of Israel's Jerusalem Post, commented: "With so many diverse traditions to select from, the Israeli composer has a fount of inspiration unequalled anywhere in the world. But the biblical texts here are performed only on the concert stage, and the music is conceived as essentially secular. . . With this

lack of encouragement from Israeli religious circles, and it does not look as if it will ever change,” he said, “the attitude of American Jewish communities, and especially of the cantors who are their musical spokesmen, is all the more welcome.”

There were many other commissions. Of all the compositions composed for “Shabbat Mitzion,” the setting of Psalm 98 by Yehezkiel Braun was so effective that, in my ever-continuing search for new creative talent, I invited him in 1966 to compose a complete service for the Sabbath Eve. “Arvit L’Shabbat” was the result; a beautiful service, permeated with the sound and mood of Jewish prayer and the very air of Israel. The guest conductor that evening was Franz Bibo, conductor of the Oberlin College Conservatory Orchestra. In 1972 we repeated it, this time with orchestral accompaniment by a 33 piece chamber orchestra, and sung by a large festival choir. The conductor was Dr. Samuel Adler of the Eastman School of Music.

One of my earliest commissions was to Gershon Ephros in 1962, the revered cantor of Congregation Beth Mordecai in Perth Amboy, N.J., who wrote “S’lichot, Midnight Penitential Service.” This was subsequently performed by myself and my choir on NBC coast-to-coast television on the advent of the high holidays.

There were other commissions as well. In 1967, on the occasion of my twenty-fifth anniversary, we presented the world premiere of “Naria L’Shabbat Hamalkah — Sing Unto the Shabbat Queen,” an exquisite service written by the gifted cantor-composer Charles Davidson. The guest conductor that evening was Michael Charry, assistant conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra.

After the Six-Day War, an oratorio by Menachem Avidom of Israel, “Jerusalem Eternal,” was commissioned to commemorate the event. Participating in the performance was the augmented chorus from Cleveland Heights High School and a chamber group of instrumental members from the Cleveland Orchestra. Two months later a somewhat more modernistic work, “Israel Reborn,” by the gifted Israeli composer Haim Alexander, was also commissioned by the congregation and received its premiere performance.

In 1968, Sholom Secunda conducted the premiere of his new cantata, “A Weeping of Stars -- Yizkor,” at our temple. The memorializing the six million Jewish victims of nazism, was written by Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum and narrated by him with much feeling. The Cleveland Heights High School Choir, combined with my enlarged Heights Temple Choir, joined with guest soloist Cantor Arthur Koret and myself to present the impressive musical score with great eloquence and drama. Robert Finn, music critic of the Cleveland Plain *Dealer*, likened the score to Honegger’s “King David,” and the script to Debussy’s “Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian.” Later that year it was repeated at the annual convention of the Cantors Assembly with the composer conducting.

One of the more unusual services we presented was composed in 1969 by Cantor Charles Davidson. Called "A Jazz Service for Friday Evening," it consisted of sacred music in the jazz idiom, and was the outgrowth of a that brought jazz services, guitar masses and the like, into Christian churches, and finally began to spill over into the synagogue.

Temple on the Heights became the first synagogue in Cleveland to take the musical plunge. It presented (on a Wednesday evening) jazz musicians, choruses and instrumental soloists in a melange of religiously oriented music by composers like Kurt Weill and Duke Ellington. It included excerpts from Ellington's "Sacred Jazz Concert" - "In the Beginning God," and "There's Something About Believing." The Kiddush, in the blues idiom, was by Kurt Weill ("Threepenny Opera"). There were excerpts from Sarah Hershberg's folk-jazz opus "Women of the Old Testament," excerpts from Charles Davidson's "Glenn-Millerish" (according to the newspaper review) Sabbath Service, and excerpts from a folk-rock service by Cantor Raymond Smolover of New York. But in 1971 the real jazz event occurred with the exciting performance of "A New Song Unto the Lord," a Sabbath eve service by the Broadway composer Gershon Kingsley, who came to Cleveland to conduct it. With Kingsley at the piano pounding out the rock-and-roll beat, I still remember the jubilant mood of the audience as we sang the intoxicating rhythms of his joyous "Kiddush."

There were many other commissions and special performances: the "second world premiere" of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's "Sacred Service for the Sabbath Eve," in honor of my tenth anniversary celebration in 1952; Leon Algazi's "Sacred Service," Lazar Weiner's "Chassidic Service," Ernest Bloch's "Sacred Service," A.W. Binder's "Israel Reborn," and his "B'reyshit." Other events were devoted to the music of Heinrich Schalit, Frederick Jacobi, Chemjo Vinaver, Darius Milhaud, and Marc Lavry. I single them out only to illustrate how strong was the urge within me to find new and greater expressions for our music. At the *ongey shabbat*, many gifted composers and musicians lectured and performed.

My community involvements were extensive, and many were the concerts at Severance Hall which I coordinated for the Annual Jewish Arts Festival programs, of which I was musical director. For a time I was music director of the Jewish Community Center, and in 1952 I was chairman of a committee which held a world-wide contest for a new Jewish orchestral composition. The prize was awarded to Jacques Berlinski of France, and his work was subsequently performed by the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra in Severance Hall under George Szell's baton.

In 1955, on the occasion of the Cleveland commemoration of the Jewish Tercentenary, I arranged for the commissioning by the Jewish Community

Federation of a cantata to be written by a major Hollywood author, Norman Corwin. It was called "The Golden Door" and was a history of Jewish contributions to America. The music for it was composed by Maurice Goldman, the massive choruses came from all parts of the city, and two well-known Hollywood actors (one of them Luther Adler), vividly portrayed the script. It was held in Cleveland's huge Public Auditorium and was attended by several thousand people.

Temple on the Heights was also the scene of the first performance in Cleveland of Sholom Secunda's new service, "Shabbat Hamalkah," which he conducted and ultimately recorded with me, both on record and on tape. I can still recall the recording session for "Z'mirot — Sabbath Songs for the Home." It was a snowy winter evening in Cleveland, the temperature had dropped to below zero, and we sat on our toes (yes, difficult, but effective!) to keep our feet warm. Secunda conducted with gloves on his hands, and the male choir wrapped large woolen scarves around their throats. However, nothing could impede the wonderful sounds that emanated from them!

One year after Leonard Bernstein wrote the "Chichester Psalms," I arranged to have its Cleveland premiere at my temple, with Robert Shaw conducting members of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, the Temple choir, and me. Ever since then, whenever the Cleveland Orchestra performs this work, my name and that of Temple on the Heights are permanently listed in its program notes as the first ones to perform it in Cleveland!

Many were the programs in which I participated with orchestras. I was soloist with the Akron Symphony Orchestra in Ernest Bloch's "Avodath Hakodesh," with a chamber group from the Cleveland Orchestra in Handel's "Judas Maccabeus," with the Suburban Symphony of Cleveland in Mendelssohn's "Elijah." I gave lecture-recitals at Oberlin College, Cleveland Museum of Art, Purdue University, Bowling Green College. I wrote articles on Jewish music for the Reconstructionist magazine, the United Synagogue Survey, the Cleveland Jewish News, the Miami Jewish Floridian. I was a recording artist for RCA Victor, Asch Recordings, and Tikvah Records. My recording of 'Z'mirot — Sabbath Songs for the Home," has been re-issued in Israel, as well as Sholom Secunda's "Shabbat Hamalkah," which he recorded with me.

My daughter's wedding in 1962 provided a special occasion to commission a new musical wedding service, and I called on several of the most important Jewish composers - Sholom Secunda, Lazar Weiner, Charles Davidson and Max Helfman. This book of Jewish wedding music is still being used today by many synagogues.

So many memories of my years in Cleveland crowd into my thoughts, jostling each other for priority. One is the recollection of the huge throngs attending our Selichot services. Year after year it became "the thing to do" for Jews

from all parts of the city. Let me illustrate by quoting from an article written by Frank Stewart, religion editor of the Cleveland Press: "It was nearly Sunday morning and the 'stranger' [himself] was rolling along on a nocturnal journey under a dark sky to a midnight religious service at Temple on the Heights. . . The great temple of Byzantine construction was illuminated from top to bottom. Lights flooded from the lofty dome to cast brilliance on four huge pillars at the entrance. Hundreds of people were coming in every direction to the doors of the temple to take part in the ancient and traditional rites of Selichot.

"As Cantor Meisels started the service, a minute or two after midnight, I estimated a crowd of over eleven hundred people were present for the penitential prayers. There was a minimum of the spoken word, although there were responses in which the congregation took part. One heard the pleas for forgiveness and confession of wrong-doing in the rich and mellow chants of Cantor Meisels. The service was a fascinating and moving arrangement of Jewish choral literature. As I watched the large congregation, it was evident his beautiful voice was interpreting the prayers with full appreciation and understanding. The throng of midnight worshippers included persons of religious faiths other than Jewish because the services were open to everyone, but prayer books which carried the Hebrew form of service contained also the English translations."

Over the years, I received many honors and accolades. To mention a few: In 1962 the Jewish Theological Seminary presented a Certificate of Appreciation to me from its chancellor, Dr. Louis Finkelstein, "as a symbol of gratitude for his devoted service in advancing the cause of hazzanut and Jewish music, and his able leadership in mobilizing public support for the program of the Cantors Institute." In 1968, the Hon. Charles A. Vanik, congressman from Ohio, wrote into the Congressional Record Proceedings, in Washington, D.C., his congratulations on my completing 25 years of service with the temple: "His distinguished career has been filled with service to his religion, his people, and the general community. His devotion, the quality of his work, and his deep faith, are unexcelled. I am proud to know him."

Later that year, Ida and I were honorees at the annual Israel Bond Dinner. In 1972, after my term as President of the Cantors Assembly had come to a close, I was presented by them with a Citation "in appreciation for the extraordinary efforts exerted for a quarter century to help provide the funds which have made possible the publication, research, education and scholarship aid of the Cantors Assembly." In 1980 I was designated Honoree for the Seminary Award at a Jewish Federation reception given in Cleveland; and in 1981 the new chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Dr. Gerson D. Cohen, presented me with another Certificate of Appreciation "as an expres-

sion of gratitude for dedication and service to the Community in advancing the religious and cultural traditions of Conservative Judaism, and in recognition of his leadership in supporting the programs and progress of the Jewish Theological Seminary.”

One proud moment which I shall always treasure came in June, 1979, when the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies bestowed upon me the degree of Doctor of Jewish Music, *honoris causa*, in recognition of my “achievements as a charismatic cantor, creative teacher, and superb interpreter of the music of the Jewish people, whose renditions of liturgical and secular music brought a new sense of the beautiful and holy to vast audiences in the United States, Canada and Israel. . .”

There have been other awards as well as scholarships. One was established at the Temple on the Heights, two by the Cantors Assembly, another by a dear friend, Paul Shapiro in 1979, “in celebration of 37 years of outstanding service to Cleveland’s Temple on the Heights, and in joyous commemoration of over three decades of friendship. . . A token of appreciation for a glittering hazzanic career in which Cantor Meisels enhanced the sacred calling of the hazzan, devoting himself tirelessly with heart and soul to every facet of Jewish music and Jewish life in America.” The purpose of these scholarships was to provide assistance to students preparing for the cantorate, to make possible the publication of new and out-of-print music, and to provide funds for musicological research in Jewish sacred and folk music. These goals were, in effect, the essence of my work with the Cantors Assembly.

Ever since the inception of the Cantors Assembly, I have worked unceasingly to improve the status of the cantor, and all of my energies were directed towards their welfare. Together with Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum, the Executive Vice-President, and Cantor Moses Silverman of blessed memory, we formed a triumvirate that spent hours and days planning how to develop new areas of publication, fund-raising, education, and scholarship aid.

In 1964, I became the Assembly’s President, a post I was to hold for three years. Those times, because the United Synagogue was in conflict with the Cantors Assembly. The United Synagogue wanted to have control over the placement of hazzanim, and be our representative in our dealings with congregations. But we feared for our welfare which might be endangered if a lay organization had complete control.

After many long meetings between Cantor Rosenbaum, Cantor Silverman and myself, we decided to resist their demands and reaffirm our own independence. Promptly the United Synagogue severed its relations with us. “Booted out of membership” was the way the headlines in the newspapers put it.



I am proud to say that our hazzanim remained loyal and championed our cause. We have grown today into a large and highly respected organization that is now world-wide. We continue as always to support, through scholarship funds, the work of the Cantors Institute, where several of our hazzanim are on the faculty. We maintain our own excellent Placement service, which is under our control completely.

It was during my term as president, in 1964, that I had the "z'chut" to lead to Israel the First International Conference on Synagogue Music. It was a very exciting time, with conferences, concerts, special services, lectures, and memories. I shall ever treasure the recollection, and photograph, of the reception for our Executive Board at the home of President Shazar. We drank tea together, he joined with us in singing "*Lchayim tovim*." We spoke of our Convention plans and he autographed our copies of Issachar Miron's "*Im Eshkacheych*." The warmth and conviviality of that afternoon will long remain with me.

Another unforgettable experience occurred during our stay and coincided with the observance of Tisha B'Av. At sundown, what seemed like the entire population of Jerusalem gathered on the various roads leading up to Har Tziyon, and together, in orderly rows, we marched quietly to the top where the roads converged. Solemnly we sat on the low benches and lit the *kinot* candles. All was dark save for the flickering of the candles, which stretched out as far as the eye could see. Each cantor present was assigned a particular portion, which he chanted aloud with intense emotion and often tears. In the open rooms about us, encased in glass containers, lay the remnants of the Holocaust carnage and plunder — lamp shades created out of human skin with the tattoos still evident upon them, Torah scrolls in shreds with pieces of hair and dried blood still visible, *taleysim* ripped apart and laying forlorn and limp, pieces of soap manufactured from human fat. Above all this rose the subdued keening of the women and the hushed prayers of the men as they chanted the words of the service. It was a most moving experience, one which will be forever embedded in the memories of those who were there.

I also recall one more event, that of the cortege and funeral procession for Z'ev Jabotinsky, creator of the Jewish Legion, whose heroic actions led to the formation of the Israeli army. His remains were brought to Israel for burial, and the cortege, laden with flowers, slowly wound through the streets of Tel Aviv. All around, on each sidewalk, lines of people crowded and jostled each other to be closer to their national idol. As the cortege approached the Great Synagogue on Allenby Street, Hazzan Benjamin Unger came down the steps, ascended a small platform, and commenced to chant the *Eyl Maley Rachamim*. A hush descended on the thousands of people assembled far and wide, as the rich voice of Hazzan Unger resounded through the atmosphere and over

the heads of the people standing shoulder to shoulder. The people stood silent, transfixed and breathless. Was it the memory of a man whose ideals meant so much to them? Was it the eloquent voice of the hazzan echoing along the labyrinth of streets radiating out from the square? Was it the threnody of the traditional prayer, which hovered like an invisible cloud over the heads of the people and permeated their subconscious with memories of chants ages old? It was truly nerve-tingling.

The Cantors Assembly convocation ended on a joyful note as several of the cantors, myself included, gave a concert in one of the open-air stadiums. A near-riot occurred when we ran out of space for all those clamoring to get in, and admission had to be curtailed. Even Issachar Miron, who had engineered the entire concert and was its chairman, had so much difficulty entering that his glasses were broken in the brawl. The response of the audience to our singing was electric, and their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The concert finally concluded with the audience joining us all in singing a Yiddish song.

But enough of plaques and awards and testimonials. What is more important, I always felt, was to inspire young people, to exert an influence upon them by opening their minds to the beauty of our sacred music. It is with our youth that we face our greatest challenge. They are the ones who must carry forward the Jewish hope for the future. This is why I am so proud that a number of scholarships in my name have been provided for students who will carry on the traditions of our profession. Through my work with the children in the classrooms, the Youth services, and the Cantor's Club (now the Zamir Junior Choir), I tried to instill in our young people a deeper appreciation of Judaism, a stronger love for Torah, and forge an even greater link in the chain of living Judaism. The Talmud says, "*Chanoch l'na-ar al pi darko gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenu*" - "If you lead a child along the path of learning and Torah when he is young, even when he is old he will not depart from it."

I feel I have touched the lives of many of my students and influenced their course of direction. Danny Gildar, for example, became a cantor; Alan Letofsky, Larry Lauer and Mark Borowitz all became rabbis. Many of my students went on to become youth leaders and junior cantors in their colleges and summer camps. And because of their intensive training in my Cantor's Club, they became more knowledgeable Jews with a keener awareness of their Jewish identity. I often gave advice and offered material to colleagues seeking my help. Jan Peerce, the distinguished operatic star and my long-time dear friend, who had asked me to suggest some Hebrew music to him, wrote me: "I will be indebted to you for a long time for all the suggestions and help you have given me."

Early in my career, I realized the need to raise additional money for the Cantors Assembly - to augment their funds so that they could continue their

noble work of scholarship, education, and the publication of out-of-print music. Cantor Moses Silverman and I formed a Development Committee to raise these funds, and I hit upon the idea of holding a Gala Cantorial concert in my temple. The response was overwhelming, with people from all parts of the city clamoring to buy tickets. Evidently hazzanic chant strikes a responsive chord within people's hearts. I would invite two or three of the most important cantors and supplement them with my local colleagues. In order to show their dedication to the Cantors Assembly and its projects, the hazzanim sang with very little or no compensation. Each concert was a huge financial success and all moneys went directly to the Cantors Assembly. At each successive concert I presented different hazzanim to the delighted audiences, among them the most celebrated men in our profession.

Among those who gave so generously of their time and talents were David Kusevitsky, Louis Danto, Arthur Koret, Moshe Taube, Abraham Denburg, Isaac Goodfriend and Benjamin Siegel. We soon prevailed on other congregations throughout the country to follow suit, and these Cantorial concerts became an additional source of revenue. Many congregations now have an annual Cantorial Concert as part of their yearly events.

In 1979, at the close of thirty-seven years with Temple on the Heights, Ida and I decided to retire from Cleveland. To commemorate this, I arranged two programs. The first was a magnificent Sabbath Eve service which consisted of prayers selected from many of the services I had commissioned in the past. The second was a Gala Cantorial Concert in which seventeen of the most eminent hazzanim in the country lifted their voices in glorious song before an ecstatic audience of sixteen hundred people. These men had traveled from cities far and wide to express their love to me and pay tribute to a colleague on the occasion of his retirement. It was a spectacular event.

The Indianapolis *Jewish Post and Opinion* called it the pinnacle, not only of Cleveland's cantorial history, but perhaps that of any Jewish community in the United States. Participating were: Cantors Morton Shames, Arthur Koret, Martin Leubitz, Elliot Portner, Jacob Barkin, Tibor Kelen, Moshe Taube, Erno Grosz, Moshe Ganchoff, Louis Danto, Isaac Goodfriend, Jacob Mendelson, Ben Zion Miller, Abraham Mizrahi, David Kusevitsky, Daniel Gildar, and myself. The concert, in which each cantor sang only one selection, concluded with a group of joyful Hassidic songs, in which each cantor joined with me one by one, until the entire bima shook with their singing and dancing. The *Jewish Post* headed their report, "Seventeen Cantors Fete Meisels in Unforgettable Concert." After the concert an elaborate reception was tendered for the hazzanim in the home of the Co-Chairman and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Friedman, where the music went on until the early morning hours.

Dr. Julius Drossin, writing glowingly about the concert in the *Post*, said: "If

one is fortunate enough to attend such a celebration once in a lifetime, it is rare indeed. To anticipate another seems almost impossible. Yet the excellence of so many young cantorial voices with full careers ahead gives rise to the hope that our country's Jewish communities are well served with vibrancy and talent. If not for us, then for our children let there be great comfort in this knowledge."

In 1982, shortly after arriving in Miami, my planning of cantorial concerts reached its culmination in a magnificent concert which I arranged to be held at Miami's large Theatre of Performing Arts. Since I was no longer connected with a specific synagogue, I had to become solely responsible for the sale of 2900 tickets! But as in previous years, the concert was a tremendous success and I was able to raise quite a considerable amount of money for the Cantors Assembly. The hazzanim participating included David Bagley, Erno Grosz, Tibor Kellen, Ben Zion Miller, and myself. Since then, cantorial concerts have proliferated and are held annually in nearly every synagogue in Miami, although I am sorry to say, no longer solely for the benefit of the Cantors Assembly. The Miami concert was repeated the next evening in Ft. Lauderdale's Bailey Hall by Cantor Maurice Neu, and several days later in Atlanta with Cantor Isaac Goodfriend, both very successfully.

One of those attending the concerts in Florida was Mr. Haim Wiener, who became enamored with the art of the cantor after listening to both concerts. He and his wife Gila have since established a "Foundation for the Advancement of the Cantorial Arts," which subsidizes cantorial concerts both here and abroad. He insists that these Cantorial Concerts inspired him to begin this noble project.

In 1986 a most unusual and distinctive honor was accorded me on the occasion of my Fifty Years in the Cantorate. At its Annual Convention that year, the Cantors Assembly devoted an evening to me, described my life-long activities, and presented me with a Kavod Award "in recognition of a half-century of outstanding dedication to the calling of Hazzanut. . . An authentic and classic *Sheliah Tzibbur*," it continued, "his style combines elegance and consummate musicianship. He has been for decades the interpreter of the Yiddish art and folksong par excellence, moving and inspiring audiences in his long career. A former President of the Cantors Assembly, he has devoted himself consistently and continually with energy and courage to our sacred calling and to those who pursue it."

Since coming to Miami, where I live now in semi-retirement, I still officiate for the High Holy days, conduct Passover seders, and serve as a substitute cantor for congregations as emergencies arise. I am currently at work on a series of resource books for cantors, for publication in the near future. I still maintain my community involvement and act as liaison for the Joint Place-

ment Commission of the Cantors Assembly for those seeking part-time employment in the Miami area. Always concerned about the financial needs of the Cantors Assembly, I continue to raise funds for it from friends and former congregants, with whom Ida and I maintain a very close relationship.

I am grateful for so many things. I thank God particularly for His blessings of good health to me and Ida, and for giving us two remarkable children, Florence and Samuel, generous in their love towards us and talented and gifted in their own fields. Ours is a unique marriage; unique because Ida and I share everything we do. Ida has always been a part of my musical career, my "eyzer k'negdo," and the love that flows between us echoes and re-echoes in a thousand ways.

Formerly Music Director of the Cleveland Hebrew Schools for 25 years, she is a talented pianist, arranger and composer. She has published over 150 arrangements of traditional and modern Hebrew and Yiddish songs for solo as well as chorus, to be used in concert or the synagogue. Many of the folksongs of yesteryear, as well as today, will now continue to be a part of our Jewish heritage to treasure, instead of being lost to future generations. The response to her music by cantors everywhere has been tremendous, and "in recognition of her outstanding and devoted efforts over many years in behalf of hazzanut and the Cantors Assembly," a \$10,000 Scholarship Fund has been established in her name.

My daughter, Florence, has played flute with the New York Opera Orchestra for many years and is currently Treasurer of Local 802 of the Musicians Union. Our son, Samuel, lives in Ann Arbor, Mich., where he is a Research Professor at the University of Michigan, specializing in the educational problems of the very young handicapped child.

When I retired from Cleveland, one of the editorials that appeared about me in the *Cleveland Jewish News* stated: "Saul Meisels has demonstrated throughout his career a desire to uphold the best in traditional hazzanut as well as provide opportunities for gifted modern composers to add to the treasure-house of Jewish music. His efforts have brought national recognition to himself and honor to his community."

I am proud that through my encouragement of new music for the synagogue I helped to widen the scope of Jewish composition. I am grateful for the understanding and generous friends who supported my undertakings and made it possible for me to commission composers to create new music, and that through this encouragement, the musical literature of the synagogue has been measurably increased. And I am proud that the Cantorial Concerts which I presented at Temple on the Heights have become a model for other congregations throughout the country to emulate.

I feel that the hazzan of today must work for the good of all hazzanim and forge a path along which others can follow. We are all builders of the future, and whether we build at the religious or the secular level, in the synagogue or in the community, all of us should work together for the greater welfare and advancement of our sacred profession. My highest reward has never been what I received for my work but what my efforts were able to accomplish and engender. I do not believe a man's worth is measured by the number of years he has lived. What one should celebrate is the contribution a person has made to his generation in his life-time.

Abraham Heschel once wrote: "Hazzanut is the art of interpreting the words of the siddur. The cantor's task is to bring the words to life." This is what I have always tried to do — to give life to the words, to the Jewish soul within me, to give expression to the soundless words imprisoned within the hearts of my congregants.

We read in the Psalms: "*l'vdu et Adonai b' simcha, bo'u l'fanav birnana.*" "Serve the Lord in gladness, come before Him with joyous song." If I have accomplished this in any small measure, if I have been able to inspire some of my colleagues with a new enthusiasm and ignite the spark of musical creativity, if I have been able to demonstrate that hazzanim cannot live only in the present but must look future, then I know that our sacred chants and the songs of our people will flourish eternally and keep alive our exalted musical heritage.

What we do for ourselves very often dies with us. It is what we do for others that remains and is immortal.

## “A SONG FOR THE HEART”

**DAVID BACLEY**

On November 19, 1988, I was privileged to join three other hazzanim (Jacob Mendelson, Daniel Gildar, and Ben-Zion Miller) on a historic Cantorial mission to Romania, Israel, and the Soviet Union. The mission was the result of the efforts and financial assistance of Haim Wiener, founder and president of the Gila and Haim Wiener Foundation for the Advancement of the Cantorial Art.

My visit to Romania was the second in as many years. Nothing has really changed except that more families have either gone on aliyah to Israel or have passed away.

The Jewish people in Romania were anxiously awaiting our return and we felt as if we had come home. We visited seven cities and gave as many concerts. In all of the seven cities we were received with warm enthusiasm and joyful tears.

We also joined **in a concert** in the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv, a tribute to the Kusevitsky brothers and sponsored by the same foundation that sponsored our tour behind the Iron Curtain. All of the seats in Mann Auditorium were sold out weeks in advance. Hundreds of people were left standing outside.

The interest in hazzanut in Israel is high, so much so that the Municipality of Tel Aviv and the Gila and Haim Wiener Foundation are the sponsors of a school for hazzanim with an enrollment of 65 students.

Our visit to the Soviet Union was a most unforgettable and emotional experience.

My expectations and recollections of the past played on my emotions and I found myself unable to fall asleep. I kept on thinking of my experiences as a child in Russia, the Stalin era, and the refuseniks. I tried to envision what the people would look like, what the structures would be like, and what the shul would feel like. I couldn't help but think how my life's history has changed. My family and I long ago escaped from Russia and now I have returned with an official invitation by the Government to sing and to daven!

Our first concert was held in the Moscow Great Synagogue. The shul was packed to capacity with hundreds standing in the aisles. Their receptiveness and enthusiasm cannot be described. They applauded and shouted “Bravo.” They saw me as an artist and I saw them as spiritually emaciated and starved

**CANTOR DAVID BAGLEY** is Cantor of Beth Shalom Synagogue of Toronto and a renowned concert artist.

Jews. Most did not know the words to the recitatives or Yiddish songs. However, one could feel and almost touch their Jewish heartbeat. Present at our first concert was Konstantin Kharchev, Chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs, U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers. He was extremely impressed with our musical message. He asked us to meet with him the following afternoon at 5:00 p.m. for ten minutes. The meeting lasted for fifty minutes. Mr. Kharchev kept on telling us about the new Russian era, about the great strides and progress under the leadership of President Mikhail Gorbachev. He praised our mission and its accomplishments especially for East-West relations and more particularly for the Jewish community in the Soviet Union.

We always ended our concerts with the singing of '*Am Yisroel Chai*': The people of Israel lives. In this song we involved as many as possible in a dance. I have never signed as many autographs as I did in the Soviet Union. Yes, we captured the spiritual souls of the Jews in Russia.

Interestingly enough, the most sought-after recitative was my singing of "*Ani Mu-umin.*" Somehow we kindled the spark of *emunah* in their hearts.

The service on Shabbat morning in the Great Synagogue was an experience that I will never forget. The shul was packed to capacity. Few wore *taleysim* and only a few held prayer books. However, their eyes were glued on the Aron Kodesh. So many wept constantly, one could actually see and feel that they were moved to great spiritual heights.

The Shabbat morning service began at 9:45 a.m. and ended at 3:15 p.m.! Somehow we made up for all the years that they were denied the basic privilege of worshipping in total freedom.

Every word in the prayers had special significance, meaning and purpose. The prayers had a genuine spiritual message. I felt ever closer to God.

That same Saturday evening, which was the first night of Hanukkah, we gave our second concert. There must have been at least 3,400 people both inside and outside the shul. As a matter of fact, loudspeakers were placed in such a way as to enable the hundreds of people outside the shul to hear the concert. Can you imagine, or can you feel what it was like to kindle officially the first Hanukkah candle in the Soviet Union and proclaim for all to see and hear the great miracle that "*Am Yisroel Chai*" ?

Sunday morning we gave a concert at the Gnessin Hall of the Moscow Conservatory of Music. The 1500 people in attendance were shouting "*Kol Nidre*" and "*Rozinkes Mit Mandlen*"! From there we went to the Lubavitch house. We sang and we danced for a good hour. Outside the Lubavitch house we saw a large Hanukkah Menorah -truly a miracle.

Yes, my friends, hazzanut was revived in Russia and Romania thanks to Haim Wiener, whom I consider a true tzadik. Our mission was indeed a "Song for the Heart."



## CANTORS ASSEMBLY IN ISRAEL JULY 1987

LIPPMAN BODOFF

During the two weeks from July 7-21, 1987, the Cantors Assembly, the professional organization of hazzanim who serve the Congregations of the Conservative Movement, celebrated its 40th anniversary convention in what it described as a “festive gathering of hazzanim, synagogue Jews, musicians and scholars from all over the world.” Under the inspired and dedicated leadership of the organization’s president, Cantor Solomon Mendelson, the program of lectures, concerts, fellowship, sightseeing, and travel went off without a hitch, providing a never-to-be-forgotten musical, spiritual, and cultural experience for the eight hundred attendees of the convention, not to mention providing a wonderful two-week vacation for the hazzanim, their families and friends who came from different countries to Israel to attend this event and make it memorable.

For those who could not attend, it is worthwhile to record the many varied activities that were packed into just two short weeks. Hazzanim from all over the world met in a collegial atmosphere, sharing their common interest in learning and performing in their chosen field with an unforgettable closeness and camaraderie. There were special events every day, dealing with the religious and cultural life of Jews around the world. We were privileged to hear about, and to hear, new ideas and new idioms in hazzanut. We were able to hear many cantors in many different forums, from Yad Vashem to the Kotel, from Shabbat services and zemirot at Shabbat dinners to mini-concerts almost every evening. The peak of these cantorial activities was reached at two gala cantorial concerts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, in which fourteen cantors from all over the world participated. The Johannesburg Jewish Male Choir led by Gus Levy thrilled more than a thousand listeners in the SRO audiences that came to hear them. In this regard, it is a form of *“hakarat hatov”* (expression of gratitude) to acknowledge the generous sponsorship of these concerts by the Gila and Haim Wiener Foundation, which has generously supported many programs of the Cantors Assembly.

But hazzanut was not the only activity of the convention. We were able to find time to visit many sites of Jewish history and tradition in Israel, including some that were “firsts” for many of us.

LIPPMAN BODOFF has served as cantor on the high holy days for over twenty five years in congregations in the New York area.

There were other aspects of the convention of perhaps more enduring significance. Because of this convention, seven hundred of us — hazzanim, their families and friends — had the privilege of marking with our presence the occasion of the 20th year of Jerusalem's unification and Israel's 40th anniversary, thereby uplifting its morale, assisting lagging tourism, and demonstrating the bonds of peoplehood between Jews of the Diaspora and the Jews of Israel. Surely 1987 provided a fitting opportunity for the Cantors Assembly to hold its annual convention in Israel for the first time on the occasion of the Assembly's 40th anniversary.

The convention gave us the opportunity to meet Mayor Teddy Kollek of Jerusalem, Natan Sharansky and his mother, Ida Milgrom, both recently of the USSR and now residents of Jerusalem, and to hear and meet Member of the Knesset and Minister of Tourism, Moshe Sharir; Member of the Knesset and former Minister, Dr. Yosef Burg; the biblical scholar, Pinhas Peli; and the ethno-musicologist, Dr. Uri Sharvit.

We were moved, too, by our visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, and the renewal there of our dedication to eternal remembrance of the Holocaust in a special ceremony of **Yizkor**. This event featured the beautiful singing of the Ankor Children's Choir of the Rubin Academy of Jerusalem and Hazzan Louis Teichman, and an address by Dr. Pesach Schindler, Director of the Israel Office of the World Council of Synagogues.

It would be easy enough to stop here. But I believe that the achievements of this convention make a number of rather important statements of historical and cultural nature that are worthy of attention.

The convention brought home dramatically, in all its aspects, the transcendence of Jewish culture above national boundaries, and the vibrance of Jewish life throughout the Diaspora. Jewish people, or "family" as Professor Ruth Wisse has aptly called it, has a culture of which hazzanut is a living and important aspect, that transcends the boundaries of space and time, which has affected Jews everywhere and which Jews everywhere have helped to create.

Because we are all part of a people or family, we owe to each other responsibilities of mutual aid, comfort and service. Whether one looks to the example of the two tribes of Reuben and Gad who were required to fight alongside their brethren before they could settle outside the borders of the Promised Land, or the practices of pidyon *shvuyim*, redemption of prisoners, by Jews in Italy, England, Ottoman Turkey, and other lands, or the varied forms of assistance openly and clandestinely given by American Jews to the Jewish State under attack after its birth, Jews know that they owe continuing service to Israel, just as it stands ready to come to the aid of Jews all over the world if that is ever required.

If the new school of hazzanut in Israel, announced by Tel Aviv Mayor

Shlomo Lahat at the second Gala Concert, is to be successful, it is to be hoped that members of the Cantors Assembly will offer their services periodically to that endeavor, as dentists and other professionals and other volunteers contribute their services in Israel on a regular basis and from time to time.

The convention dramatically brought home the fact that the state of cantorial vocal artistry is very high. Indeed, as one Israeli speaker noted one evening, one may accurately consider it a second Golden Age of Hazzanut from that standpoint. However, one must candidly admit that perhaps the prior Golden Age excelled this one in its compositional ability.

Indeed, the uniformity of the material presented at the two galas suggests that more emphasis should be placed by cantors on the composition of new melodies and larger works. I know that at its conventions in the United States a much more modern and varied style of hazzanut is generally presented. The two galas reinforce the conclusion that the traditional compositions and melodies, wonderful as they still are, do not suffice to bring to the service the fullest interest, understanding, and emotional involvement of modern congregations.

Jews today are increasingly divorced from a past of unrelieved suffering and oppression and, from a religious standpoint, practice Judaism with freedom, optimism, and a new sense of dignity and worth. It should not be surprising that Jews who were once treated shabbily prayed with a sense of worthlessness as well as helplessness. Israel and other democracies in the world have given Jews the opportunity to pray not only with spiritual humility but with new feelings of adequacy and dignity. The reputation of hazzanut is not enhanced by perpetuating the idea among Jewish worshippers that nothing has changed or can change in the music of the synagogue.

In this regard, Dr. Yosef Burg's address was very instructive and is worthy of widespread attention. He made two important points of particular interest. The first, which we have mentioned, is that hazzanim cannot hope to keep modern congregants interested and involved by the unrelieved chanting of the old style nusah, melodies and compositions. No one suggests disregarding our most treasured traditions. No one suggests dropping the *Kol Nidre* melody. But new modes and melodies, new forms and formats, and new feelings must be found to enrich our musical tradition.

In the United States, perhaps unknown to Dr. Burg, this is being done, particularly through new commissioned works. The new music at its best is less repetitive, more lyrical, more optimistic, less melodramatic, more confident and less petitioning, more varied and less predictable. The compositions of Israeli composers for the synagogue like Eli Jaffe are a significant contribution to liturgical composition largely within traditional frameworks; the works being done outside of Israel often move into new musical frameworks

in terms of style and feeling. It is unfortunate that the significant opportunity to present such music in Israel was missed by the narrow range of music that was presented at the convention, exemplary as those presentations were from the standpoint of vocal artistry.

Dr. Burg's second point, made in jest surely, although there is always some seriousness intended and included in jests was, as he put it, "you don't have to be an *"am hahretz"* to be a hazzan." Indeed, for many years the hazzan was largely, and many times, solely responsible for carrying on the religious and the musical traditions of the liturgy and more. In more modern times, the emergence of two distinct professions vying for congregational loyalty and support has created divisions that are unfortunate for all. But Dr. Burg's remarks suggest an important lesson for hazzanim and rabbis, and, indeed, for all Jews involved in the creation and transmission of Jewish culture. If we are a people, and a culture, there is little excuse for anyone being an *"am ha'aretz,"* which I would define in the modern world as largely embracing people who are reasonably well informed about their own field but poorly informed about any other.

And so one may ask, why aren't there more hazzanim at rabbinical *"shi'urim"* and why aren't there more rabbis at cantorial concerts and other serious musical events? Why aren't appreciable numbers of them present at lectures by Jewish historians, sociologists and novelists? Is it really so self-evident that none has anything of relevance to contribute to the other, or is not the opposite self-evidently true?

The issue goes beyond the need for inter-disciplinary fertilization and extends to inter-cultural fertilization. The Cantors Assembly convention of hazzanim in Israel not only brought together hazzanim from many places and cultures. It also involved the ideas and inputs of religious, historical and cultural scholars. It was inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary in scope. This type of programming provides a model not just for hazzanim but for all who are involved in Jewish cultural life, to look beyond their own borders and disciplines so that they can be enriched by the ideas and creativity of their fellow Jews everywhere.

Finally, one cannot omit the importance of the concert that featured the two cantatas, "1 Never Saw Another Butterfly" by Charles Davidson, based on the poems of the children of Terezin concentration camp, and "A Time for Freedom" by Samuel Rosenbaum and Charles Davidson, based on Natan Sharansky's trial in the USSR.

It has often been remarked that Jews have not yet been able to incorporate crucial events of modern history into the Jewish liturgy, including the rebirth of the State of Israel, the unification of Jerusalem, the Holocaust, the plight and the unbelievable courage of Soviet Jewry, and what one can only describe

as the massive “*kibbutz galuyot*,” ingathering of exiles, that we have witnessed, from Morocco to Soviet Russia, in the past forty years. But in the meantime, hazzanim have assumed at least part of the responsibility of commissioning and creating new forms to express the meaning of these experiences, to give them continuity with the rest of our history, to keep these events alive in our memory and our emotions, and to fashion new artistic and liturgical vessels of a modern and thus more relevant nature with which to express the traditional values of our past.

The two works we were privileged to hear are bold, original, and often arresting and moving. If they were not complete esthetic successes, they were completely successful as evidence of the kind of innovation that is necessary and possible in our musical culture, provided our composers, our rabbis and our *tsibbur* have the vision to support it.

And so, the 40th anniversary convention of the Cantors Assembly was much more than that. It was an event and an experience for those who were there of historic significance and implications, from which all Jews and not just our hazzanim benetitted and can take nourishment in the years ahead.

## REVIEWS OF NEW MUSIC

**“Cradle of Fire,” by Michael Isaacson; five settings of Holocaust songs for treble choir and orchestra. Piano reduction by the composer, with English adaptations by Samuel Rosenbaum; Transcontinental Music Publishers.**

**DR. ROBERT STRASSBURG**

Once again, Dr. Michael Isaacson has served the cause of Jewish music with distinction by creating effective settings for live Holocaust songs for treble choir, string orchestra and harp. The choral score, with a piano reduction by the composer, includes the timeless *Shtiler*, *Shtiler*, *S'Brent*, *Zog Nit Keynmol Babi Yar* and *Ani Maamin*.

The settings are well within the capacity of any well-trained children or adult group. The choral writing is idiomatic and the piano accompaniments moderately easy. In its orchestral dress, “Cradle of Fire” is equally if not more compelling.

Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum has contributed richly to the song cycle with his persuasive English translations of *S' Brent* and *Babi Yar*. He weds words and melody in a faithful manner.

“Cradle of Fire” opens with *Shtiler*, *Shtiler*, a tragic lullaby for sopranos and altos, supported by a tender and unobtrusive harp and string accompaniment. The choral writing of *S'Brent*, which follows, is Schubertian in character. The four-part choral texture of the middle and closing section is challenging in its intensity and the arabesque-like figuration given to the orchestra makes this one of the most imaginative treatments in the collection.

*Zog Nit Keynmol* is in striking contrast. Its quasi-military accompaniment provides this “blood inscribed melody” born of the concentration camp agony, with a chilling treatment. No less potent is Isaacson’s setting of *Babi Yar* with its call “to rock all Babi Yar to sleep.”

Although *Ani Maamin* has received numerous treatments, it is presented in a new and fervent light for solo voice and chorus. Maimonides’ call for undying faith brings Isaacson’s suite of Holocaust echoes, some fifty years after Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto, to an aching close.

Lest we forget, we are indebted to folk composers Volkovski, Gebirtig, Prokrass and Shapiro, as well as to poets Katcherginsky, Hirsh Glik and Shaike Driz, for they are the initial creators who experienced the unbearable tragedy of the Holocaust.

**DR. ROBERT STRASSBURG is a well known American composer and Professor Emeritus of the faculty of California State University at Los Angeles.**

They are ably and nobly served by Michael Isaacson. “Cradle of Fire” is published by Transcontinental Music Publishers. It is available in vocal score with piano reduction. The orchestral score may be obtained on rental.

**“Shaarei Shirah: Gates of Song” Charles Davidson, music editor, UAHC, Transcontinental Music Publishers.**

**BARUCH COHON**

In 1953 the Hebrew Union School of Sacred Music began publishing out-of-print classics of Jewish music. In his preface to the first volume (Baer’s *Baal Tefilah*) Eric Werner wrote: “May (this book) become the corrective against those fictitious ‘traditions’ which rest solely upon the belief in individual cantors.”

Now, after thirty-five years of placing the school’s graduates in congregations throughout the country — some of which never had cantors before — the Reform movement has produced a book of music designed as a companion to *Gates of Prayer*, and is embarked on an energetic campaign to sell it to all the Jewish world. Workshop sessions at national and regional conventions of congregations, cantors, and rabbis devote major amounts of time to this book.

Small wonder. *Shaarei Shirah* has been a long time coming. Glance at the opening statement, and count the names of those mentioned as raking an active role on various committees involved with its publication. Our own Cantors Assembly colleague, Charles Davidson, probably should qualify as next ambassador to the United Nations after serving as musical editor on such a multiple-cooks project!

Under such circumstances, no editor can expect to achieve unity of style. What the potential user must look for is musical clarity, consistency in format, and some guidance for the layman. With all those supervisors hanging over his shoulder, how much success did Davidson and his staff achieve in these areas? And what of Werner’s “fictitious traditions?”

Certainly they have produced a clean attractive volume. The looseleaf keyboard edition is overpriced, perhaps deliberately, given the prevalence of Xerox bootlegging. But the more affordable leadsheet edition, with melody line and guitar chords, also comes in an 8½ by 11 inch size, perfect for copy machines. Nevertheless, the editors express a “hope that this edition will be

used by congregants during worship services, as well as by teachers, students, campers and families.” In an era when musical literacy seems to have fallen to a very low ebb, even among some who make their living in music, it will be interesting to see how many congregations will invest in multiple copies of this book; and of those who do how many will actually place them in the prayerbook racks. Historically, the Union Hymnal, Union Songster, and similar predecessors wound up in dust-covered cartons, even though they were printed in a handier page-size.

For amateur unison singing groups, this book has definite strong points. It contains a great number of standard tunes, clearly presented, with intelligent instrumental introductions and consistent transliteration, in generally singable keys. It also prints the Hebrew text, which should encourage some singers to improve their Hebrew literacy while they are at it, and also enable those who know Hebrew to avoid getting confused by the transliteration.

Content, however, is spotty. Taking the committee’s opening statement at face value, it must be stated that the book fails to meet some of its own goals. Guideline No. 2 specifies “music that is authentically Jewish, using where possible traditional modes.” Loose enough to interpret various ways, this statement still assumes some liturgical and modal framework. In fact, there is virtually none. Evening and morning texts and music are evidently interchangeable, whether they apply to **Sh’ma uvirchoteha** or **T’filah** sections. Nusah is missing. This is a Shabbat book, intended for the entire year, yet it omits **Hallel** entirely, and includes **Avinu Malkein**, which is not part of the Shabbat liturgy.

Guideline No. 3 specifies music that is “widely used and appropriate to congregational singing.” I would raise an objection to appropriateness on the grounds of repetition of the Divine Name as if it were just another word. This is found throughout the book. Composers can violate this tradition through choice or through ignorance, but a collection published by an entire movement can be expected to be more sensitive.

Guideline No. 4 specifies music for “texts that appear in **Shaarei Tefilah**,” and an earlier paragraph states: “this volume includes settings for every text in **Gates of Prayer** suitable for congregational singing.” Not quite. For example, how can a Shabbat songbook leave out **L’chu N’ran’na, Vay’chulu, Or Zaru’a?** For a prayerbook that opens one Sabbath Eve service with Mu Yedidot, where is the tune for it?

And finally, when the committee declares: “We have, wherever possible, adjusted the melody to the correct Hebrew accentuation,” they are sticking their necks out. Just one comparison should illustrate the point. Janowski’s **Huriu** (#2 1), clearly written in the rhythm of Israeli Hebrew, achieves correct



accents throughout with no problem. The Bialik-Minkowsky *Shabat Hamalkuh* (#158) blows hot and cold, with frequent concessions to old habits. Result: ‘*Ashkesephardi*.’ Having wrestled with that same song in the 1950 edition of the Idelsohn Songbook. I noticed very quickly that regardless what we printed, people sang it the way they knew it. Now, however, Yehoram Gaon has recorded an Israeli version with correct accents throughout — and surprisingly enough it is not awkward. Same melody, different approach.

For reasons possibly more political than musical, some numbers included that are too complex or too theatrical to qualify as “congregational singing.” Others found their way in here from summer camps. Placing these selections alongside standard synagogue melodies creates an odd impression — a crazy-quilt of unrelated, uneven, inconsistent material.

Good or mediocre, valuable or worthless, the material in this book certainly offers the user a choice. What it does not offer is a tradition. Thirty-five years after their first publication, the Committees of the Reform movement have now taken some of the trends aptly called “fictitious traditions” and stamped them authentic.

Nevertheless, it is time which will determine the success of this collection. Its availability in different forms makes it possible that some traditional Jewish music will become available and familiar to the under-educated musicians serving in too many congregations. On the other hand, the inclusion of popular melodies may be of use to more established synagogue musicians who are less aware of contemporary goings-on. The publishers and the editor are to be commended, in any case, for their efforts.

## MUSIC SECTION

Jacob Rapoport was probably the leading composer of hazzanic recitatives in early 20th century in America. His compositions were usually commissioned by leading hazzanim of the "Golden Age" who sang them in appearances all over the country with great success.

Although an intellectual and highly competent craftsman, he did not succumb to deviations from his path of nusah to indulge in harmonic histrionics for the sake of show. His pieces are deeply rooted in Eastern European soul and piety.

Charles Heller is a Toronto composer and conductor who made the arrangements which follow at the commission of Hazzan Benjamin Maissner of Holy Blossom Temple.

We publish here arrangements of two of Rapoport's most famous recitatives: "*Brich Sh'mei*, " and *Anenu* "

## B'RICH SH'MEI

Arrangement commissioned by Cantor Benjamin Maissner, Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto

Jacob Rappoport

arr. Charles Heller

*slow, rubato*

A- na av-da d'kud-she b'-rich

*mp*  
*marcato*

*rit.*

*ped. ad lib.*

hu d'-sa-ged-na ka-mel u-mi-ka-na di-kar o-rai-tel, b'-

chol i-dan v'-i-dan. Lo al e-nash ra-chets-na

lo al bar e - la-hin se-mech-na lo al e-nash ra-chets-na v'- lo al bar e -

*colla parte*

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line starting with the lyrics 'A- na av-da d'kud-she b'-rich' and the piano accompaniment with markings for 'mp', 'marcato', and 'rit.'. The second system continues the vocal line with 'hu d'-sa-ged-na ka-mel u-mi-ka-na di-kar o-rai-tel, b'-' and the piano accompaniment. The third system has the vocal line 'chol i-dan v'-i-dan. Lo al e-nash ra-chets-na' and the piano accompaniment. The fourth system concludes with the vocal line 'lo al bar e - la-hin se-mech-na lo al e-nash ra-chets-na v'- lo al bar e -' and the piano accompaniment, which includes the marking 'colla parte'.

lo-hin sa-mech-na e - la be-e lo-ha dish-ma - - - ya

d'-hu e lo-ha k'-shot v'-o rai-tei k'shot, un-vi-o - hi k'shot, u-mas-gei l'-me-bad

ta-v'-van u - mas-gei l'- me - - - - - bad, ta - v'- van -

ta - v'-van - ta-v'-van u k'- shot. - - - - - Bei a - na ra - cheta - v'-lish-

*Ped. ad lib.*

B'rich Sh'mei

3.

mei ka-di-she ya-ki-ra a-na-e-mar tush b'-chen. Bei a - -

na-ra-chets v'-lish-mei ka-di-she ya-ki-ra, v'-lish-mei ka-di-she ya-ki-ra, a-

*colla parte*

na e-mar a-na e-mar tush b'-chen.

*cantabile*

The first system of the musical score consists of a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand.

The second system continues the musical score. The vocal line has the following lyrics: *Y'- hel ra-a -va ko-da-mach d'-tif-tach li- bi b'-o- rai-ta, v'-tash-*

The third system continues the musical score. The vocal line has the following lyrics: *lim mish-a-lin v'-tash-lim - mish- a-lin mish-a -lin d'-li-bi - v'- 11-h d'- chol a-mach, v'*

The piano accompaniment in this system is marked *colla parte*.

The fourth system continues the musical score. The vocal line has the following lyrics: *li - ba, d'-chol a-mach Yis-ra-el d'- chol a-mach - yis-ra-el l'-*

B'rich Sh'uel

5.

The musical score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a prelude and accompaniment for the vocal lines.

**Vocal Line 1:**  
 The first vocal line begins with the lyrics: "tav ul-cha-yin — l'-tav ul-cha-yin — v'-lish-lan, l'-". The melody is simple and melodic, with a final note on a whole rest.

**Piano Accompaniment 1:**  
 The piano accompaniment for the first system features a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. There are two measures marked with "+8" in the bass line.

**Vocal Line 2:**  
 The second vocal line continues with the lyrics: "tav l'-tav — ul-cha-yin — v'-lish-lan". The melody is similar to the first line.

**Piano Accompaniment 2:**  
 The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic support. There are some triplets and slurs in the right hand.

**Final Section:**  
 The score concludes with a final piano accompaniment section. The right hand has a melodic line with a fermata over the final note, and the left hand has a simple bass line. The word "men." is written above the staff.

# ANENU

Jacob Rapoport  
arr. by Charles Heller

mp rubato +8va Ped ad lib. sempre

nenu a nenu A nenu a-nenu E-lo hei-

a-voke-nu A he

nu. A-ne nu, A nenu-a-ne nu E-lo

Submitted by Cantor Benjamin Maissner, Toronto Canada  
Vocalization based on a transcription by Noach Schall



hei, Av - ra - ham, A — ne — nu, A-nenu E-lo —

hei, Av - ra - ham a — nenu. A - nenu Pachad Yitshak, Pachad

Yitshak Anenu A — nenu A - ne - nu Avir - Ya'a - ha, A - vir -

Ya'a - kov a — nenu. A - ne nu ezat Hoshi'vatimanc — nu, A -

ne — nu A — ne

colla parte

nu — Kod-shei Lieb

ot — a — ne — nu A — ne — nu Ho-o-neb'

et Tsara a-nenu hao — ne b'et Tsara anenu

8va

A

Musical score for the first system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole note followed by a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

A - ne — nu, Oy Ha-one b'et: Tsa-

colla  
Pace

Musical score for the second system, including lyrics. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "A - ne — nu, Oy Ha-one b'et: Tsa-". The piano accompaniment features a more complex rhythmic pattern with some triplets. The instruction "colla Pace" is written below the piano part.

ra - Oy a-ne — nu

8va

Oy a-nenu a-vi y'-to-mim

Musical score for the third system, including lyrics. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "ra - Oy a-ne — nu" and "Oy a-nenu a-vi y'-to-mim". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern.

Oy a-nenu a-vi y'-to-mim - a — ne nu

Musical score for the fourth system, including lyrics. The vocal line concludes with the lyrics "Oy a-nenu a-vi y'-to-mim - a — ne nu". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern.

