TRANSCENDING JEWISH DENOMINATIONAL LINES: THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF CANTOR MEIR FINKELSTEIN

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Notes: *All sheet music and photographs are included with the express permission of Meir Finkelstein. Unofficial Jewish denominational terminology not commonly utilized in academia has been place in quotes, while established terms have been capitalized.*

INTRODUCTION: JEWISH MUSIC & IDENTITY

Born in Israel in 1951, and raised in the United Kingdom, at age 14, Meir Finkelstein became the youngest professional cantor in Europe. By the 1970s he had relocated to North America where he served Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues while also earning acclaim for his Jewish and secular compositions. From Israel to England, Scotland, Illinois, California, Ontario, Michigan, to Texas, Finkelstein encountered an array of Jewish communities, musical traditions, and cultures. This cantorial thesis maps the unique life experiences that most contributed to the formation of Finkelstein's Jewish identity and musical expression.

Just as Finkelstein physically and geographically migrated, he also embarked upon a spiritual and intellectual journey. Though he was raised in a halachically observant, Orthodox household marked by the full range of traditional Jewish customs, his religious beliefs and practices became more liberal over time. This thesis explores these changes and their resulting manifestation in his musical compositions. As the musicologists Lily E. Hirsch, and Amy Lynn Wlodarski wrote, "Issues such as cultural multiplicity (across a given society), cultural exchange and hybridity (between two groups within a society or between two culturally disparate societies), and the complex, often compound nature of 'identity' (for a given individual)—can affect the work that each of us does" (Hirsch and Wlodarski, *A Colloquy on Jewish Studies, Music, and Biography*, 122).

Finkelstein is an example, in the ethnomusicologist Marc Kligman's words, of how "contemporary Jewish music reflects American Jewry's religious and cultural diversity and also shapes it by staking a claim to a synthesized contemporary Jewish identity" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 140). American Judaism in particular, "within

the context of the voluntarism and individualism of the American way of life," forces us to consider which factors most contribute to one's self-defined Jewish identity. In a recent report, the sociologists Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Ephraim Tabory explained that:

> "The individual American Jew defines his or her religious preference in response to two related questions: 1. Should one's Jewish identity be based on modern, Western models of acceptable identities, or should it be based on traditional Judaic models, such as those embodied in Jewish law (halakha), as set forth in traditional Jewish texts? 2. Should Jewish identity be essentially religious, that is, based in the synagogue or temple, or should it be essentially ethnic—based in the history and traditions of the more or autonomous, self-governing Jewish people such as found in the shtetls of Eastern Europe or in the modern State of Israel?" (Lazerwitz, Winter, Dashefsky, and Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism*, XIX).

This analysis helps to further explain the uniquely American phenomenon of denominationalism:

> "Denominations are…groups providing means of identification and location within the American social structure. Loyalty to the…denomination...involves loyalty to the denomination's tradition, and particularly to those elements of the tradition which for reasons of history, geography, culture, or social structure, most sharply differentiate this tradition in the American experience from other traditions" (Lazerwitz, Winter, Dashefsky, and Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism*, 6).

This thesis illustrates how one cantor's life and music has embodied and transcended those denominational distinctions. It is based on primary sources—interviews with cantor / composer Meir Finkelstein, his brother, fellow cantor and librettist, Aryeh Finklestein (he prefers this spelling), friend and composer Stephen Glass, and longtime

friend Ari Zev, as well as my own first-hand experiences as his congregant and cantorial mentee at Congregation Shaarey Zedek, in Southfield, MI.

Each chapter of this thesis focuses on a contributing influence to Finkelstein's musical and theological development and is accompanied by pertinent biographical details. I provide a critical analysis of Finkelstein's compositions, in search of musical patterns, trends, and stylistic elements that illustrate themes from Finkelstein's biography and his religious and ideological commitments. I have explored the various contextual factors that influence the music, from historical and geographical to social elements. Finally, I complement the analysis of primary sources with historical research on the various synagogue communities that Finkelstein served, and the specific customs they observed as they pertain to liturgical music.

My research indicates that liturgical music within American synagogues is coded by denomination. Each Jewish movement has a distinct style that best represents the values and identity of the congregation and its members.[1] I will compare and contrast the musical worship practices, structures, and trends within the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements. Of course, the denominational descriptions that follow are generalizations; outlying examples could be identified. However, these generalizations are necessary counterpoints that illuminate how Finkelstein's life and musical compositions transcend and defy these denominational structures and expectations.

[1] "Every sector of the Jewish community—from the most right-wing Orthodox to the most secular—participates in the Jewish music endeavor, creating, performing, and listening to the particular music that meets its taste and needs. Jewish music is sung and performed in synagogues of all sizes and types, in schools, community centers, and summer camps, at organizational conclaves, and in college campus auditoriums or in concert halls as august as Carnegie Hall" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 88).

Though I organized this thesis by designating chapters for each significant influence that contributed to Finkelstein's life, and the formation of his Jewish identity, there is much overlap in these sections. Several transformational and diverse experiences occur within the same timeframe, and numerous influences become evident in his compositions simultaneously—they are all interconnected. As a result, I tried to provide a coherent and chronological accounting of these experiences in each chapter. This further demonstrates how challenging it is to dissect the origins of one's Jewish identity and the most consequential contributing factors. Ultimately, who we are and our contributions to the world are the culmination of all of the influences in our lives up until this point. Through this biographical and musical case study, moreover, I demonstrate that it is both challenging and divisive to assert that one style of Jewish music is more authentic than the next. Rather, Jewish music—like identity—is the culmination of exposure to a variety of cultures, traditions, and experiences over time.

PART I: JEWISH LITURGICAL MUSIC & DENOMINATIONAL DIFFERENCES

CHAPTER I: THE MUSIC OF ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUES

Ultra-Orthodox

In order to understand sacred music within Orthodox communities, we must first have a general understanding of the Orthodox ideology. It is necessary to note that there are variations within the movement. For simplicity's sake, I have designated two primary groups: Ultra-Orthodox (which includes Haredim and Hassidim)[2] and Modern Orthodox. Orthodox Jews are traditionalists who believe that the Torah was divinely revealed at Mount Sinai. Therefore, they take the teaching quite literally and live according to biblical commandments as interpreted by rabbis of the Talmud and successive rabbinic commentaries. Orthodox Jews pray three times per day, observe Shabbat by refraining from the use of fire, electricity, financial transactions, and travel outside of the *eruv* (a designated, enclosed area), and observe the laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws—though there are many interpretations as to the "proper" way to do this). They also believe that men and

[2] "Haredi, or strictly Orthodox, Jews are committed to living lives of religious stringency and usually aim to limit their interactions with the rest of society. They dress modestly and distinctly, with men usually bearded and wearing black attire. They usually eschew universities and secular education, with a life of full-time study of Jewish texts being the ideal for men. Haredi Judaism was decimated in the Holocaust. The Haredi community is highly diverse. There are two principal streams: The 'Lithuanian' stream, which has historically emphasized study as the pre-eminent value; and the 'Hassidic' stream which emphasizes joyful spirituality alongside study. The latter is itself divided into multiple sects, usually led by a revered 'rebbe' or master, and often named by place of origin. Important Hassidic sects with a presence in the UK include Belzer, Lubavitch, Satmar and Vishnitzer. The principal umbrella body for Haredi synagogues is the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations although by no means all synagogues are members" ("Shabbat Times 22nd - 23rd January '21 in London," United Synagogue, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.theus.org.uk/).

women have different obligations and specific roles in the community. In general, women are expected to be modest, reserved, less educated (in Jewish text, not secular studies), and to be responsible for household duties. Additionally, women are regarded as sensual by nature and the responsibility of preventing men from temptation is placed on solely on them. There is also a rabbinic law that prohibits woman from singing (*kol isha*) in front of men, which is considered immodest. As a result, female participation in Orthodox synagogues is minimal. When they do attend services, women are seated separately from men (usually with a *mechitza*) and expected to keep their voices low so as not to be distracting to the men. Needless to say, in the Orthodox movement, women are generally not permitted to be cantors or spiritual leaders of the community. The stringency of Orthodox practice extends to their communal prayer practices and their views on music within the synagogue.

One feature of Ultra-Orthodox self-understanding is the claim that Orthodoxy is the one and only authentic form of Judaism in existence today, alongside numerous forms of deviance and heresy. This view is especially relevant with reference to the Orthodox worship practices which—despite the immense variations among Orthodox communities—Orthodox Jews claim is more authentic and untainted from non-Jewish influence. This is a fallacy. As explained by musicologist Eric Werner:

> "Though many traditional prayers may reflect Jewish thinking of ancient times, mainly of the late Hellenistic period, neither Jewish theology nor Jewish songs, nor even their forms, have remained unchanged during subsequent centuries. This corpus of music is not a homogenous entity, but a hybrid conglomeration of Jewish, German, Polish, and even Russian folklore, which has been further reshaped and stylized by many generations of singers, cantors, and folk musicians. The traditional religious music of a particular group is determined by theological, ethnic, geographic, and historical factors. The musical forms encountered in *minhag ashkenaz* are

> best classified with reference to their treatment of the Hebrew text, or to their performance practice" (Werner, *A Voice Still Heard, the Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews*, 1).

Liturgical music within Orthodox synagogues is characterized by the unique relationship between the chazzan and the congregants. A chazzan's use of *nusach*, Jewish modes, and cantorial improvisation is an emblematic component of the Orthodox worship service,[3] as is the congregation's cacophonous whispered Hebrew chanting that occurs between solo singing. While there is an occasional call and response between the chazzan[4] and the congregation, most responses are not sung melodically or unison—aside from the occasional *piyyut* (liturgical poem) or *niggun* (wordless melody).[5] Rather, when it is the congregant's turn to respond, each person begins to *daven* starting from the same spot in the liturgy but will recite at different paces and have varying melodies from one another rather than a uniformed response.[6] Werner breaks down Ashkenazi Orthodox worship into

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[3] "Cantorial music is based on nusach, a Hebrew term denoting melodic phrases traditionally used for leading synagogue worship, in which specific prayers in the liturgy are sung in a particular mode or scale. A cantorial virtuoso not only performs the nusach accurately but is also capable of improvisation and of vocal embellishments that have specific vocal "effects," such as a drei (turn) or kvetch (cry)" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 92).

[4] There are multiple spellings of the transliterated word (as there are with all transliterated words) Chazzan, Chazan, Hazzan, Hazan, all of which are synonymous with the term Cantor.

[5] "The Hasidic theory of the niggun—a melody without lyrics—maintained that melodies, too, contain divine sparks, so that defiled melodies can be redeemed by being sung in sanctity" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 46).

[6] "Their style of worship until this time had been anything but subdued and reserved. For the most part, Jews had prayed and sung out loud, each at a different pace and volume, a style that must have appeared chaotic to an outsider, even though it did in fact have its own inherent method and cohesive structure" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 187-188).

what he refers to as plain response, refrain, free melismatic recitative, *missinai* tunes and chants, and melismatic chants / *niggunim*.[7] In this way, the Orthodox prayer service is much more individualized. The experience is both performative—listening to the vocal prowess of the chazzan—and personal—softly reading the words of the *siddur* aloud.[8] When viewed from a more progressive Jewish perspective, liturgical music of the Orthodox synagogue is also characterized primarily by what it lacks, rather than what it includes. Namely, its lack of instrumentation, general lack of choral singing, and lack of female voices and

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[7] "Plain response is when a reader renders a prayer, which customarily is answered by a congregational response; it may or may not be metrical. The form types of the responses depend on the parallelistic style of the text. The practice of response goes back to the Second Temple. The term *la'anot* (to answer) and its derivatives occur early in the Bible and signify singing in alternation. Refrain is a practice that can be traced back to the time of the Psalmists. There are a few well-known examples of refrains in the texts of the psalter, the Dead Sea scrolls, and, later, the medieval *piyyutim*. Free melismatic recitative is a typically Ashkenazic rendition of certain prose and a few poetic texts. It was established relatively late by the Chazzanim, who wished to have more leeway for displaying their voices. Elements of Slovak and German folk song, of military band music, and of Italian Opera were mixed without much sense of style. It is, to this day, a favorite form type of Eastern European Chazzanim and their congregations. Missinai tunes and chants are the most distinctive element of *minhag Ashkenaz*. They originated in the Rhineland during the 12th-15th centuries under sad and tragic circumstances. In general, *Missinai* tunes are applied to prayers and rites of the High Holy Days and the Three Festivals; they have made hardly any inroads into the daily of Shabbat ritual. Melismatic chant/Niggunim have long vocalists or meaningless syllables instead of texts to serve as the bases for the melodies. In Chassidism it is highly respected as the most spiritualized type of vocal music. In most cases the tune (*niggun*) is the result of spirited improvisation. The *niggun* was and is generally chanted upon meaningless syllables" (Werner, *A Voice Still Heard, the Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews* 6-7).

[8] The cantor had led the service by chanting the Hebrew prayers in the nusach (melodic formulas determined by liturgical time and regional style), while the congregation responded in a prescribed, albeit apparently cacophonous, manner" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 188).

participation.[9] Even the pronunciation of prayers in the Orthodox community is distinctive: ranging from the strong Ashkenazic pronunciation of Eastern European Jews to the Sephardic pronunciation of Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and North African Jews. In general, Orthodox Jews are considered the most "traditional" and stringent in their Jewish practice.

Modern Orthodox

In terms of ideology, Modern Orthodox Judaism is very similar to Ultra-Orthodox. They both subscribe to the belief that the Torah is the divine word of G-d revealed at Mount Sinai and live their lives according to *halacha* (Jewish rabbinic law). Differences primarily pertain to their views of the non-Jewish and secular world and how to function within it. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism tends to have a much more insular approach, engaging with the secular world only out of necessity, while Modern Orthodox Judaism believes that interaction with the non-Jewish world is not only necessary but also beneficial and encouraged. They try to fully integrate their lives with that of modern society. In some ways, it may appear that the Modern Orthodox have distinct public and private personas.

In terms of their worship practice, Modern Orthodox Jews put a stronger emphasis

[9] "A noteworthy feature of the new Orthodox music is that it is created and performed chiefly by men—but listened to by both men and women. This is because Halakhah considers the voice of a woman singing to be sexually arousing to men, and therefore prohibits men from hearing it (the reverse is not the case). As a kind of musical subculture, however, the Orthodox world has produced female singers who perform their own original songs, as well as songs written by male performers, at concerts exclusively for women, and make recordings as well" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 114).

on congregational participation and communal singing, making their service appear more structured to an outsider. As a result of their integration and acculturation to the secular world, Modern Orthodox Jews are exposed to a wide variety of music. Therefore, it is not uncommon for more popular melodies (usually still from the Jewish music world and all male Yeshiva choirs) to make their way into synagogue practice on occasion. As cantor and musicologist Eliyahu Schleifer has written:

> **"**Above all, the Modern Orthodox…worshipers demanded active participation by congregational singing. Religious youth movements, such as Young Israel in America and B'nei Akiva in Israel, insisted that the lion's share of the services be sung by the congregation and that the precentor (usually a layman) be limited to simple traditional chants. This new trend encouraged the insertion of popular and neo-Hasidic tunes in the services (Schleifer, *Current Trends of Liturgical Music in the Ashkenazi Synagogue,* 67)".

Some Modern Orthodox synagogues have even begun allowing more female participation in limited egalitarian services, and a Modern Orthodox female rabbinate is also emerging. While there is always a diversity of practice within a designated religious denomination, these groups remain unified around the core values and traditions that they equally embrace.

CHAPTER II: THE MUSIC OF CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUES

Traditional Conservative / Conservadox

Conservative Judaism, like Orthodoxy, is diverse and may be separated into two groups: "Traditional Conservative" / "Conservadox" and "Progressive Conservative" (a paradox). Even so, Conservative Judaism as a whole, while rooted in *halacha*, differs significantly from Orthodoxy in a few significant ways. The Conservative movement made adaptations to some rabbinic interpretations of *halacha* in order to better accommodate Jews who wish to integrate their religious and secular lives. The most predominant adaptations include egalitarianism (allowing women to play a more active role in Jewish religious life, including mixed seating in some synagogues, eliminating the *mechitza*), updates to the liturgical text of the *siddur* in order to better reflect this value, allowing the community to drive to and from *shul*, and the implementation of musical instruments in services, in some communities.

The American Conservative movement acquired its distinctiveness when the second-generation Jewish immigrants, born in America, acculturated from birth, moved to the suburbs, where an altered agenda for synagogue music emerged. According to the liturgists Lawrence Hoffman and Janet Walton, these goals included:[10]

1. *Stimulate congregational singing*
2. *Inspire Jewish devotion*
3. *Revive values of Jewish melody*
4. *Exclude, as far as possible, non-Jewish music and poetry*
5. *Provoke in the children of our religious schools a love for Jewish poetry and song*
6. *Encourage an earnest study of Jewish music in the religious schools*

[10] Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 196.

Furthermore, in Conservative Synagogues, according to Kligman, Contemporary American Jewish music makes use primarily of English and Hebrew. And while Eastern European motifs have not totally disappeared, today's Jewish music employs many elements of popular American music.

> "[Further,] music for worship in Conservative congregations ranges from solo cantorial artistry to the folk-style singing of a *havurah*, the small, informal fellowship group that developed out of the Jewish youth culture of the 1960s. The traditional style of the Golden Age of the cantorate is more common in Conservative congregations than it is in Orthodox or Reform, though it is waning there as well…most Conservatives expect to hear the same old prayers sung with the same old melodies, a familiarity that provides comfort" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 89).

In other words, music within "Traditional Conservative" / "Conservadox" synagogues is similar, in many regards, to that of Orthodox synagogues: no musical instrumentation is used while the chazzan recites prayers using *nusach*, the Jewish modes, and cantorial improvisation. There is also a fair split between a congregant's individual, reflective prayers and the chazzan's recitatives. The Conservative service is likely more structured and formal than that of the Orthodox. More composed call and response is utilized in sections of the service recited aloud, and more congregational melodies are employed. It is not uncommon for older members to pronounce Hebrew with an Ashkenazi accent, especially if they are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Younger congregants, especially those who attend Jewish summer camp, are more likely to use the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew spoken in Israel. The duration of these services tends to be longer, as a more complete recitation of the liturgy is chanted during each prayer service. Even so, it is not uncommon for some prayers to be skipped, amended, or recited

silently for the sake of brevity. Very little English is recited during the service, and the *siddur* is written in Hebrew with an English translation but no transliteration.

Progressive Conservative

Music within "Progressive Conservative" synagogues is often more reminiscent of the "Modern Reform" tradition. In terms of liturgy, not every prayer is recited, thereby allowing for a more abridged service. The liturgical text has also been amended to include more pluralistic and egalitarian language, which is reflective of Conservative ideology. Prayers are recited in both Hebrew and English, allowing much of the service to be participatory rather than performative. Much more communal singing is encouraged and often replaces cantorial solo recitations. The service is far more structured than those of "Traditional Conservative" communities in that they largely eliminate individual, silent prayer in lieu of unison call and response when reciting prayers aloud. Furthermore, while many of the "traditional" melodies heard in Orthodox and "Conservadox" synagogues are still utilized, newer music is also introduced and popularized in these communities. Hebrew is most commonly pronounced in the Sephardic manner, strengthening the bond of the community to Israeli society.

These services are usually geared towards congregants who are actively involved in the Jewish community and synagogue life, but not necessary those who are the most Jewishly learned. Therefore, these services are focused on accessibility and inclusivity for congregants with all levels of religious observance and education. "Today, Conservative and Reform seminaries alike teach cantorial students and song leaders that music needs to be sung with clarity, in a comfortable key, and at a reasonable tempo in order for

congregants to join in" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 121). In "Progressive Conservative" communities, the choice to allow musical instrumentation during Shabbat and Holiday services is the most iconic way in which these services are reminiscent of the Reform movement. These services still tend to be more comprehensive liturgically, and also in duration, than that of Reform synagogues. Behind all of these decisions is the Conservative mentality that acculturation into American society is something positive to be embraced. This is the primary ideological difference between Orthodox and Conservative communities. While "Traditional Conservative" communities struggle to balance tradition with modernization, "Progressive Conservative" communities deem this balance as essential to their Jewish identity.

CHAPTER III: THE MUSIC OF REFORM SYNAGOGUES

Classical Reform

Synagogue worship culture in Reform congregations may be divided into two distinct groups: Classical Reform and "Modern Reform". Reform Judaism developed in nineteenth-century Germany and was founded primarily upon liberal ideals and the desire to acculturate into Christian society. According to the musicologist Abraham Z. Idelson, the idea to reform public Jewish worship in particular "was called forth by the general struggle in Europe for social emancipation and justice and for freedom of thought" (Idelson, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, 233). The impetus to make these changes also coincided with reforms being made in the church where "there had arisen opposition against the dead Latin language, unknown to the people, and an effort was made to substitute instead the vernacular of the respective countries…the same fight raged regarding the music. A similar striving toward the reform of synagogue worship started in Jewry" (Idelson, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, 234). Reformers were very concerned about the appearance and reputation of Jewish worship services to general society.[11] Therefore, they largely eliminated the role of the cantor as a soloist in lieu of congregational singing,[12] they favored the recitation of the sermon and some prayers in the

[11] "Christians found the synagogue service unpleasant and disorderly to listen to. Protestantism provided the aesthetic norms: German prayers, an organ, and hymns. Biblical lections and prayers were read, not chanted, as the traditional sing-song chants were deemed too oriental for modern use. Jewish hymn texts were sung to music taken from non-Jewish sources" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change,* 60).

[12] "The solo part of the chazzan, the unrhythmical chant, did not receive any attention; it remained in its eighteenth-century form and frequently became stale and lifeless. This remainder of the old Semitic-Oriental song was tolerated only for the sake of those members who still belonged to the older generation and who, through education and

vernacular language (rather than in Hebrew), printed the prayerbooks in both Hebrew and the vernacular, they substituted unscripted, ununiform, individualized prayer with pre-composed hymns and singing, and they introduced the organ into worship services.[13]

In many regards, this newly reimagined service mimicked that of the Christian prayer services. Therefore, as Reform Judaism spread across Europe and into the United States, reformers set Jewish liturgical texts to European classical music and the cantor, "the embodiment of Jewish musical tradition, became a relic of the past and was replaced by professional musicians, usually a choir director and an organist who were not necessarily Jewish but who, in conjunction with the rabbi, chose the music for the synagogue" (Hoffman and Waltman, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 189). Furthermore:

> [The] "rabbi, who was seen as functioning akin to a Protestant minister, read the service that centered on his sermon. A four-part choir rendered the newly notated music of the prayers, which themselves were often translated…while the congregation prayed silently. Whereas formerly the chanting of the liturgy for a Sabbath service had taken several hours, now the reformers abbreviated the service both for theological and aesthetic purposes" (Hoffman and Waltman, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 188).

While this new sect of Judaism, the Reform movement, proved to be a huge accomplishment for Jews who wished to maintain a connection to their religion while also fitting more seamlessly into the Christian society in which they lived, not all of these

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habit, considered a service without chazzanuth as unJewish" (Idelson, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development,* 244).

[13] "As early as 1810 they were attempting in Cassel to subdue "unsuitable traditional singing which interrupts the prayer," and from then on, it was not unusual for individual synagogues to promulgate Synagogenordnungen, official pronouncements on order and decorum that prohibited such things as wandering up and down the aisles during prayer, loud kissing of the tsitsit (prayer shawl fringes) and swaying to and fro during prayer" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 187).

innovations were embraced in every community. Many—especially the introduction of organ accompaniment—weathered a strong backlash and "throughout Europe not a single congregation became entirely Reform according to the program of Jacobson.[14] Every community in Central Europe, notably in Germany, is still divided into Orthodox and Progressive or 'Organ' congregations" (Idelson, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, 243).

Yet, this highly acculturated, Reform synagogue aesthetic found especially fertile soil among newly American Jews—many immigrants from central Europe—who sought to quickly integrate into American Protestant society. Thus, the music of Sulzer, Lewandowski, and Naumbourg found a place in American synagogues, alongside their American disciples, A.W. Binder, Isadore Freed, and Herbert Fromm. Their music became emblematic of what is called Classical Reform. Further, in keeping with American's democratic ethos, American Reform synagogues—unlike their predecessors in Europe—

[14] "The first successful reformer of the Synagogue ritual was Israel Jacobson (1769-1828), a rich and influential merchant who…made it his aim to reform the ritual as well as to reorganize the religious education of Jews in Germany. He established in 1801 a boys' school for elementary knowledge and trade. There he arranged a children's service into which he introduced hymns, the tunes of which he took from the Protestant chorales. To their tunes he set Hebrew text and printed a collection of chorales with the notes running from right to left…In Seesen, in 1810, he erected on the grounds of the boys' school the first Reform Temple in Europe, in which he installed an organ and for which he arranged the ritual as well as the music. Jacobson's program for the service was this: Alongside of the Hebrew texts of the prayers…he introduced German hymns to the tunes of Christian chorales. He abolished the chanting of the Pentateuch and Prophets according to traditional modes as well as the unrhythmical prayer modes, and together with these he discarded the chazzan. He himself read the service without any chant, according to the manner of reading the Bible text and prayers in the Protestant Church. He introduced the sermon in pure German—he himself preaching in his Temple. He brought to his Temple the gown of the Church. He also introduced the confirmation of boys and girls" (Idelson, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, 234-235).

were resoundingly egalitarian (though the rabbinate remained closed to women until the mid-twentieth century).

Classical Reform was far more appealing to the Jews of Russia who began to arrive in large numbers in the late-nineteenth century, after the assassination of Czar Alexander II. While these Jews tended to congregate in Orthodox and Conservative synagogues at first, their descendants, according to Kligman, tended to perpetuate the more emotional sound of their synagogue music when they began to join Reform congregations in the early and mid-twentieth century. This is one facet of a new type of Reform Jewish synagogue culture, deemed "Modern Reform" in this thesis.

Modern Reform

This new wave of Reform Judaism had a renewed connection to the old Jewish traditions and wanted to recapture the "authenticity" of Jewish music and worship that had been abandoned early on. Now living in America, a place full of religious and cultural diversity, second-generation American Reform Jews did not feel as compelled to acculturate in the ways their ancestors had in nineteenth-century Europe and America. By the mid-twentieth century, in light of the nascent Zionist, black power, and multicultural movements, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity became something to be embraced. According to Hoffman and Walton, rather than conforming, "their religion could now be practiced out of individual choice because for the first time in Jewish memory, Jews were free to change the shape and scope of their religion, and as individuals, to choose their own desired level of observance rather than to be governed by the mandates of the community at large" (Hoffman and Walton, *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 189). Slowly, music of

the synagogue took on the aesthetic of popular music and displaced the more formal Classical Reform sound. Now, there was enthusiasm around reintroducing more traditional Hebrew liturgy, allowing services to be less formal, and synagogues to replace organ with piano or guitar accompaniment. As the cantor and composer Jeff Klepper explains:

> **"**We took Reform war-horse melodies and played them on guitar. That was part of the revolution. Which means we stripped them of their choral music, for instance the [Isadore] Freed Hassidic 'Mi Chamocha,' which was a Hassidic melody, or quasi-Hassidic. We didn't have an organ in the woods, there was no place to plug it in and you couldn't have a piano because a piano was too big to shlep, and you didn't have Casio keyboards. Since services were in the woods, in a little clearing in the woods a guitar was used. It was portable, it was mellifluous, it was rhythmic…Thus, the creation of new liturgy was based on need and on the desire for an aesthetically satisfying musical style that was participatory and playable on guitar…keyboard falls out of favor because organs are the symbols of the Reform they are running away from, the pre-ethnic Reform. Guitar becomes the instrument of choice" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 117-118).

Another staple of "Modern Reform" Judaism is its emphasis on congregational participation. As Kligman states: "Worship is seen more and more as belonging to the people, and demanding, therefore, an engaging musical style that evokes their active participation…[thus], most Reform cantors and composers of music for the synagogue have learned to synthesize the folk and artistic styles and combine them with traditional chants" (Kligman, *Contemporary Jewish Music in America*, 120). "Modern Reform" services are focused on congregational inclusivity, accessibility, and participation, while rediscovering the uniquely "exotic / ethnic" sound. In short, if Classical Reform was concerned with how the Christian world would view Jewish worship, then "Modern Reform" was concerned with reinstating traditional Jewish worship practices while fusing it with contemporary Jewish music.

PART II: THE LIFE & MUSIC OF MEIR FINKELSTEIN

CHAPTER IV: CHAZZANUT & ORTHODOX JUDAISM

For Meir Finkelstein, music and Judaism were intertwined at an early age. Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish household in London, song was part of daily life. The Finkelsteins sang during their morning, afternoon, and evening prayers, after each meal, when they attended synagogue, and for the pure joy of it. This liturgical musical influence was even more prominent since his father, Zvi, was the cantor at their synagogue. Zvi grew up in Romania in an Ultra-Orthodox, *Vizhntiz* Chassidic household where he attended yeshiva. His first language was Romanian, but he also spoke fluent Yiddish and Hungarian. During World War II (when he was about 18 years old), Zvi he spent four years working in forced labor camps and salt mines in the Carpathian Mountains of Transylvania. After being liberated, Zvi made his way by ship to Palestine in 1946 where he fought with the *Haganah*[15] in Israel's War of Independence. Residing in Israel thereafter, he worked as a carpenter—a skill he acquired during forced labor in Holocaust.

In 1947, while performing carpentry work at a nearby home, a woman came to the window, captivated by the alluring lyric baritone voice she heard singing. Entranced, she resolved that the man singing, Zvi, would become her husband. Shortly thereafter, Tzipporah (Phyllis in English) Wools, a London native who moved to Israel when she was

[15] "The Haganah was the underground military organization of the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael from 1920 to 1948" ("Pre-State Israel (Palestine/Eretz Israel)," Pre-State Israel (Palestine/Eretz Israel) Table of Contents, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pre-state-israel).

eight years old, and Zvi Finkelstein were married. Drawn to music, he studied at the Conservatoire of Isaac Mann in Tel Aviv and led services each Shabbat at the Great Synagogue in Haifa. Having grown up in a rather isolated Jewish community, he was sheltered from the outside world and religiously pious. As such, devout prayer was an integral part of Zvi's daily life. This, coupled with his innate musical ability, made the cantorate a natural fit, but in newly founded Israel, the chazzan was a voluntary role, not a professional one.

Growing up, Aryeh Finklestein (again, he prefers this spelling which differs from Meir's), Zvi and Tzipporah's eldest child, recalls that though they were Modern Orthodox outside their house, but that inside the house much of their rituals and approaches to liturgy were Chassidic. Each Shabbat they did *shneim mikrah v'echad targum* (the recitation of each verse of the Torah's weekly *parashah* twice and then the reading of the Aramaic translation once) before they walked to synagogue. Zvi taught his children the late-rabbinic *Midrash Tachuma* was Zvi's and taught them to memorize one page of Talmud each week. Aryeh fondly remembers their father telling them stories about the Baal Shem Tov—the Jewish mystic and founder of Chassidism—before bed. In this way, Zvi's *Vizhnitz Chassidism* was very influential in their upbringing.

According to Finkelstein, one Shabbat, a visitor from England heard his father singing in *shul* and asked him to return to London with him to lead High Holiday services at his congregation. Zvi accepted this offer and travelled to London shortly thereafter. His visit was well-received and so the congregation, Yavneh Synagogue in London, offered him the full-time cantorial position which he accepted (and where he was employed for the next four years), leaving his family behind in Israel for one year while he earned money

for a home and their passage to England. Meir was four years old and Aryeh seven when they migrated from Petach Tikvah to London in 1955 (his younger siblings, Betzalel and Esther weren't born for another six and eleven years, respectively).

Finkelstein's older brother, Aryeh, began singing with his father in synagogue at age seven and it was not long before Meir followed in their footsteps. Together, they formed a trio of Finkelstein cantors. His father constantly improvised and composed cantorial recitatives and as a young child, Finkelstein would harmonize. He was never formally taught how to harmonize, the rules of music theory, or the Jewish modes—he just had an ear for it. It quickly became evident to the family and those in the Jewish London community that Meir was musically gifted, his brother Aryeh, even referring to him in our interviews as a child prodigy and comparing his musical gift to that Mozart. He taught himself to play the accordion and on his eighth birthday was gifted an old, worn upright piano which they placed in the corner of their kitchen. Immediately, Finkelstein sat down at the piano and inexplicably began to play *Hatikvah*. The eight-year-old who had never seen or touched a piano before began playing melodies his father was singing! At first, he only played the right hand, but he quickly adapted, adding the left hand as well, and creating complex harmonies for his father's compositions. At home, the Finkelstein's had a record player and together they listened to recordings of great American Orthodox cantors such as Yossele Rosenblatt and Moshe Koussevitzky. By age ten, Finkelstein had memorized and could mimic every track on those records with astounding accuracy and prowess.

In 1960, the Finkelstein family moved to Glasgow, Scotland, for his father to take a new cantorial position at the Great Central Synagogue. At age nine, Finkelstein started

attending school in the morning at the Bella Houston Academy and Yeshiva in the afternoons at the Glasgow Yeshiva. At his new synagogue, Zvi Finkelstein formed an all-male children's choir. In just a few short years, Zvi realized that his son could accompany him on piano when they practiced cantorial recitatives outside of the synagogue, coming up with complex, sophisticated chords. Meir did all of this by ear: without sheet music, piano training, or any formal music education. In 1964, at the age of 13-years-old, Finkelstein made his first professional recording. He, along with his brother Aryeh, were featured on their father's record of cantorial and Israeli music, *The Cantor and His Sons*, that was recorded in Glasgow with the Fontana record label and distributed by its US subsidiary, Mercury Records.

Only a year later, at age fourteen, that an Orthodox congregation in Glasgow, Pollokshields Synagogue, hired Finkelstein to be their cantor, making him the youngest cantor in Europe. After serving there for two years, at age 16, he moved away from his family in Glasgow and relocated to Newcastle upon Tyne, to accept a cantorial position at Jesmond Hebrew Congregation (nearly 200 miles away). Then at 18, he was appointed the cantor of one of London's most prestigious synagogues, Golders Green Synagogue, where he served until the age of 22 when he accepted his first position in the United States.

These early years of Finkelstein's life were profoundly impactful, first exposing him to the world of chazzanut (traditional liturgical music) and prayer. His Orthodox upbringing and his training and collaboration with his father and brother were the basis of his future musical and cantorial career. Even when Finkelstein accepted his first cantorial position at a Conservative synagogue in the U.S. (Beth Hillel Congregation of Wilmette, Illinois) and began formally transitioning to Conservative Judaism himself, his cantorial

style retained core elements of the Eastern European Orthodox cantorial style and was later cloaked within his liturgical compositions. One such example of this phenomenon is Finkelstein's setting of the iconic High Holiday prayer "*Hin'ni"*. A musical analysis of this piece reveals that it possesses both "traditional" and innovative facets. The influence of chazzanut on this composition is best appreciated in measures 1-22 which I have excerpted for reference.

Set for four-part choir and organ or piano accompaniment, this piece starts in at the bottom of the Cm scale (though it was also published in Dm), allowing it to sound modest and humble before G-d as the cantor says "*hin'ni*," I am here, three times consecutively. The runs in measures 7 and 8 occur on the words "*nirash v'nifchad*," (to be in turmoil and fearful). With these emotional words, Finkelstein transitions into the classic *Magen Avot* mode, using this "scale" to reflect the fear and trepidation expressed in the text. His word painting continues in measure 13 on the words "*bati la'amod*," (I have come here to stand [before G-d]) jumping up a 5th so that the soloist's voice moves vertically, emulating their limbs as they stand before G-d. Finkelstein favors using a 12/8 or 9/8 meter so that he can stress the words before the bar line. He sustains the F in the accompaniment, providing the tonal support that would be given by *meshorerim* (male choral back-up singers)[16] in an

[16] "Among the most intriguing aspects of historical Ashkenaz *chazzanut* is the role of the *m'shor'rim*, singers who assisted the *chazzan* in the execution of portions of the synagogue repertory. Perhaps the most common function of the *m'shor'rim* is to fill in a few beats where there are rests in the melody between phrases. Although the return of the *chazzan* is not explicitly indicated, it is suggested by the reappearance of the melodic line, often in the upper register. The temporal filler is similar to the harmonic filler. Both fill the space of a small number of beats between phrases. In most cases, neither is harmonically essential, since both tend to sustain the harmony that is sounding at the time of their entrance; yet they are harmonically distinct. The harmonic filler enters on a dominant harmony and requires a resolution, which is made by the *chazzan*" (Katz, *A*

Orthodox setting. Then, at "*Yisrael"* (Israel) he switches into the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode in measure 16—a common Ashkenazic technique but embellished with a jazzy chord underneath for harmonization. This is something Finkelstein does frequently: writes a classic Ashkenazic cantorial phrase but adds his own unique flair with the harmonization. He chooses to repeat the phrase "*amcha yisrael"* (your people Israel), adding to the building drama and suspense of the piece.

In measure 18, the Fm7 chord includes an augmented interval, further contributing to the modal sound. He then moves to a G major chord in the scale of *Ahavah Rabbah*. In measure 19 there is a recitation tone, D, in the coloratura which is a traditional Ashkenazi cadence. The first beat of measure 19 is G major but is followed by a G diminished 7 chord on "*asher shelachuni" (*they who sent me). Then, the penultimate syllable of "*shelachuni"* is C7, and last syllable is Fm, departing from traditional chazzanut. He uses harmonic dissonance at the end of measure 19 to go beyond the text into musical *midrash* (exegesis)—emphasizing the challenge for the chazzan to represent the congregation before G-d.

In measure 22, Finkelstein adds a Cm as the text says "*v'af al pi"* (and despite this) expressing a timid and humble disposition in the presence of G-d, "s*heeini chedai"* (that I am not worthy), and then quickly shifting to major to conclude the section on a hopeful note. The piano shifts tonalities and echoes the cantor throughout. As Finkelstein's friend, colleague, and fellow composer, Stephen Glass said, this music is something special…it has the "Finkelstein Factor". "[He] uses harmonies to convert emotional content and

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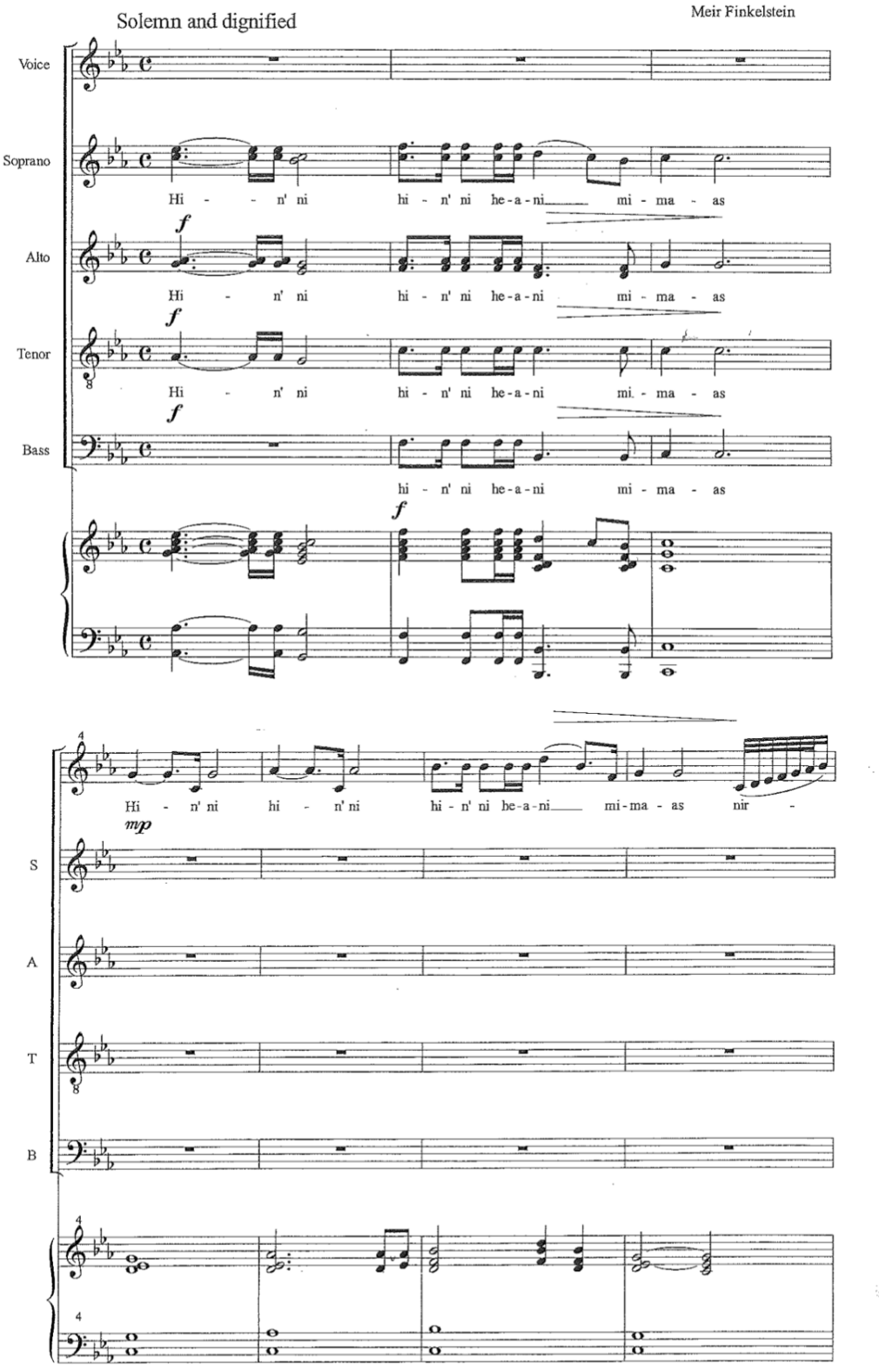
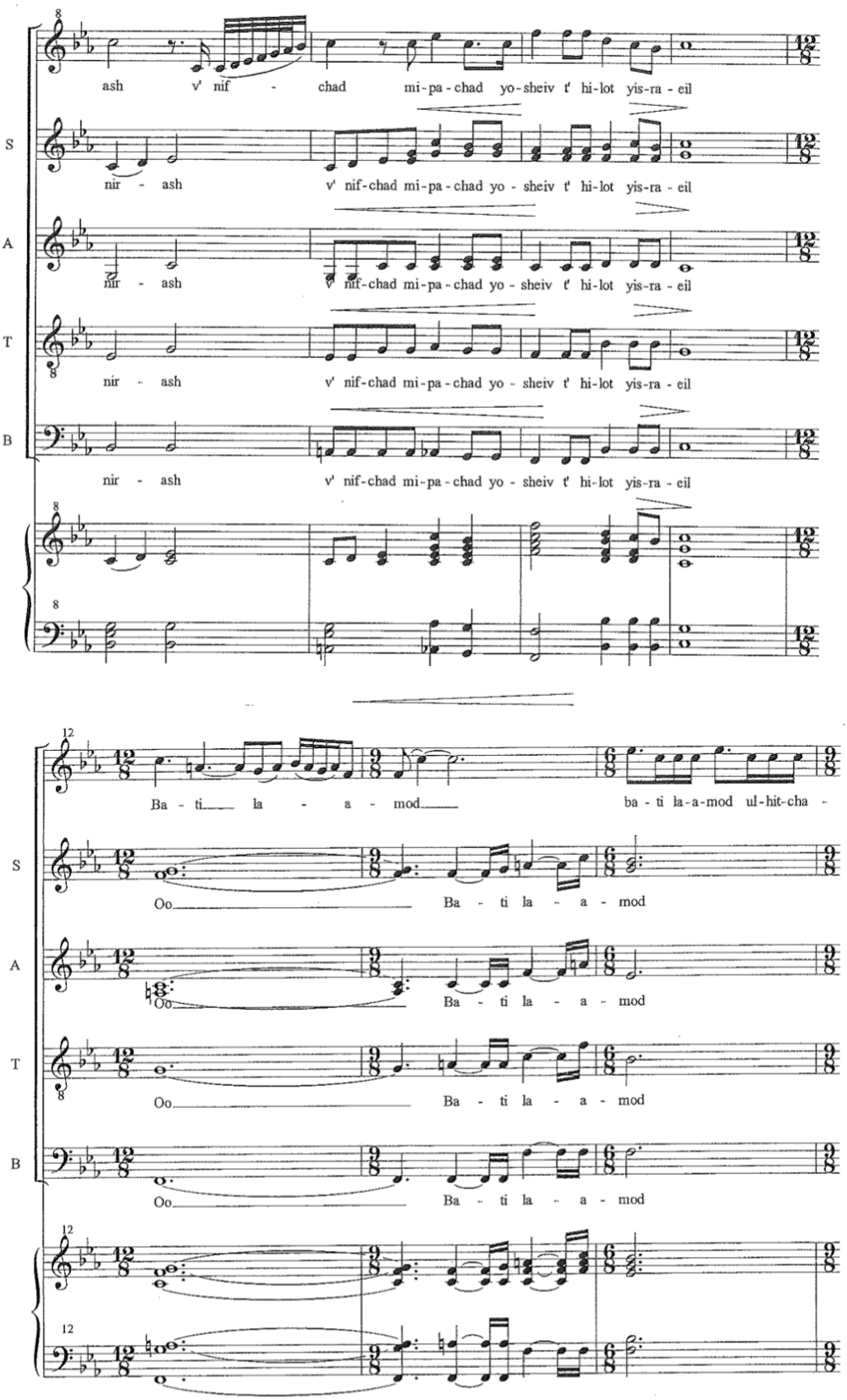
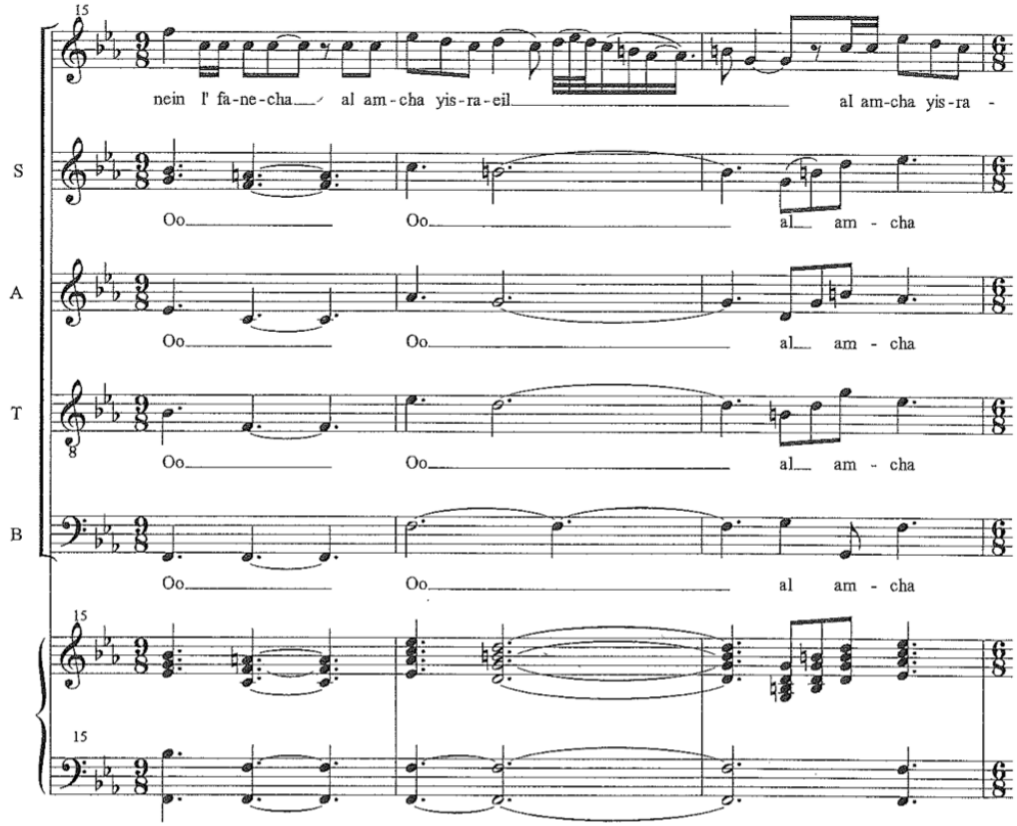
Prolegomenon to the Study of Performance Practice of Synagogue Music Involving M'shor'rim, 35).

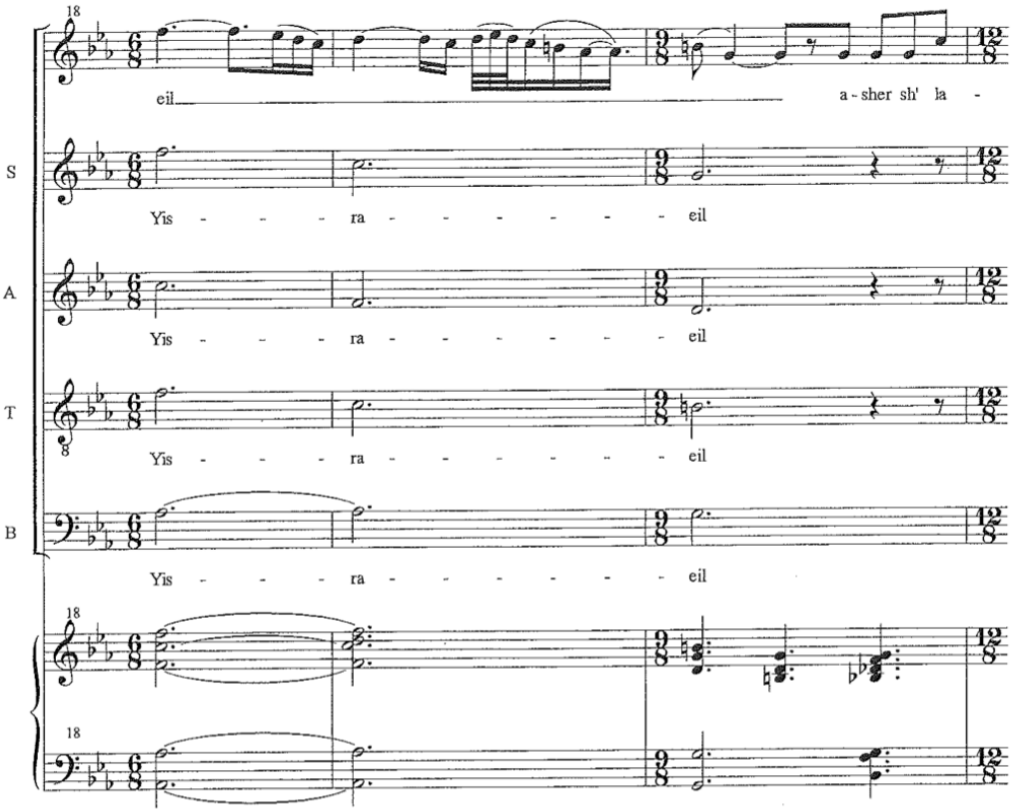
deepen the meaning of words." It is significant to note that while Finkelstein did eliminate some of the original liturgical text found in an Orthodox *siddur*, the music he composed needed to reflect the ideals and content of the Conservative prayerbook*, Sim Shalom*. Even so, he is able to express the full complexity, tenor, and intention of this text.

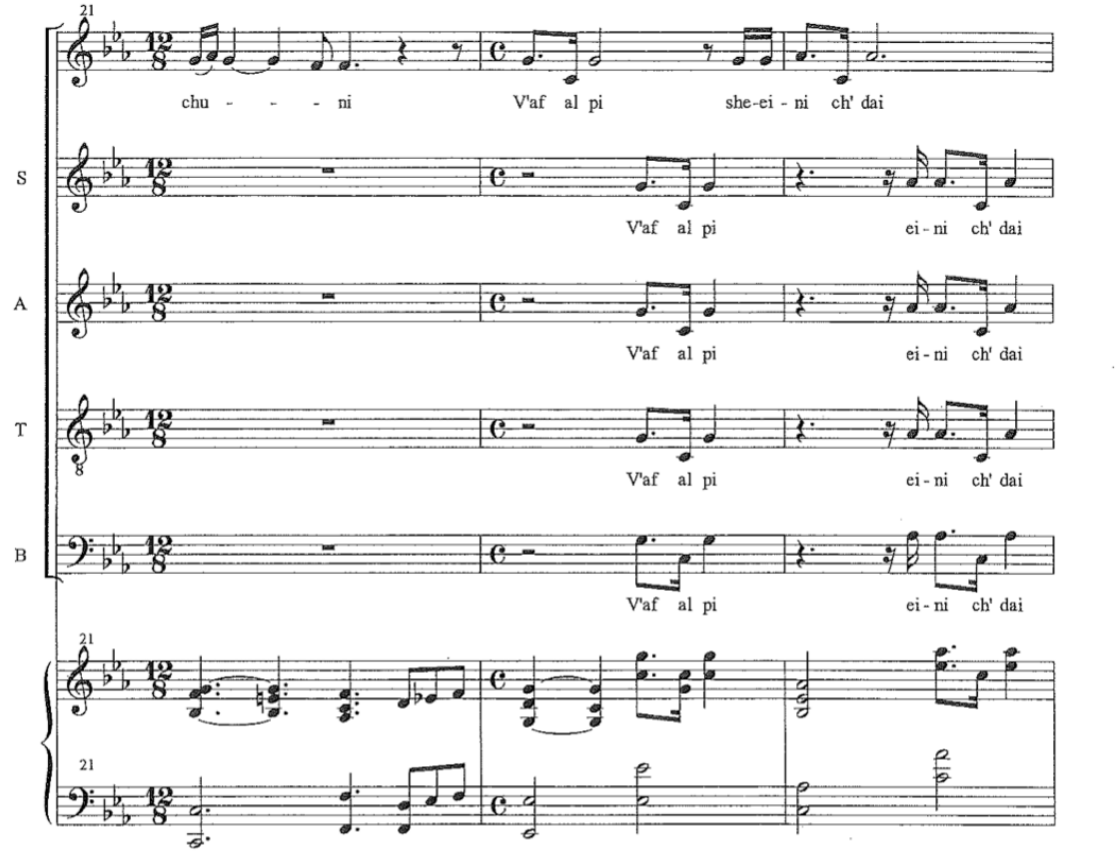
Hin'ni


Solemn and dignified
Meir Finkelstein
Voice
Soprano
Hi - - n' ni hi - n' ni he-a-ni mi - ma - as
Alto
Hi - n' ni hi - n' ni he-a-ni mi - ma - as
Tenor
Hi - n' ni hi - n' ni he-a-ni mi. - ma - as
Bass
hi - n' ni he-a-ni mi - ma - as
Hi - n' ni hi - n' ni hi - n' ni he-a-ni mi-ma - as nir -
S
A
T
B


ash v' nif - chad mi-pa-chad yo-sheiv t' hi-lot yis-ra-eil
S
nir - ash v' nif-chad mi-pa-chad yo - sheiv t' hi-lot yis-ra-eil
A
nir - ash v' nif-chad mi-pa-chad yo - sheiv t' hi-lot yis-ra-eil
T
nir - ash v' nif-chad mi-pa-chad yo - sheiv t' hi-lot yis-ra-eil
B
nir - ash v' nif-chad mi-pa-chad yo - sheiv t' hi-lot yis-ra-eil
Ba - ti la - a - mod ba - ti la-a-mod ul-hit-cha -
S
Oo Ba - ti la - a - mod
A
Oo Ba - ti la - a - mod
T
Oo Ba - ti la - a - mod
B
Oo Ba - ti la - a - mod


15
nein l' fa-ne-cha al am-cha yis-ra-eil al am-cha yis-ra -
S
Oo Oo al am - cha
A
Oo Oo al am - cha
T
Oo Oo al am - cha
B
Oo Oo al am - cha


18
eil a-sher sh' la -
S
Yis - - - ra - - - - - - - eil
A
Yis - - - ra - - - - - - - eil
T
Yis - - - ra - - - - - - - eil
B
Yis - - - ra - - - - - - - eil



End of music excerpt.

GLASGOW, 1962. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: MEIR, TZIPPORAH, BEZALEL, ZVI, AND ARYEH FINKELSTEIN.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MEIR FINKELSTEIN

MEIR FINKELSTEIN, AGE 14.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MEIR FINKELSTEIN.

INDUCTION OF REV. MEIR FINKELSTEIN AT GOLDERS GREEN SYNAGOGUE IN LONDON. NOVEMBER 14, 1970.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MEIR FINKELSTEIN.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE EXCERPT, COURTESY OF MEIR FINKELSTEIN.

Nearly a thousand congregants joined celebrations at the Golders Green Synagogue, Dunstan Road, on Saturday when 19-year-old Meir Finkelstein was inducted as the new Reader.

Meir was appointed in August to replace the Rev. M. Taschlicky, who had reached retiring age.

In his induction sermon the minister, Rabbi Dr. Eugene Newman, said it was a great day in the life of the congregation.

"The last induction of a Reader here took place 36 years ago when the Rev. Taschlicky — a great and famous cantor — came," he said. The office of Reader had always been regarded as an honoured position in the community.

A good Reader needed three fundamental qualities — wisdom, musical knowledge and soul.

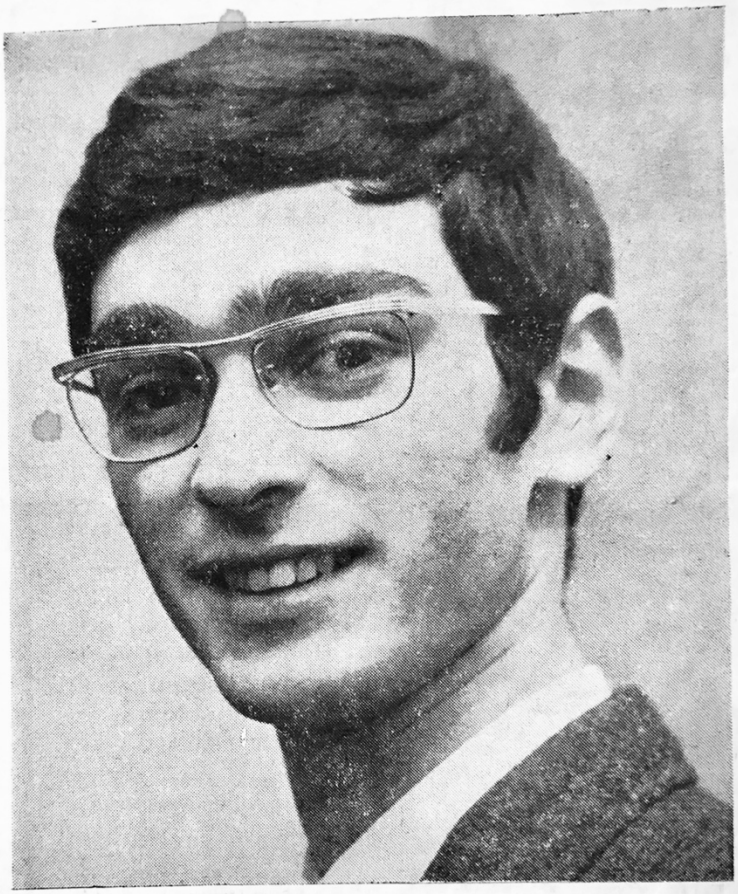
MUSICAL

To Meir he said: "God blessed you with a great gift. You possess a sweet, clear and resonant voice. You possess natural cantoral ability and you are very musical.

"You have made an excellent beginning and I hope you will continue in the same spirit.

"If you do I feel sure that you will be the shining light among the younger generation of cantors in England."

Meir's appointment caused some comment at the time since he was one of the youngest men ever to have been chosen by such a large and important London community.



MEIR FINKELSTEIN . . . he possesses natural cantoral ability.

Meir's father and elder brother, who both have their own congregations, were in Golders Green on Saturday to join in the celebrations.

During the afternoon about 150 people enjoyed a meal (herring and beer) in the adjoining hall. Rabbi Sidney Silberg, a former colleague of Meir in Newcastle, spoke.

And 300 members and friends went to a recital in the evening by the three Finkelstein cantors.

CHAPTER V: CLASSICAL MUSIC & CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

While cantorial music and chazzanut served as the foundation for Finkelstein's music education, classical music has perhaps had an even more profound influence on his musical development. In his words, classical music "opened the floodgates" to a whole new world, Finkelstein said, and it helped him to find and develop his most authentic self. Though his father, Zvi, was not exposed to non-Jewish culture as a child, his mother Tzipporah, having grown up in a more liberal Jewish household, loved classical music and had records of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and even Broadway classics like "My Fair Lady" and "Carousel" (she became more observant upon her marriage to Zvi). Though quite young at the time, Finkelstein remembers listening to records of classical music with his grandmother and aunt who lived across the street from them in Petach Tikvah. Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto II became a family favorite and Finkelstein later recognized it as having "a huge influence in his compositions". Once the Finkelstein family moved to England, Zvi befriended a Jewish refugee from Hungary, named Ernest Levy,[17] who resettled in England. Finkelstein has described Levy as being one of the most significant people in his life. Levy was a fixture of the Finkelsteins' Shabbat table every week, and Meir (despite the vast age difference) formed a strong bond over their shared love of music. Levy was intimately familiar with opera and classical music, more broadly, so after Shabbat dinner, Finkelstein would walk him home as Levy shared his knowledge of the variety of music he was exposed to, ranging from symphonies to sonatas, arias, and

[17] The Newsroom, "Rev Ernest Levy," The Scotsman (The Scotsman, August 27, 2009), https://www.scotsman.com/news/obituaries/rev-ernest-levy-2443454.

German lieder. Ironically, even though Levy ignited Finkelstein's passion for secular music, the Finkelstein family helped to propel Levy's career in the cantorate.

Finkelstein's exposure to and love of classical music intensified when he left his family for the first time at age 16. In order to accept the position as the cantor at Jesmond Hebrew Congregation, he relocated to Newcastle while his family remained in Glasgow and continued his high school studies at the local secular school. Finkelstein amusingly recalls how when he was asked to officiate at his first funeral, he wrote a note to his teacher excusing himself from class, as he had no guardian present to do so on his behalf. In Newcastle, Finkelstein joined his high school's choir for the first time and sang music that would forever change him, including Handel's "Messiah," which became the inspiration for his cantata, *Liberation*, later in life.

Finkelstein's exposure to classical, non-Jewish music was accompanied by his awareness of Jewish heterodoxy. In Newcastle, Finkelstein resided in an apartment next to the synagogue with a non-observant Jewish engineer nearly twice his age: Mike Jacobs. Finkelstein describes Jacobs as being pivotal in his intellectual and theological development, by challenging his assumptions and engaging him in conversations about faith, identity, Jewish practice, and science. These discussions were, in part, prompted by the practical need to negotiate the conflicting demands and lifestyles of an Orthodox and secular Jew living together.

During our interviews, Finkelstein recalled a transformational experience that opened pandora's box, as it were. One morning, Jacobs sat in the kitchen eating a crumpet (an English pastry somewhere between a muffin and a pancake) and offered to share it with Finkelstein. Finkelstein declined, reflexively, since it was not kosher by his family and

Orthodox synagogue standards. But Jacobs, ever curious, asked why? What caused the crumpet to be unkosher? Finkelstein proceeded to read the ingredients: flower, yeast, milk, and sugar. While none of these ingredients were innately unkosher, Finkelstein could not help but insist that he was not allowed to eat it. After a lengthy discussion, curiosity overtook him, and Finkelstein hesitantly tasted his first bite of crumpet. Finkelstein then breathed a sigh of relief, realizing that nothing could happen to him for breaking this *mitzvah* (commandment). From that moment on, Finkelstein allowed himself to ask questions of faith and science. For the first time in his life, Finkelstein realized that dogmatically adhering to a rule that he couldn't reasonably understand was unfulfilling. He yearned for more knowledge and desired logical explanations for long-held Jewish traditions.

Growing up, Finkelstein would adhere to various religious practices not necessarily because he believed in their merit, but because that was the culture of the community in which he raised. Rather than risk ostracization, this community refrained from questioning the status quo. Some of these practices included keeping strict kosher—not only kosher ingredients but refraining from eating any food prepared outside of the home that didn't come from a kosher kitchen (and kosher restaurants were virtually non-existent); observing Shabbat by refraining from the use of fire, electricity, travel, or financial transactions (all of which would be performed by the family's *shabbos goy),*[18] eating festive meals with family, and attending synagogue. Being suddenly thrust into adulthood at the young age of

[18] A *shabbos goy* is a non-Jew who performs certain activities that Jewish religious law (*halacha*) prohibits a Jew from doing on Shabbat.

16—living away from family, being self-sufficient, and financially independent—Finkelstein was no longer bound by the norms of his community. Instead, he had the opportunity to truly explore what Judaism meant to him, how he wanted to observe it, how he would interact with the secular world going forward, and how this could open the door to new, fulfilling musical expressions.

Just two years later, when Finkelstein was asked to be the chazzan of Golders Green Synagogue in London, he accepted the position on the condition that he could attend the Royal College of Music simultaneously, obtaining his first formal musical training. With an overwhelming majority vote, he became the new cantor (or reverend/reader as they called him). An announcement, in October 1970, from the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, a local Jewish newspaper reads:

> "The Golders Green Synagogue has appointed 18-year-old Rev. Meir Finkelstein as reader. Eighty-five-year-old Rev. Isaac Livingstone, the congregation's emeritus minister, said that has he been consulted he would have advised appointing someone older as a more experienced person was needed. The congregation elected Mr. Finkelstein by 76 votes to ten and its minister, Rabbi Dr. Eugene Newman, stated that he felt the new reader would carry out his duties with ability and dignity. Mr. Finkelstein was formerly reader of the Jesmond Hebrew Congregation, Newcastle and the Pollokshields Synagogue, Glasgow" (Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, October, 1970, 3).

Upon learning of Finkelstein's appointment as cantor of Golders Green Synagogue in the paper, a man named William Morrison—a successful London real estate developer—contacted him. Finkelstein recalls meeting him "outside the Royal College of Music, and as he (Morrison) got out of his chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce, he said he remembered my Dad, Aryeh and myself in Glasgow. He also told me that he was previously unaware of any cantor continuing their musical studies at the RCM. Since Morrison studied there as a

young man, he wanted to pay for all of my tuition and living expenses." As a result, Morrison became Finkelstein's benefactor. At the Royal College of Music, Finkelstein studied voice, piano, and composition, earning him an ARCM diploma (Associate of Royal College of Music), and further exposing him to the world of classical music and opera. He was particularly inspired by the music of Mozart, Verdi, and Fauré when writing his own fully orchestrated works.

During his studies, Finkelstein met a fellow cantor, Johnny Gluck.[19] Gluck hosted a dinner party where Finkelstein met Rabbi David Lincoln, an Orthodox, London native who immigrated to the U.S. and worked at a Conservative synagogue in Chicago. On the spot, Lincoln offered Gluck the position of cantor at his congregation, but uncomfortable with the prospect of working for a more liberal community, Gluck declined the offer, recommending Finkelstein instead. After completing his studies at the Royal College of Music and graduating with honors, Finkelstein accepted the position and moved to the United States with his new wife, Leba. The announcement in the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain's newsletter read:

> "Twenty-two-year-old Rev. Meir Finkelstein, reader of the Golders Green Synagogue for the past three years, has left to become cantor of the Beth Hillel Conservative Congregation in Chicago. Before his departure he married Leba Nemeth, daughter of Rabbi Morris Nemeth, minister of the New West End Synagogue, Bayswater" (Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, March 1974, 4).

By the young age of twenty-two, an already seasoned chazzan, having worked at three

[19] "Johnny Gluck," geoffreyshisler.com, December 3, 2012, https://geoffreyshisler.com/biographies-2/johnny-gluck/.

different congregations across Scotland and England, an accomplished musician, and newlywed, Finkelstein made the life altering decision to start anew in North America—a decision that would transform him culturally, theologically, and musically.

Living in Chicago, Finkelstein was exposed to an array of secular music and more progressive branches of Judaism. Previously unexposed to Conservative Judaism, he entered his new community with an open and curious mind. While at Beth Hillel Congregation, where he worked from 1974-1978, Finkelstein had experiences that impacted his understanding of Jewish law, traditions, and practices. As a result of his evolving ideology and acculturation, he made adaptations to his Jewish practice, such as driving a car to and from synagogue on Shabbat and the *chagim* (festivals)—a practical sensibility for living in the harsh, freezing conditions of Illinois winters—and eating vegetarian cuisine out in non-Kosher restaurants.

Finkelstein also became accustomed to the Conservative liturgy. Back in the U.K. the primary *siddur* used in his Orthodox congregations was the *Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire*, the prayerbook authorized by the chief rabbinate of the United Kingdom (otherwise known as *Singer's Siddur*), as well as Samuel Alman's "Blue Book," *The Voice of Prayer & Praise*, both of which were created by the United Synagogue and frequently used throughout Orthodox synagogues in the United Kingdom. At Beth Hillel Congregation, he needed to familiarize himself with the American Conservative movement's prayerbook, *Sim Shalom*. These *siddurim* differ in terms of content, length, and language. Leaders of the Conservative movement agreed to remove liturgy that espoused ideals they did not support as a denomination, such as the concept of a human Messiah, the hope for a rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, the

return animal sacrifice, and Jewish Particularism.[20] Instead, they tried to create a *siddur* that reflected the community's desire for a Messianic age, peace in the Land of Israel, and Universalism. They also shortened the service by eliminating repetitions in the text and made the liturgy more egalitarian in language.

Though Beth Hillel Congregation was Orthodox leaning / "Conservadox," the services were significantly shorter than those to which Finkelstein was accustomed. Due to these excisions in the Conservative liturgy, Finkelstein could not chant the prayers by rote. He realized that he needed to be more thoughtful about the words he was speaking and the sentiments he was expressing. At Beth Hillel (like most Conservative congregations), the services were not chanted uninterrupted anymore; now, the cantor and

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[20] "It is instructive to note that within Judaism there have always been Universalistic and Particularistic dimensions, and this dual approach to the world finds expression in the concept of covenant (*brit*) that appears at the very beginning of the Bible. This notion maintains that God stands in relationship with all people. To be sure, the Bible tells of the unique covenant God made with Abraham and the Jewish people in Genesis 15. There the Torah states that God established the "*brit bein ha-betarim* – the covenant between the pieces" with Abraham and his descendants. This particularistic covenant was carried forth over the generations and confirmed by the Jewish people as a whole at Sinai. This covenant assigns the people Israel a special relationship with God. However, in Genesis 9 the concept of covenant appears in relation to Noah and his progeny. There the Torah states that God established a covenant with Noah and his descendants after the Flood and designated the rainbow as the sign of that eternal *brit*. Noah, of course, was not Jewish. Thus, in Sanhedrin 56 the rabbis teach that God established a universal covenant with all humanity through Noah even before a covenant was instituted with the people Israel! The notion of a dual covenant – a covenant between God and all humanity as well as a covenant between God and the Jewish people – serves as a cardinal foundation for Jewish religious beliefs and values" (Elleson, Rabbi David. "Universalism and Particularism: Jewish Teachings on Jewish Obligation." eJewish Philanthropy, May 10, 2014. https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/universalism-and-particularism-jewish-teachings-on-jewish-obligation/).

the rabbi split the responsibility of leading the congregation, and the rabbi added his own remarks and commentaries along the way. Not every prayer was recited in a given service, and there was a strong communal desire for congregational participation in the service. Additionally, at Beth Hillel Congregation, the *minhag* was to utilize the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew liturgy, rather than the Ashkenazic pronunciation that was second nature to Finkelstein. This change was fundamental to the cultural and musical development that helped to form Finkelstein's Jewish identity.

Finkelstein's conservatory training and exposure to liberal interpretations of Judaism helped him to further value the role of education—both religious and secular—and the necessity of passing down knowledge *l'dor vador* (from generation to generation) in order to have an erudite and cultured future generation. These values and the strong classical music education Finkelstein received are all evident in his cantata, *Gates of Righteousness*, which he premiered years later, in 2012. *Gates of Righteousness* (the English translation of *Shaarey Zedek*) was composed while Finkelstein was serving at Conservative synagogue, Congregation Shaarey Zedek in suburban Detroit (from 2006-2013) in honor of the *shul's* 150th anniversary. The cantata was composed for full orchestra and during its premiere was performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conducted by renowned Maestro Leonard Slatkin, and featured Hillel Day School's *Chaverim* Children's Choir, as well as Meir Finkelstein himself as tenor soloist and me, Olivia Brodsky, as soprano soloist. In a Detroit Jewish News special, the writer Karen Couf-Cohen wrote:

> "The first of four movements is built around a recurring theme that is taken from a psalm and set to music. It is titled 'Pitchu Li Shaarey Zedek' (Open for me, the Gates of Righteousness) and aligned with prayers and original poetry by the late Rabbi Morris Adler…A high solo violin introduced the mournful Kaddish melody in the third movement that is dedicated to the

> memory of the congregation's beloved Adler, tragically shot on the bimah Shabbat morning, Feb, 12, 1966…The final movement addresses Shaarey Zedek's pre-eminent role in Conservative Judaism, as Zionist leader, cultural conservator and Jewish educator. It acknowledges the unprecedented mark its members have made as leaders in the areas of business, law, the arts, politics, science and medicine. It speaks to the development of the Hebrew school and the vision of building the future of Shaarey Zedek through the education of its children. 'Al Tikrah Vanayich' ('Do not call them your children, but your builders of the future')—this theme blends into the mesmerizing 'L'Dor Vador,' Finkelstein's most notable liturgical composition. The cantata concludes with the soprano (Olivia Brodsky), tenor (Finkelstein), and chorus recapitulation of the recurring theme 'Pitchu Li' and culminates in a triumphant finale with a bright eye to the future of Shaarey Zedek."[21]

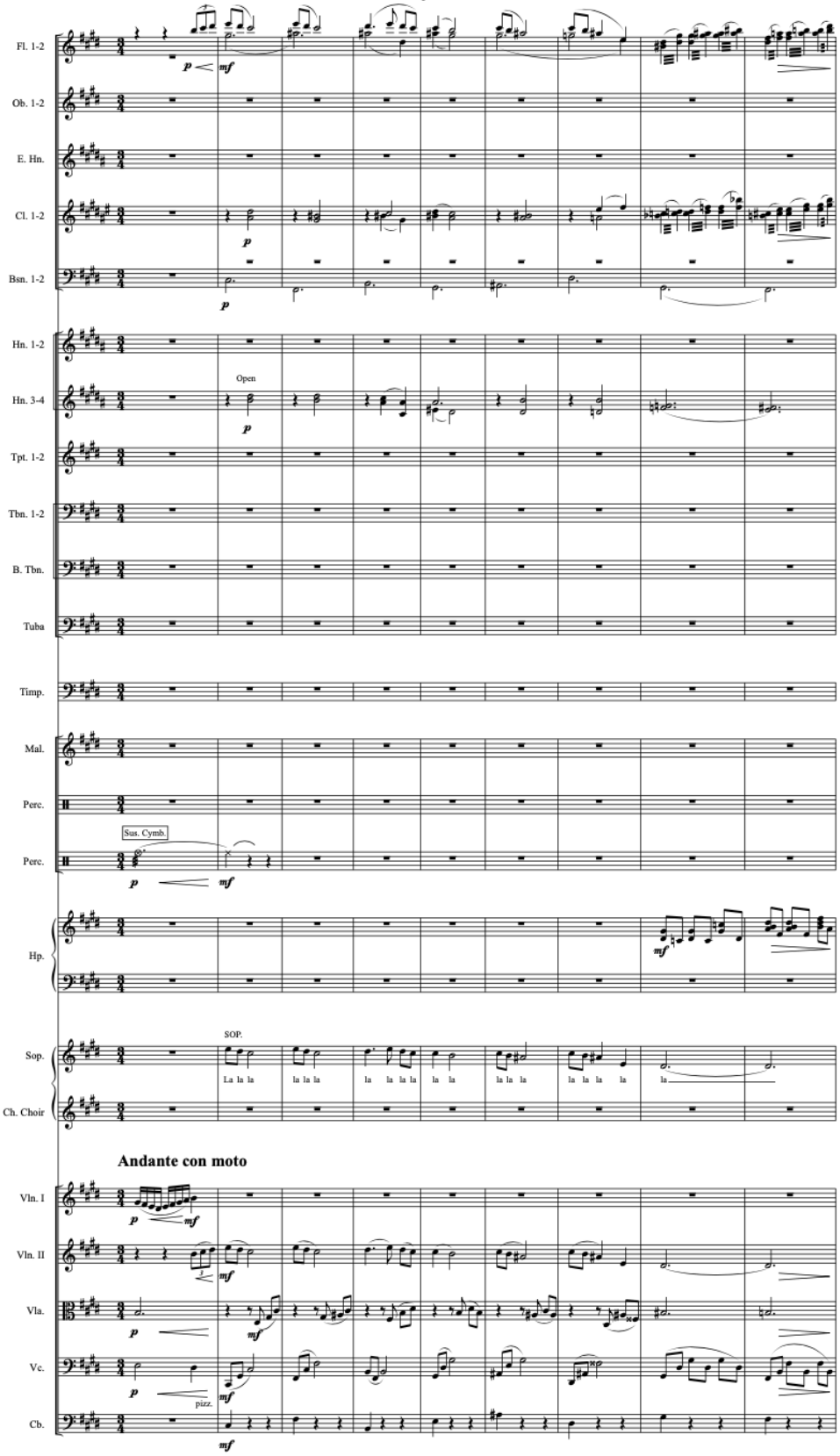
In analyzing an excerpt of this cantata in the fourth and final movement, from measures 1-44, we can hear that the grand orchestration of this piece, "*Al Tikrah Vanayich*", (don't read the text as 'your children', a phrase taken from the well-known Talmudic parable—BT Berachot 64a—about the significance of Jewish education) perfectly illuminates the meaning of the text. The orchestration is bright and ethereal giving it a sense of purity and innocence that is reflective of the children's choir. Beginning with the instrumental sounds of the flute, cymbal, violin I and II, viola, and cello in the relative minor of E (C#m), there are three consecutive notes on the upbeat in violin II, allowing for clear and graceful transition to the soprano's entrance on the syllable "la" in measure two of the vocal line. Then, the clarinets, bassoons, horns III and IV, harp and base enter and the flutes, violin I and II double the melody, supporting the soprano and providing a legato, sweeping sound.

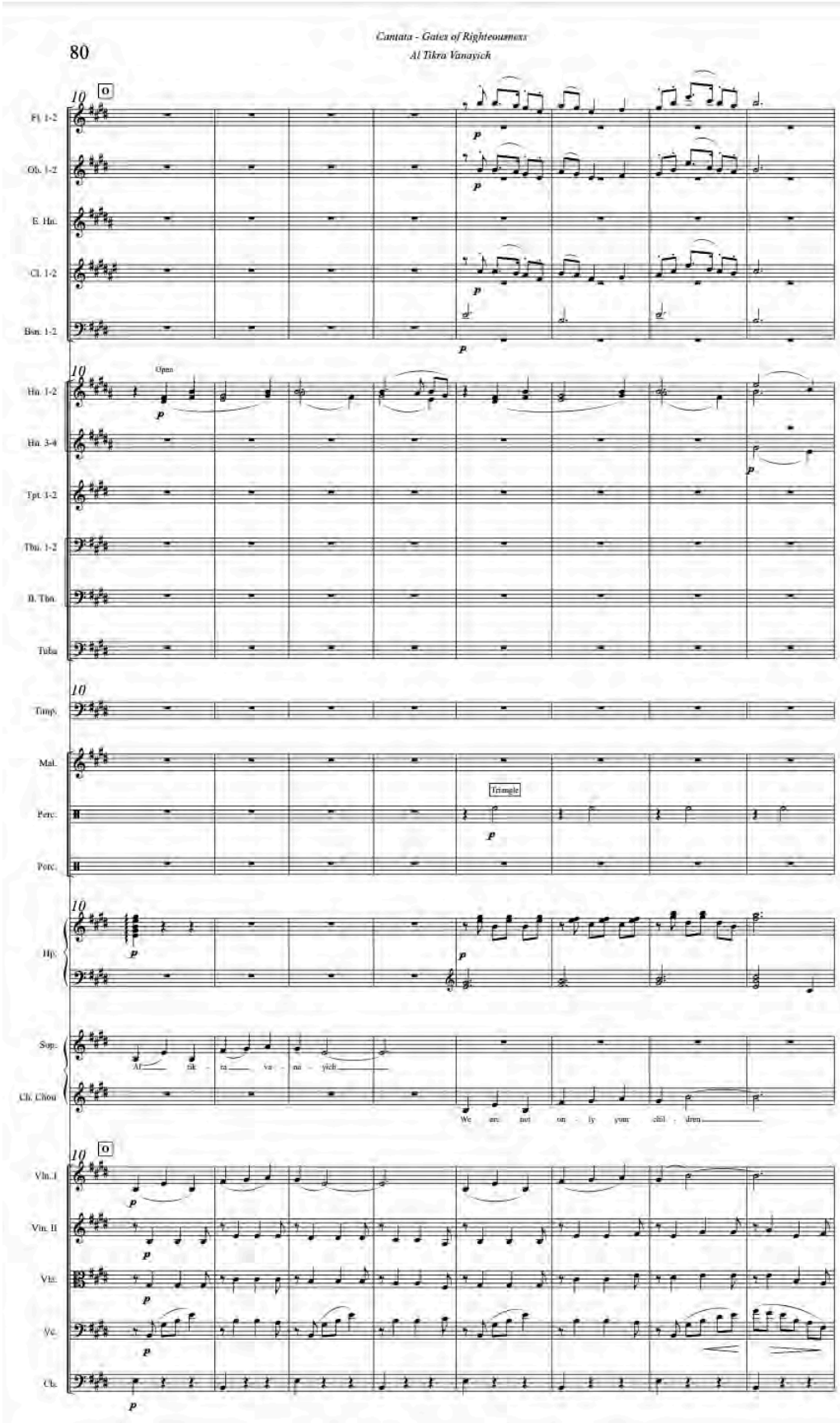
[21] Couf-Cohen, Karen. "Cantor's Cantata," May 31, 2012. https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.2012.05.31.001/8.

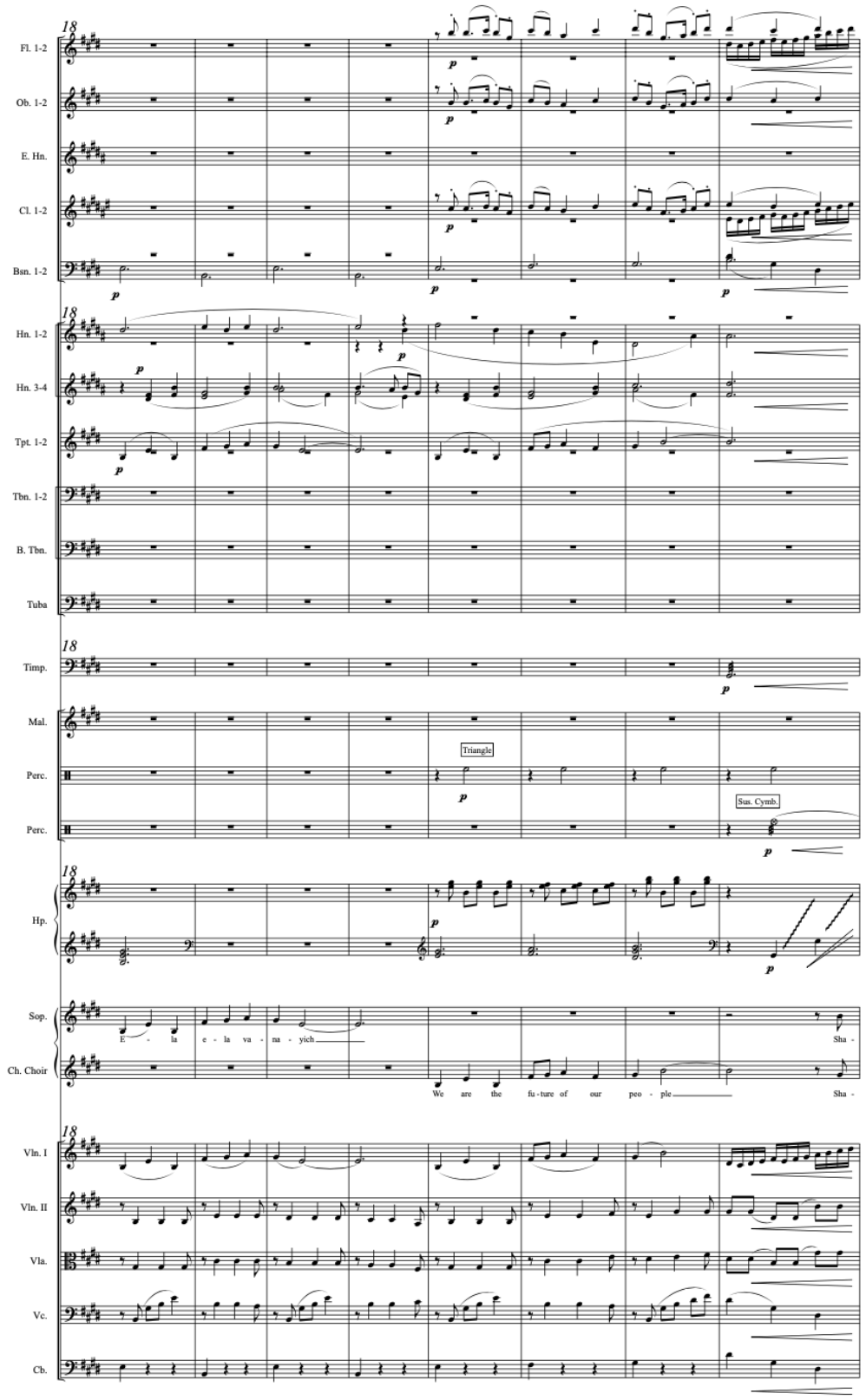
Switching to the home key of E major in measure 10, the soprano line transitions from “la” into the powerful text, “*al tikrah vanayich*,” to which the children’s choir sings responsively in English, “we are not only your children” and passing the melody back to the soprano to declare, “*ela vanayich*”, and the children state, “we are the future of our people.” In measure 10, violin II and viola are written on the off beats while the cello alternates between on and off the beat, making a sound reminiscent of a pulse of heartbeat. The cello gives a little sweep alongside the beats that the harp and cymbal echo while the bass remains steady, playing only the downbeats. The triangle enters on measure 14 along with the voices of the children’s choir, highlighting their purity and innocence. The oboe, flute and clarinet are in unison and are written as staccato, giving the instrumentation a playful sound. Looking ahead at measure 25, the soprano and children sing together, “*shalom rav l’ohavei toratecha v’ein lamo michshol*,” where the tonality shifts in measure 26 to the relative minor. At measure 33, the soprano takes over the melody again with the plea, “and as we dedicate this Sanctuary, may God send us His blessings and grant us a life that’s filled with peace.”

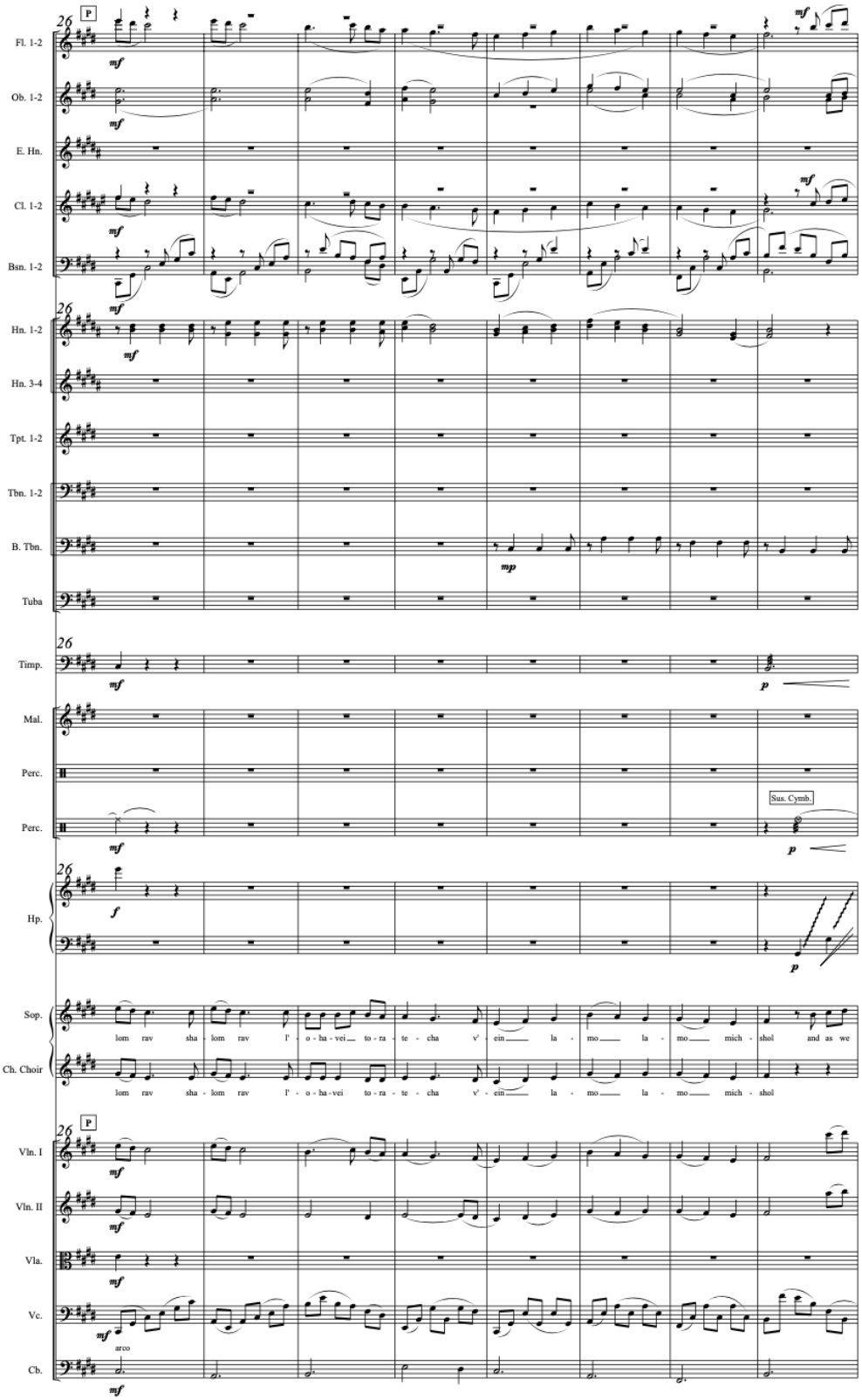
Andante con moto

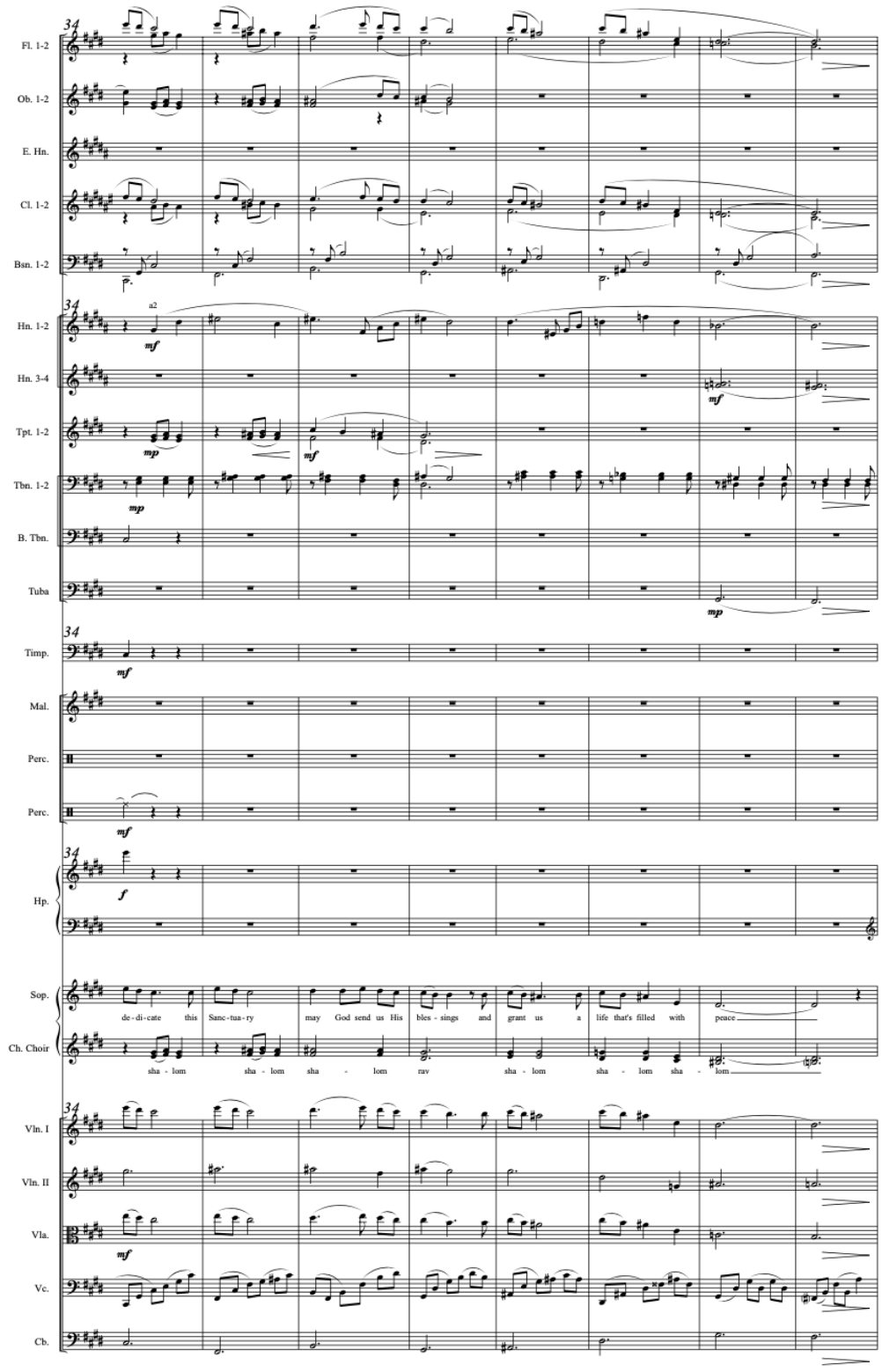
Children's Chorus, Soprano and orchestra



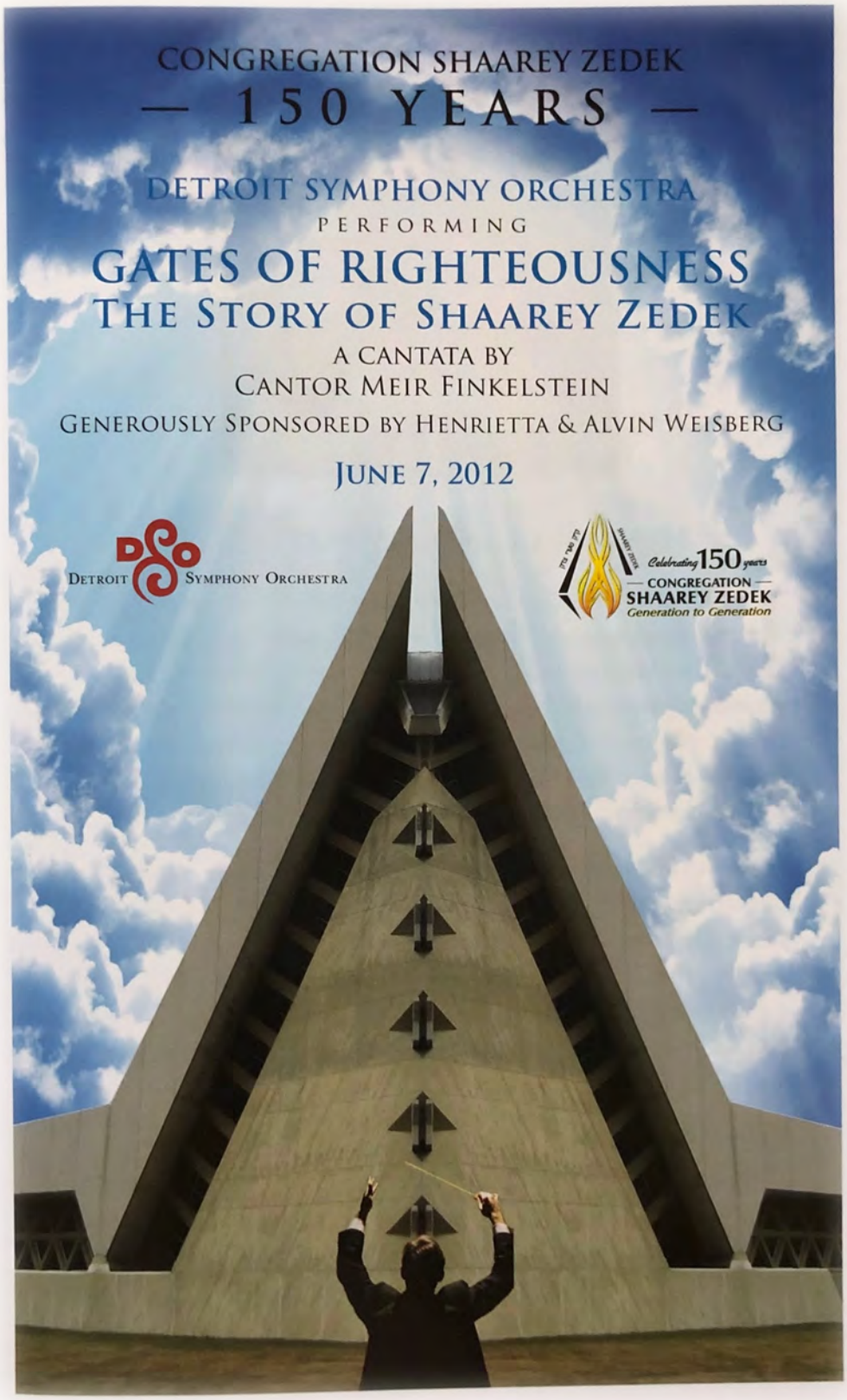

80
Fl. 1-2
Ob. 1-2
E. Hn.
Cl. 1-2
Bsn. 1-2
Open
Hn. 1-2
Hn. 3-4
Tpt. 1-2
Tbn. 1-2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Mal.
Perc.
Triangle
Perc.
Hp.
Sop.
Al tik ra va na yich
Ch. Chou
We are not on ly your chil dren
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


18
Fl. 1-2
Ob. 1-2
E. Hn.
Cl. 1-2
Bsn. 1-2
Hn. 1-2
Hn. 3-4
Tpt. 1-2
Tbn. 1-2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Mal.
Triangle
Perc.
Sus. Cymb.
Perc.
Hp.
Sop.
E - la e - la va - na - yich
Sha -
Ch. Choir
We are the fu - ture of our peo - ple
Sha -
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


26
P
Fl. 1-2
Ob. 1-2
E. Hn.
Cl. 1-2
Bsn. 1-2
Hn. 1-2
Hn. 3-4
Tpt. 1-2
Tbn. 1-2
B. Tbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Mal.
Perc.
Perc.
Sus. Cymb.
Hp.
Sop.
Ch. Choir
lom rav sha - lom rav l' - o - ha - vei to - ra - te - cha v' - ein la - mo la - mo mich - shol and as we
lom rav sha - lom rav l' - o - ha - vei to - ra - te - cha v' - ein la - mo la - mo mich - shol
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
arco
Cb.



End of music excerpt.


CONGREGATION SHAAREY ZEDEK
— 150 YEARS —
DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PERFORMING
GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
THE STORY OF SHAAREY ZEDEK
A CANTATA BY
CANTOR MEIR FINKELSTEIN
GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY HENRIETTA & ALVIN WEISBERG
JUNE 7, 2012
DSO
DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Celebrating 150 years
CONGREGATION
SHAAREY ZEDEK
Generation to Generation

GATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Gates of Righteousness is an original cantata written to celebrate the 150 year history of Congregation Shaarey Zedek through song and narration. The cantata is in four movements and features soprano and tenor soloists, a children's chorus and orchestra. The first movement focuses on the historic move the congregation made in 1962 from the synagogue on Chicago Boulevard to its present location at Bell Road and Eleven Mile.

The second movement recalls the earliest history of Shaarey Zedek, going all the way back to 1861. The congregation's growth necessitated moving to larger premises in 1915, and again in 1932. The fascinating story of baseball legend Hank Greenberg and his relationship to Shaarey Zedek is also highlighted in this second movement.

The tragic murder of Rabbi Morris Adler *(z'l)* in 1966, and the rippling effect it had on the Detroit Jewish community and World Jewry as a whole, dominates the third movement. Cantor Finkelstein has set one of Rabbi Adler's passionate poems, *Shall I Cry Out in Anger?*, to music, and has composed a special setting of the *Kaddish* in Rabbi Adler's memory.

The last movement highlights many of the Rabbis and Cantors that have graced the pulpit of Shaarey Zedek during its long history, and the important roles they have played in the development and success of the congregation. The movement also features the original song, *Al Tikra Vanayich,* which speaks of our children and their roles as future leaders of our beloved synagogue and the Jewish community at large. The *Finale* brings back many of the earlier musical themes, especially *Pitchu Li Sha'arey Zedek – Open For Me The Gates of Righteousness,* as both soloists and children's chorus join in a rousing musical celebration of our wonderful 150 year history!

CHAPTER VI: AMERICAN & ISRAELI CULTURE

Finkelstein encountered an entirely different set of musical traditions while serving as the cantor of Sinai Temple in Westwood, California, a Progressive Conservative congregation where he worked from 1982-1996. At Sinai Temple, Shabbat worship was accompanied by organ and professional choir every week—something that Finkelstein had never previously encountered. Though Sinai Temple was and still remains a Conservative synagogue, there Finkelstein first heard the music of the great American, Classical Reform cantors Max Helfman and Max Janowski—both of whom favored this lush musical accompaniment. In our interview, Finkelstein expressed that, for the first time in his life, while cantor of Sinai Temple, he had the opportunity to write music and have it performed exactly as he envisioned it. He confessed that hearing Helfman's powerful setting of "*Shema Koleinu*," in particular, "opened up a flood gate for me to write meaningful, classy music for the synagogue." Suddenly, Finkelstein was able to merge the cantorial art of his youth with the mastery of classical music. During the next 18 years in LA, Finkelstein homed in on his own vision of cantorial music with instrumental and choral accompaniment, Western harmony, as well as resonances from the classic American songbook, including Broadway, Hollywood, and gospel tradition. While Finkelstein has composed over 150 settings of liturgical music, two of his most predominant works best encapsulate this vision coming to fruition: the Jewish requiem for victims of terror, *Nishmat Tzedek* (Soul of Righteousness) and his first cantata, *Liberation*.

In 1993, Finkelstein was commissioned by friend and colleague Chayim Frenkel—then the cantor of Kehillat Israel in Pacific Palisades, California—to compose new settings for the liturgical passages in the Yizkor service in remembrance of Frenkel's brother, Tzvi,

who died suddenly at the young age of 39, entitled *Nishmat Tzedek* (the righteous soul). The project quickly took on additional elements, as Finkelstein and Frenkel decided that it should also serve as a memorial to victims of terrorist attacks in Israel's first Intifada, which ended the same year they began this project. In an interview with the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, Frenkel stated that "Meir and I realized that…it was important to give these families something that would help them on the road to recovery." To that end, Finkelstein composed three additional movements for what he calls a "choral symphony," including a setting of "*Avinu Shebashamayim*," the prayer for the State of Israel, found today in Jewish prayerbooks of all denominations. While pieces such as "*Mima'amakim"* (out of the depths I called), "*Kaddish*," and "*Eil Malei Rachamim"* are somber in tone, much of the music is optimistic in sound and impact, expressing hope for the future, rather than the sorrow of death.

Since they aspired to have Jewish communities around the world perform the music in *Nishmat Tzedek*, the two cantors also prepared a piano reduction of Finkelstein's score, setting it to piano rather than full orchestra. After its completion, the CD, accompanying book of photographs and poems (including a list of victims in the Intifada terror attacks and sheet music) were sent to the families of each of the victims. At the time, Frenkel said that he saw the music, poetry and artwork of *Nishmat Tzedek* as "very universal in [their] healing powers for those who have suffered loss…the project's power goes beyond the loss that these families have suffered…It's about finding light in darkness."[22]

Finkelstein's first cantata, *Liberation*, was composed as a tribute to the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps. In 1995, the cantata premiered at an

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[22] Jaffe-Gill, Ellen. "Power of Song Gives Hope to Mourners." Jewish Journal, August 28, 2003. https://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/8286/.

extravagant event hosted by Billy Crystal at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles and was performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and the LA Master Chorale. Part of Finkelstein's unique musical gift is his ability to compose quickly, and in his head, before committing it to paper. In total, Finkelstein reported that it only took in a couple of months to write the entire cantata. Finkelstein says that he used diverse musical styles in *Liberation*, ranging from classical to gospel, in order to "express the exhilaration of being liberated and to demonstrate the agony inherent in the struggle for freedom; my goal was to offer inspiration and hope for a better world."

In an interview with Bill Carroll from the Detroit Jewish News about *Liberation*, Finkelstein said:

> "After the liberation, we vowed that never again would such atrocities occur, but they did. Since the end of World War II, millions of innocent people have perished as a result of genocides in Cambodia and Bosnia – and today in Sudan. There are still countless people around the world yearning to be liberated from the ravages of poverty, torture and war. Not only does Liberation memorialize Holocaust victims, but I updated it to focus on these ongoing genocides and a more worldwide concept of liberation. Also, I was to pay tribute to the men and women of the United States Armed Forces, whose bravery and ultimate sacrifice saved the civilized world from the scourge of Nazism and continues to preserve our liberty. The cantata also is dedicated to the victims and survivors of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States" (Carroll, Bill. "Freedom Sings." *The Jewish News*. June 22, 2006).

His statements are a testament to how socially and culturally aware Finkelstein is. He uses his personal experiences as a starting point to better understand, relate to, and have compassion for humanity at large, and to fulfill the biblical mandate to "be a light unto the nations" (Isaiah 49:6).

Unlike some cantors living in the diaspora who feel largely disconnected from the State of

Israel, Finkelstein feels deeply connected to and influenced by Israeli culture and society. In addition to composing music about Israel, his music is specifically and meticulously composed to honor the Israeli, Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew. In our interviews, Finkelstein explained that his first language was indeed Hebrew, having been born in Israel and living there until he was four years old. His dad always spoke to him and Aryeh in Hebrew though his mother spoke only English. When speaking modern Hebrew, they all employed the Sephardic pronunciation; however, when in a religious context (such as synagogue or singing liturgical music) the Hebrew pronunciation was always Ashkenazi. This Ashkenazi, Eastern European Hebrew pronunciation generally accentuates the **first** or penultimate syllable of a word (*milel*) making it sound more akin to Yiddish, while the Sephardic pronunciation usually accents the **last** syllable of a word (*milrah*).

As explained by linguist Isaac Gottlieb, "World Jewry is divisible into two major groups of tradition based on geographic and historical considerations: Eastern or Sephardi and Western or Ashkenazi. They differ in their rites of prayer, customs, and also in many points of Jewish law. Moreover, their pronunciation of Hebrew in the synagogue differs as well" (Gottlieb, *The Power of Punctuation,* 335). Gottlieb continues, "a member of a group who changes his pronunciation to pray in Sephardi pronunciation runs the risk of identifying the language of the synagogue with modern Israeli Hebrew and confusing the holy with the secular" (Gottlieb, *The Power of Punctuation,* 342).[23] Despite learning to make this distinction between *lashon hakodesh* (the holy language if the synagogue) and *lashon*

[23] Pealim.com, "Pronunciations of Hebrew," Pealim, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.pealim.com/articles/pronounciations-of-hebrew/.

hadibur (the spoken language of the street) as a child, once Finkelstein immigrated to the United States to take his first job at a Conservative synagogue, Beth Hillel Congregation, adapted to that synagogue's *minhag* (custom) of reciting Hebrew with an Israeli, Sephardic, *milrah* pronunciation.

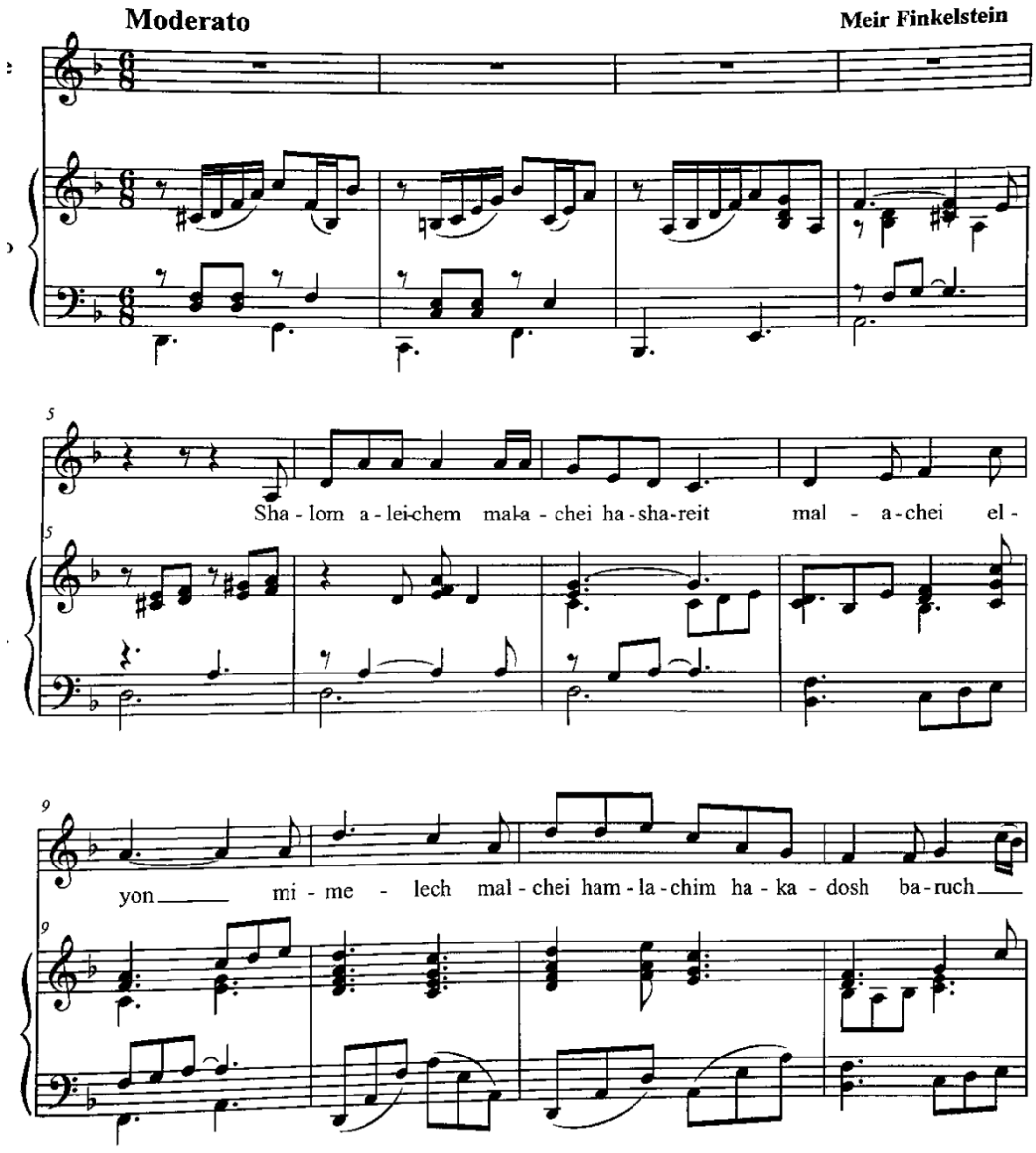
When asked about this change, Finkelstein said with confidence that "the problem with popular Jewish music is that people come up with a tune and try to smash the words into that tune to make it work…it needs to be the other way around." To that end, Finkelstein often composes in 6/8 or 3/4 time signatures because of the way the words are pronounced and his desire to maintain the *milrah* accentuation of the Hebrew. The prime example of this is found in his "*Shalom Aleichem*". Written in 6/8 time, the piece begins *sh-LOM ah-lei-CHEM ma-la-CHEI ha-sha-REIT*. The emphasis/stress occurs on the last syllable of the word or has a *milrah*/Sephardic pronunciation. Compare this to the well-known Goldfarb version, a staple of most American synagogues, written in 4/4 time that begins *SHA-lom a-LEI-chem MA-la-chei ha-SHA-reit.* The stress falls on the first or penultimate syllable, but never the last. Some music is so engrained in us, having been passed down from *l'dor vador*, (from generation to generation), that we don't even pay attention to the pronunciation. Often, this aspect of composition is overlooked or occurs subconsciously, so we too are just passing down our oral tradition. Finkelstein found it valuable to consider whether he was observing *minhagim* (customs) simply because they were familiar or because he has made a conscious, reasonable decision (though the two aren't necessarily mutually exclusive).

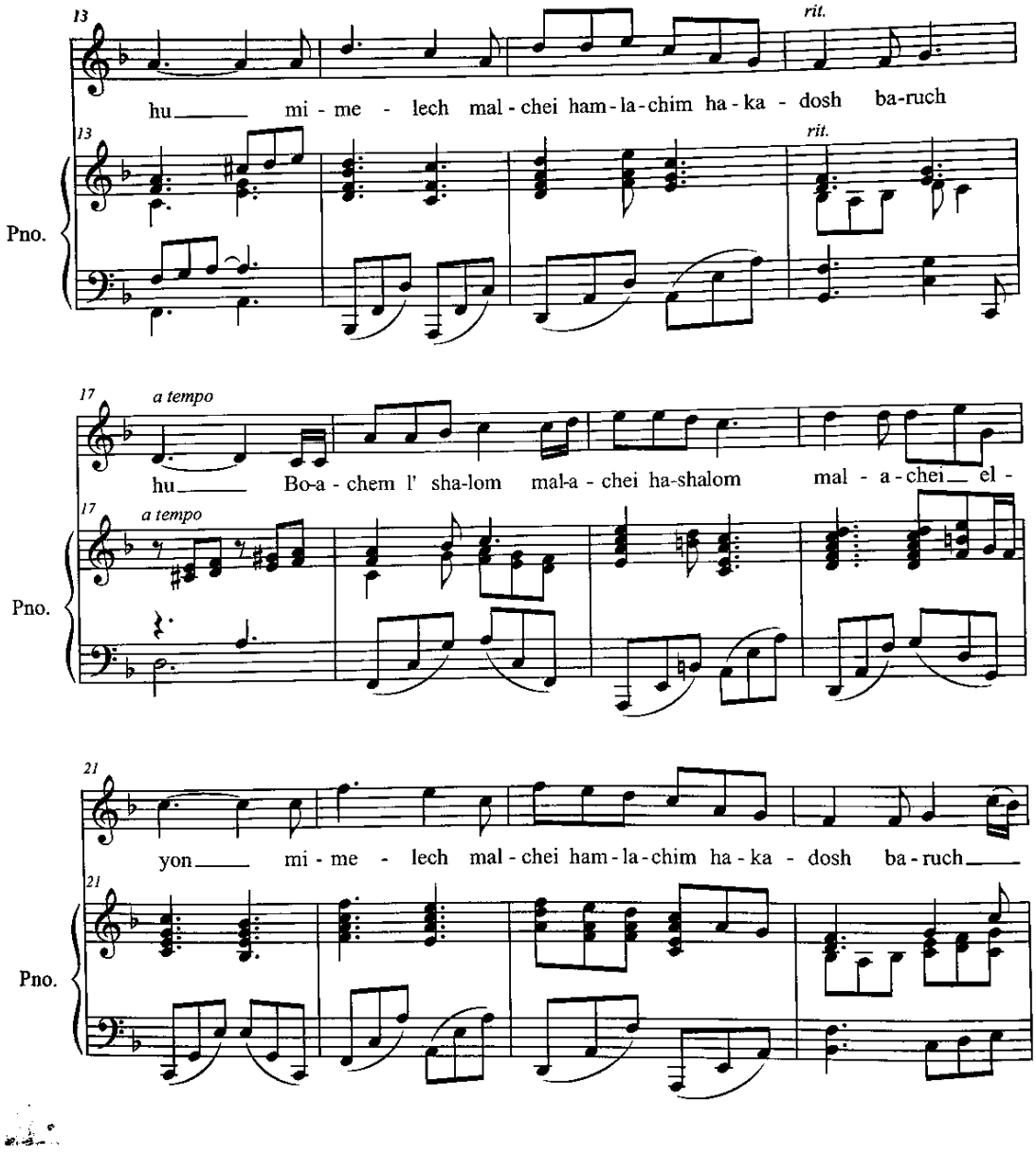
What do we wish to pass on and is it meaningful or worthwhile to know the context for which you are observing certain customs? Being confronted with a new culture and

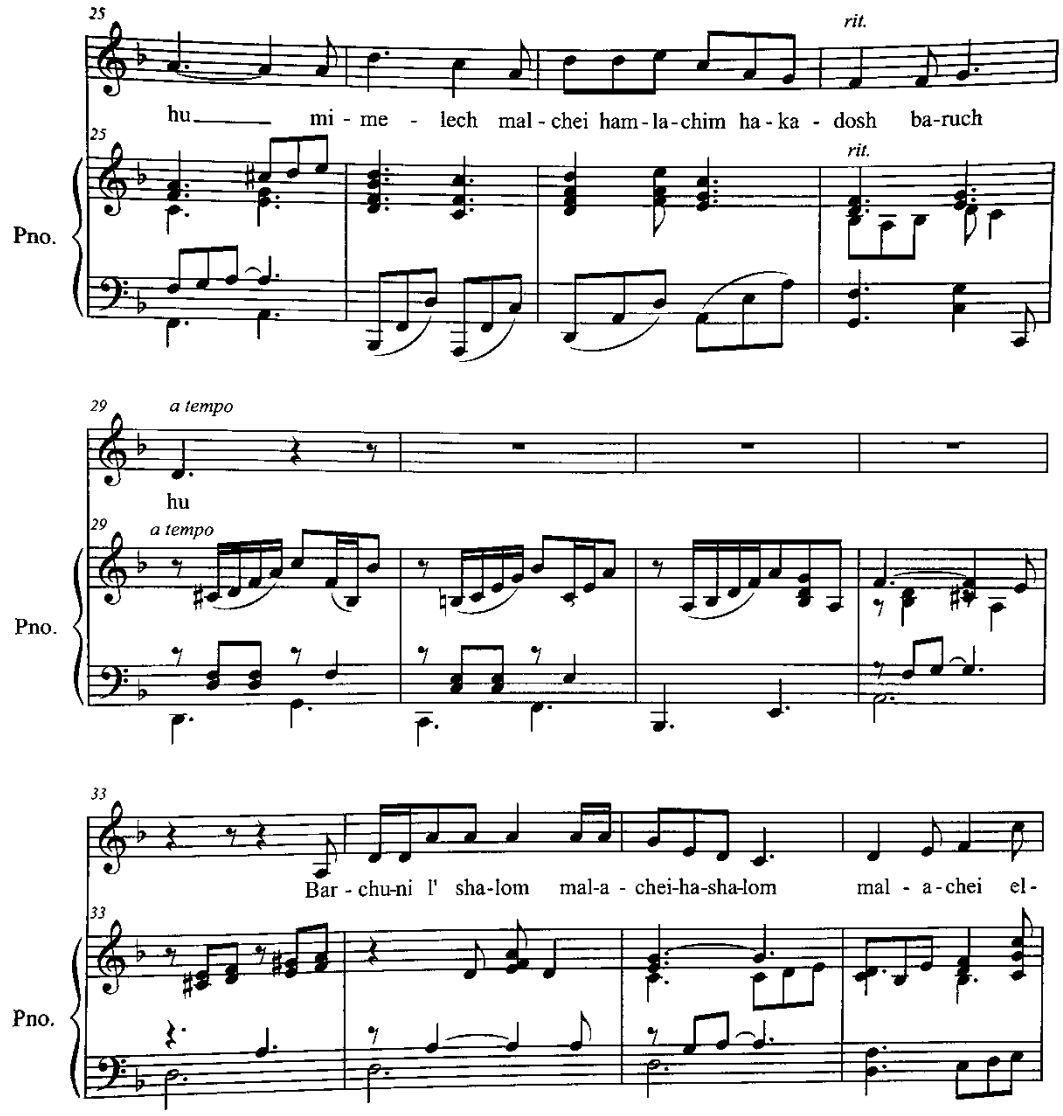
community sparked this line of thinking in Finkelstein. Had he remained in the familiarity of an Orthodox *shul* in the United Kingdom and not been exposed to the spectrum of Jewish cultures and practices elsewhere, he may never have discovered these different, and potentially more meaningful, ways of observing his Judaism. When reflecting upon his cantorate, Finkelstein feels strongly that "you have to be educated in order to succeed in this artform."

Finkelstein's "*Shalom Aleichem*," a prime example of utilizing milrah pronunciation, also carries the spirit of the American songbook. It is composed entirely in 6/8 (frequently utilized in his music) and, immediately, one can feel the upbeat dance imbued in this melody. It is particularly significant to note that Finkelstein breaks tradition by not going back to repeat the words "*shalom aleichem"* at all, meaning that there is no composed congregational refrain. Contrary to most modern setting of this prayer which included a refrain, Finkelstein's setting requires everyone sing the entirety of the text, thereby anticipating a higher level of Hebrew literacy. Most commonly, whereas many popular settings of this piece include a refrain, enabling people to join in the singing even if they are unfamiliar with much of the traditional text. He does, however, repeat certain musical motifs, such as the chords under the word "*l'shalom"* in measure 34, which are identical to the chords under "*aleichem"* in measure 6. Several times, he briefly transitions into major, such as on measures 49 and 50 when he uses C, F, and Bb major, to better reflect the blissful intention of the text. To the Jewish ear the final two measure of the piece contain motifs similar to those found in music from *Fiddler on the Roof*, such as in "*Far from the Home I Love"*. Below, I provided excerpts from Finkelstein's "*Shalom Aleichem*," as well as from his cantata, *Liberation* which is set for orchestra, choir, and solo voice.

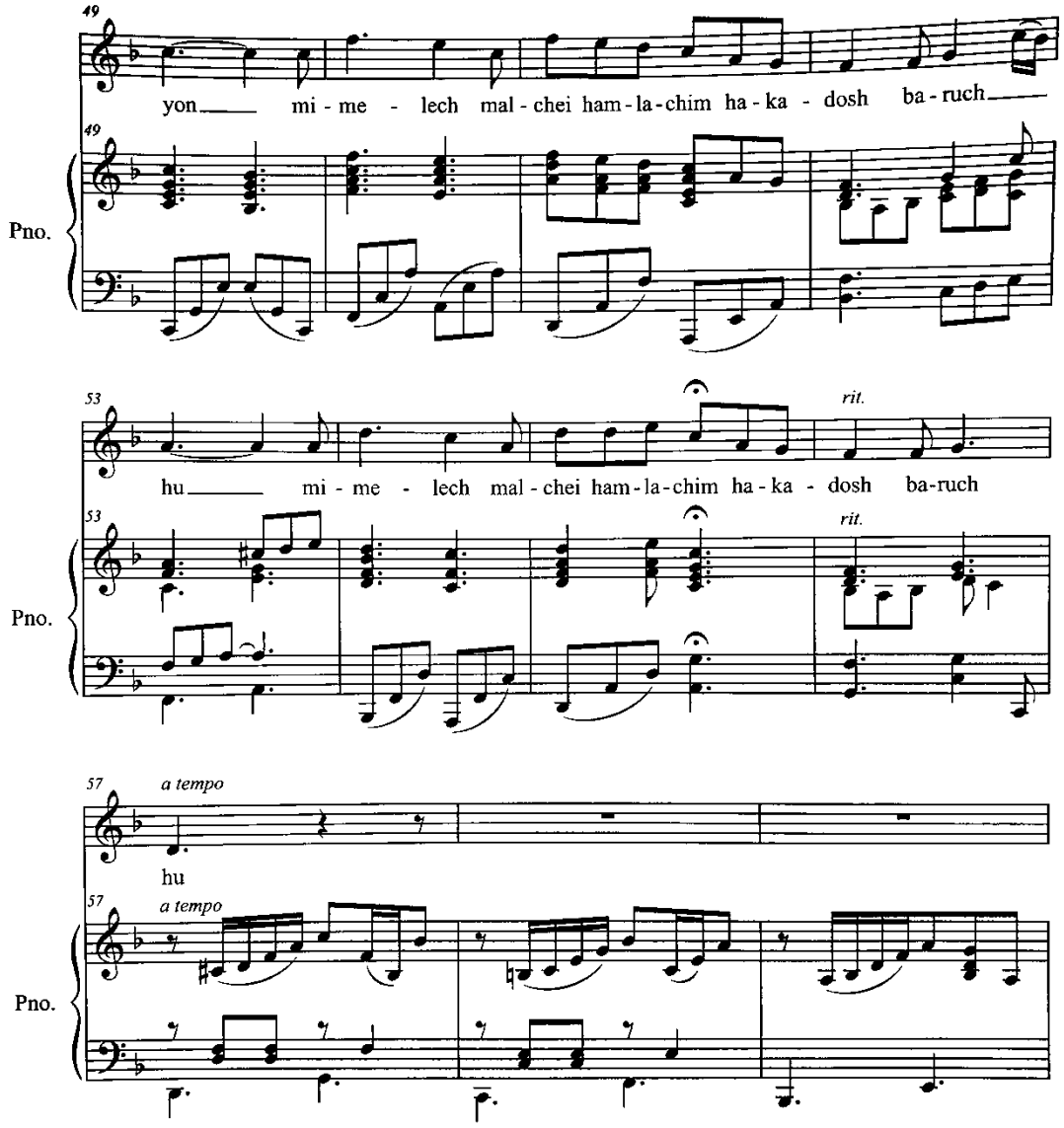
Shalom Aleichem

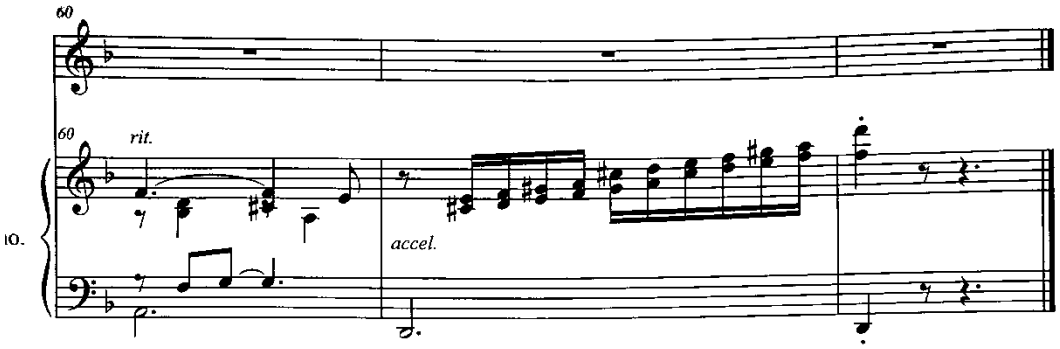



13
rit.
hu mi - me - lech mal - chei ham - la - chim ha - ka - dosh ba-ruch
13
rit.
Pno.
17
a tempo
hu Bo-a - chem l' sha-lom mal-a - chei ha-shalom mal - a - chei el -
17
a tempo
Pno.
21
yon mi - me - lech mal - chei ham - la - chim ha - ka - dosh ba - ruch
21
Pno.

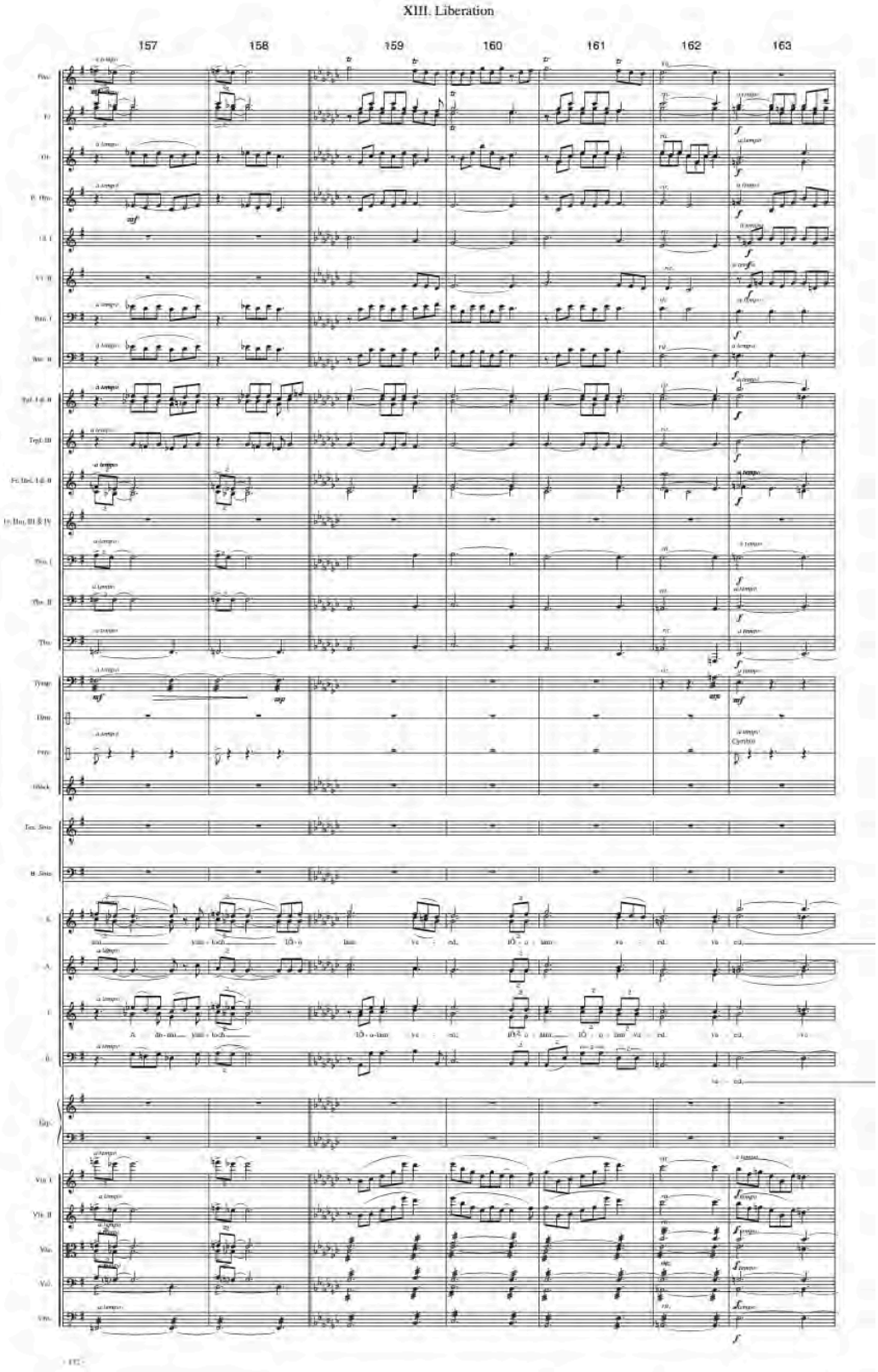


Excerpt skips to page 5.


49
yon mi - me - lech mal - chei ham - la - chim ha - ka - dosh ba - ruch
49
Pno.
53
hu mi - me - lech mal - chei ham - la - chim ha - ka - dosh ba-ruch
rit.
53
rit.
Pno.
57
a tempo
hu
57
a tempo
Pno.


60
60
rit.
accel.
Pno.

Musical excerpt from Finkelstein's cantata, *Liberation.*



END OF MUSIC EXCERPT.

CHAPTER VII: POP, ROCK & FILM

After completing his studies at the Royal College of Music, Finkelstein moved to Chicago and composed an album of Israeli pop music in the style of Barry Manilow with his brother, Aryeh. In addition to gleaning inspiration for Manilow, Finkelstein says he also drew from his admiration of musicians such as Burt Bacharach, Carol King, Stevie Wonder, and the Beatles. In 1978, after four years at Beth Hillel Congregation in Wilmette, Illinois, Finkelstein felt compelled to explore other musical interests, so he, his wife, Leba, and their daughter, Nadia, moved to Los Angeles, enabling him to pursue his aspirations of breaking into the Hollywood music industry.

From 1978-1982, Finkelstein worked in various music-related positions in order to support his family (his children, Nadia and Adam, born in 1975 and 1983 respectively). He was employed at a piano bar at the Pasadena Hilton Hotel, sold HiFi stereo equipment at a local electronics store, and worked as a part-time cantor at the Orthodox synagogue, Congregation Mogen David, in LA. Finkelstein's neighbor at the time, Corrado Vacchelli, was the president of the Italian record company, CBO. Vacchelli's wife, an opera singer, needed a voice teacher, so Finkelstein arranged to give her lessons in exchange for a job at the record company. During his work there, Finkelstein encountered the music supervisor of Lorimar Film Productions, David Franco, who subsequently helped Finkelstein to break into the Hollywood TV and film industry. In an interview with the Jewish Advocate, Finkelstein said, "I knew the head of music at Lorimar Productions who gave me a break and allowed me to score episodes of 'Dallas' and 'Falcon Crest' as well as TV and film

specials…there [were similarities] scoring for film and setting prayers to music. One [was] trying to convey the mood and intent through music."[24]

Though Finkelstein loved being able to do something so eclectic with his music, he accepted a full-time cantorial position at Sinai Temple in Westwood, California, in 1982 (one year before his son, Adam was born). During his 18 years at Sinai Temple (1982-2000), Finkelstein composed numerous works ranging from liturgical music, to Israeli pop, secular rock, and film scores. In 1985, Finkelstein's friend and colleague at Sinai Temple, Ari Zev, was offered a position working at Steven Spielberg's recently established organization, *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.* Hesitant to leave behind his work at the synagogue, Zev consulted with Finkelstein who immediately dismissed him as a temple B'nai Mitzvah tutor, forcing him to embrace the exciting new opportunity.

In 1988, a few years after their son Adam was born, Finkelstein and his wife Leba amicably divorced. Despite the separation, Finkelstein was incredibly close to his children and loved including them in his music projects. In 1990, Finkelstein released a pop and rock influenced album of Jewish music compositions entitled, *L'dor Vador* (from generation to generation), featuring his daughter Nadia. Amongst his many liturgical compositions is his iconic "*Mi Chamocha,"* which also has a distinct pop / rock influence. This piece, which I have excerpted below, uses a modified strophic (repeating) form. He arranges the piece to have and AABA' structure. From the start, this piece is reminiscent of a dance. It begins with strong rhythmic downbeats and major chords, all of which help

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[24] "Newton Shul Hosts Renowned Cantor." The Jewish Advocate, November 19, 2010. https://www.thejewishadvocate.com/articles/newton-shul-hosts-renowned-cantor/.

to convey the warmth and excitement with which one invites guests into their home for Shabbat. Though Finkelstein composed this piece while serving at a Conservative synagogue, it is interesting to note that the text says "Moshe" but not "Miriam", a liturgical change many Conservative synagogues have adapted in an effort to be more egalitarian and honor the foremothers **and** forefathers of Judaism. He also breaks tradition by repeating certain words and phrases in the text, such as "*malchutcha"* (your kingship, referring to G-d), "*nora"* (awe-inspiring), and the phrase "*Adonai imloch l'loam va'ed"* (G-d will be King forever). Both the repetition of these words and the music itself help to focus the intention of the prayer. Throughout the piece he emphasized the base, giving it a very American Pop feel. He concludes the composition in a dramatic, theatrical fashion as well, ending on beat 2 despite there being 4 beats in the measure. All of these decisions, whether made consciously or subconsciously, demonstrate the clear secular, popular musical influence.

In 1995, Finkelstein—at the recommendation of his friend and former colleague, Ari Zev—was commissioned by Steven Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Foundation* to compose the musical score for his documentary film, *Survivors of the Holocaust.* "[The film] chronicles the events of the Holocaust as witnessed by those who survived. The program weaves together archival footage and an original music score with survivors' personal testimonies and photographs, chronicling life in pre-war Europe, the devastating impact of Nazism, the liberation of the concentration camps, and life fifty years later."[25] Finkelstein subsequently released the score in his album, by the same name, *Survivors of*

[25] "Finkelstein, Meir," [WorldCat Identities], January 1, 1996, http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no98028054/.

the Holocaust, for which he was nominated for a Cable Ace Award. Of this experience Finkelstein said, "I think Steven chose me because he liked the fact that I'm a Holocaust survivor's son…he was wonderful to work with, and it was a great experience."

In 1996, Finkelstein met his second wife, Monica, who attended services at Sinai Temple with the specific intent of meeting a Jewish partner—a venture that proved resoundingly successful. Bound together by their shared values, outlooks on life, religion, and politics, they married a year later, in 1997. That same year, Finkelstein also released an album of his first cantata, *Liberation*, (composed as a tribute for the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps). In 1998, he was commissioned to compose and perform part of the musical score for the film *What Dreams May Come*, starring Robin Williams. In the "Hell scene," Finkelstein utilized some of the motifs from the *Eicha* trope cantillation (used for the Book of Lamentations and recited on *Tisha B'av*, the fast that commemorates the fall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem) in order to convey a sad, ominous tone. In true Hollywood fashion, Finkelstein also tutored actor Kirk Douglas on chanting the Torah portion for the 70th anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah the following year, in 1999.

After 18 years in Los Angeles, and successfully navigating the Hollywood music industry, Finkelstein and his family (second wife, Monica, and their two children, Noah and Emily) relocated to Dallas, Texas, in 2000. The family's move enabled Monica to accept her full scholarship to law school at Southern Methodist University while also providing Finkelstein with the opportunity to take a step back from the intensity of life in LA and spend more time with his young children. In 2001, Finkelstein filled in as the cantor of Beth-El Congregation, in Fort Worth, Texas—a Reform congregation with organ and

choral accompaniment in services. Finkelstein recalls his surprise upon realizing that the rabbi did not wear a *kippah*, nor a *tallit,* while leading High Holiday services from the *bima*. To his even greater astonishment, they read Torah at night (rather than in the morning, as is customary in halachically observant communities), and the rabbi chanted the *parashah* in English, while utilizing traditional Torah trope cantillation. Despite the initial shock of the experience, Finkelstein reflected that it was a good, yet strange experience. In our conversation he explained, "it was weird because it was different, not because I necessarily objected to their customs. Anything that is new or different will feel strange at first."

In 2002, Finkelstein was offered a position in Toronto at Congregation Beth Tzdek, a "Traditional Conservative" / "Conservadox" synagogue that Finkelstein described as being Orthodox in every respect except for their seating arrangements, which was mixed with men and woman together. Since Monica was in the midst of law school, Finkelstein agreed to accept the position on the condition that she be able to transfer into a law school in Toronto to continue her studies. Unfortunately, Finkelstein encountered many challenges while working there. After only a short time in Toronto, it became clear that it would not be possible for Monica to transfer to a Canadian law school, so she, Noah, and Emily returned to Dallas, where her parents resided and could help look after the children while she was in school. Additionally, after working for more than 20 years in "Progressive Conservative" synagogues, Finkelstein found it incredibly challenging, and stifling to his musical aspirations, to work in a "Traditional Conservative" / "Conservadox" community again. Most importantly, after two years, Finkelstein decided he could no longer be

separated from him family, so after Monica completed her degree, the family moved yet again.

In 2005, Finkelstein accepted the cantorial position at suburban Detroit's Conservative synagogue, Congregation Shaarey Zedek.[26] Though Finkelstein and his unique liturgical musical style influenced synagogues across the world, I can personally attest to the impact he had on Congregation Shaarey Zedek. Of his work, reporter Curt Schleier of the Detroit Jewish News wrote:

> "Cantor Meir Finkelstein has made several changes – a few of them controversial – at Congregation Shaarey Zedek since joining the Oakland County-based synagogue last fall. The innovations have included changes in liturgical melodies and shortened services. He also has moved the 12-member synagogue choir from behind the curtain on the bimah to a position near him, and he now leads the choir while davening with the congregation. His request to put a piano keyboard on the bimah is pending board approval. Shaarey Zedek President Gregg Orley of Bloomfield Hills approves of the bold new moves, 'I think leading the choir on the bima is wonderful,' he said. 'Also, the board decided to let the cantor experiment with a keyboard and other musical changes one a month at Shabbat services starting this fall.' Cantor Finkelstein also has organized a youth choir, taken complete charge of the bar and bat mitzvah program, started a concert series as part of the synagogue Cultural Connection, and even leads popular sing-alongs with his keyboard on Tuesday nights at Shaarey Zedek's B'nai Israel Center in West Bloomfield. Anyone can attend and sing Yiddish and Broadway songs with him" (Schleier, Curt. "Creative Force Cantor Finkelstein Brings Innovations to Shaarey Zedek." *The Detroit Jewish News*. June 22, 2006).

[26] My family has been members of Shaarey Zedek since the 1950s. Finkelstein and I first crossed paths when he was inducted as our new cantor in 2005, when I was studying for my Bat Mitzvah. I attended the "little house," Shaayey Zedek's B'nai Israel Center in West Bloomfield. B'nai Israel had more "traditional" services than the Southfield location. There was no cantor, so services were led by one of the rabbis or a lay leader. When B'nai Israel closed in 2006, all congregants attended "the big house" in Southfield. During his time there, Finkelstein greatly encouraged and inspired me to become more involved in synagogue life. I began private cantorial training with him in 2008.

In our interviews, Finkelstein recalled that once a month they agreed to have an abbreviated musical service with Rabbi Barkan that would include Finkelstein leading from the piano. Though this was an experimental service, Finkelstein says "it became the most popular service at the *shul*!" As a result, the Shaarey Zedek community eventually agreed to allow piano accompaniment as a permanent staple in the synagogue. This innovation did, however, cause a rift in the community, leading to a decline in membership. Some members who identified with more traditional, "Conservadox" Judaism either became regulars at Shaarey Zedek's B'nai Israel Center in West Bloomfield (where my family and I frequented), which did not have a cantor and was much more traditional in terms of music, liturgy, and duration of services, or they became members of different, more traditional synagogues entirely. They then hired accompanist Gary Schunk and, in 2006, they held their first accompanied High Holiday service—a huge step in the liberalization and modernization of the community.

During his time at Shaarey Zedek, from 2005-2013, Finkelstein was still able to pursue other musical endeavors outside of traditional synagogue worship. In 2007, he debuted a Passover Seder rock musical, *Matzah Do About Nothing,* and a cantata featuring both Jewish and gospel choirs entitled, *I Won't Forget You O Jerusalem*. His most significant project during this time in Detroit was the composition of a new cantata, *Gates of Righteousness* (the English translation of the synagogue's name), in honor of the 150th anniversary of the *shul.* The cantata was composed for full orchestra, and during its premiere, was performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conducted by renowned Maestro Leonard Slatkin, and featured Hillel Day School's *Chaverim* Children's Choir, as well as Meir Finkelstein himself as tenor soloist and me, Olivia Brodsky, as soprano soloist.

After eight years with the Detroit community, Finkelstein once again decided to relocate, this time moving back to Texas and switching places with colleague and renowned chazzan David Propis (also one of *the Three Jewish Tenors,* along with Finkelstein and Chazzan Alberto Mizrahi).[27] Finkelstein described Congregation Beth Jeshurun, in Houston, Texas, as "another Sinai Temple, but without a professional choir." He said that this new congregation was much more liberal religiously and described it as a "Friday night community," rather than a "Saturday morning" one, like Shaarey Zedek (the former being closely associated with Reform congregations and the latter with more traditional, Conservative ones). Here, Finkelstein was also able to inspire communal growth and change. He established a band for every *Kabbalat Shabbat* service and even

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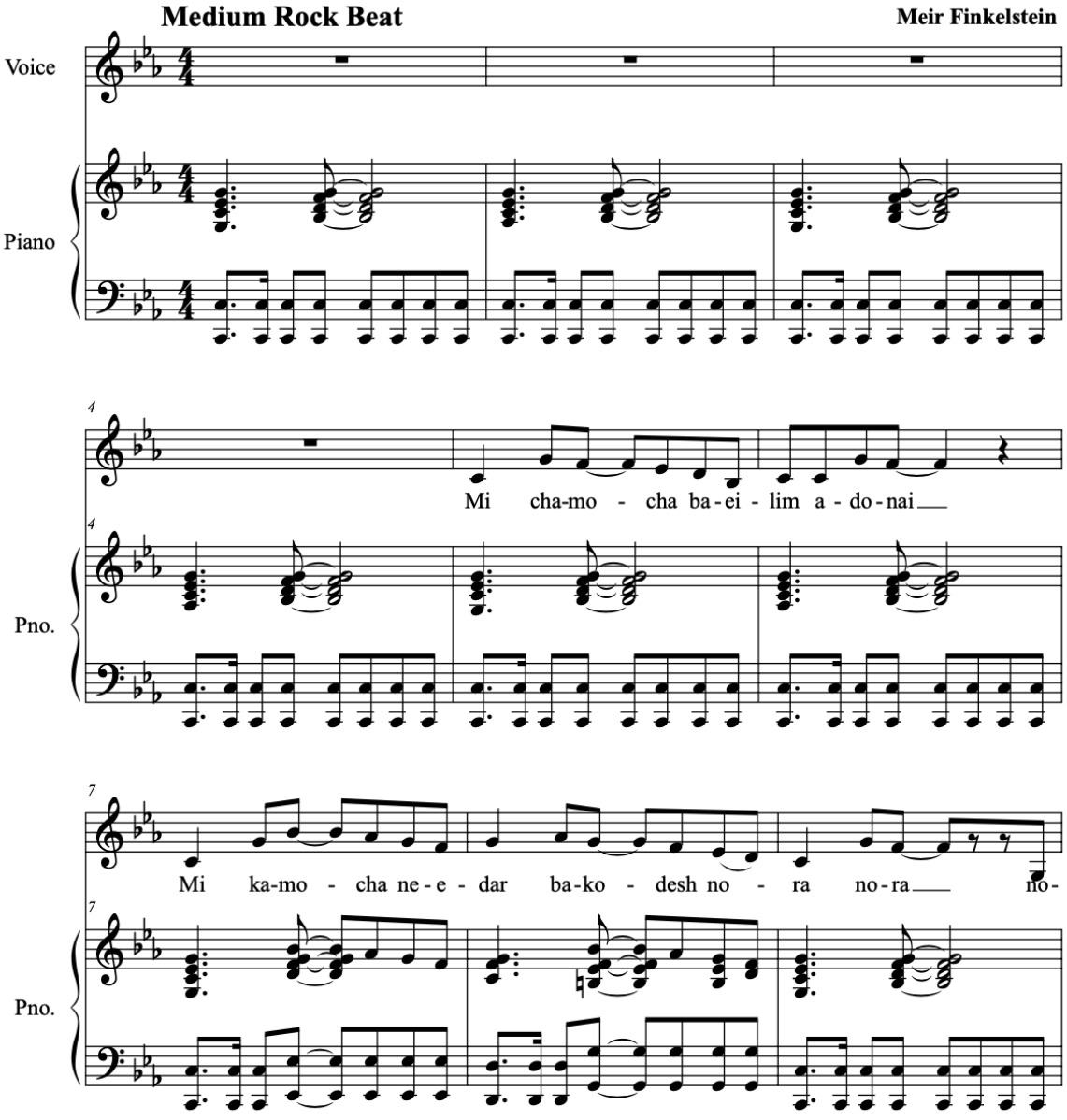
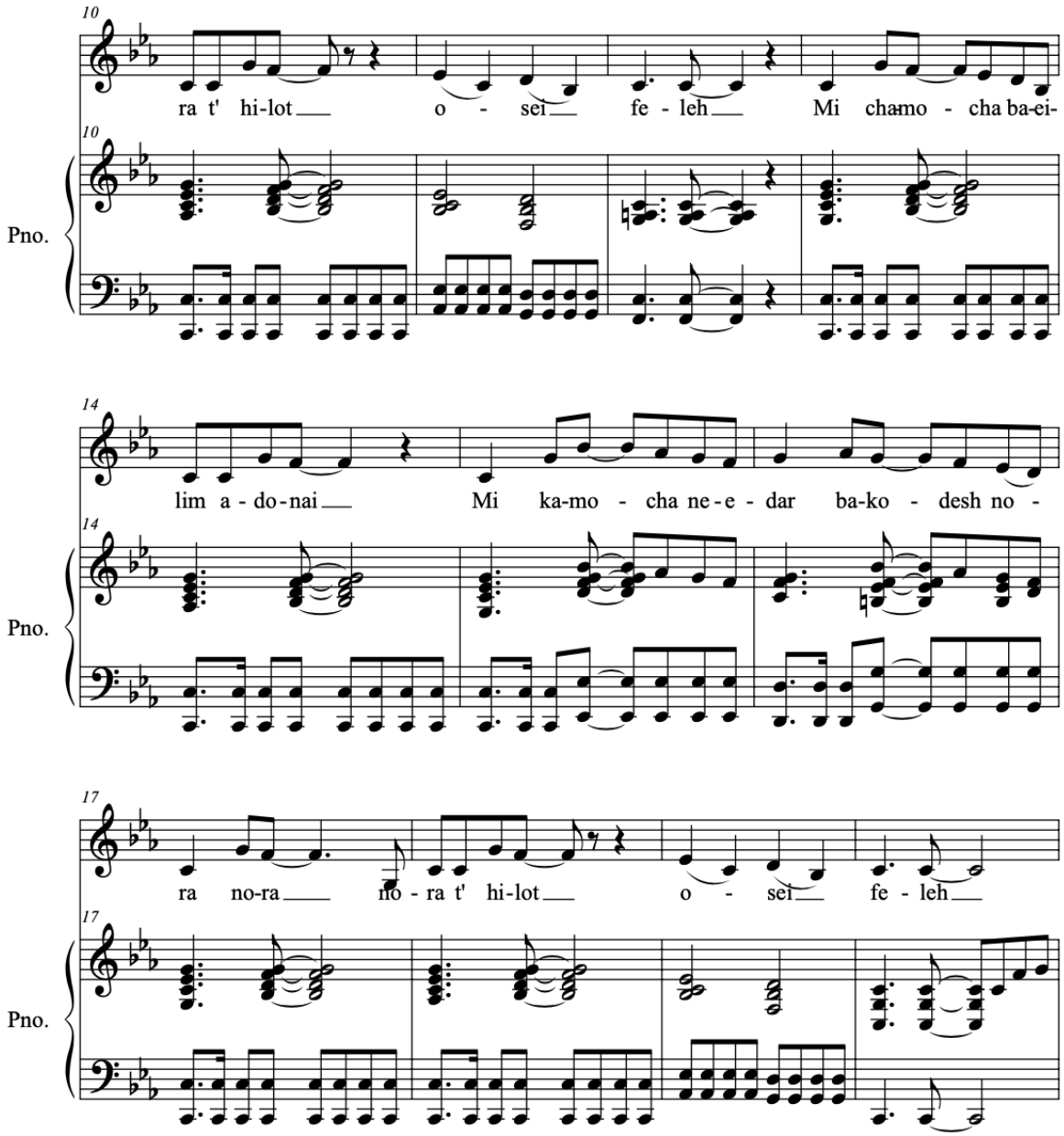
[27] "Perhaps it was inevitable: the Three Irish Tenors, the Three Russian Tenors, Three Mo' Tenors, and now the Three Jewish Tenors. But marketing gimmicks aside, these singers--like the other Tenors--are serious musicians with years of classical training and concert experience. (The Jewish Tenors are also all cantors.) Alberto Mizrahi, the longtime hazan at Lakeview's Anshe Emet Synagogue, focused on opera earlier in his career, but for the last decade or so he's carved a niche as a specialist in Jewish vocal music. His voice is clear and resonant, capable of emotional highs and lows, and he's not afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve--they don't call him "the Jewish Pavarotti" because he's a little plump. I've heard Mizrahi performing with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and with the musicologically erudite Chants Mystique, and on those occasions I was impressed with the passion in his delivery. Eight years ago, Mizrahi hooked up with two like-minded fellow cantors--Toronto's Meir Finkelstein and the Houston-based David Propis--and formed a trio that can do Broadway and opera as easily as liturgy. Their local debut is the culminating event in Anshe Emet's celebration of Michael Siegel's 20th year as rabbi. Broadway will be represented by numbers from Damn Yankees, Guys and Dolls, and Stop the World--I Want to Get Off. The Tenors will also perform a tribute to Moyshe Oysher, a legendary cantor remembered these days for his "Bessarabian scat singing"; a Yiddish theater medley; a selection of Yiddish music from Havana called "Bagels and Bongos"; a Harpo Marx tune; and a clutch of songs about early-20th-century Jewish immigration" (Shen, Ted. "Three Jewish Tenors." Chicago Reader. Chicago Reader, February 27, 2003. https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/three-jewish-tenors/Content?oid=911313).

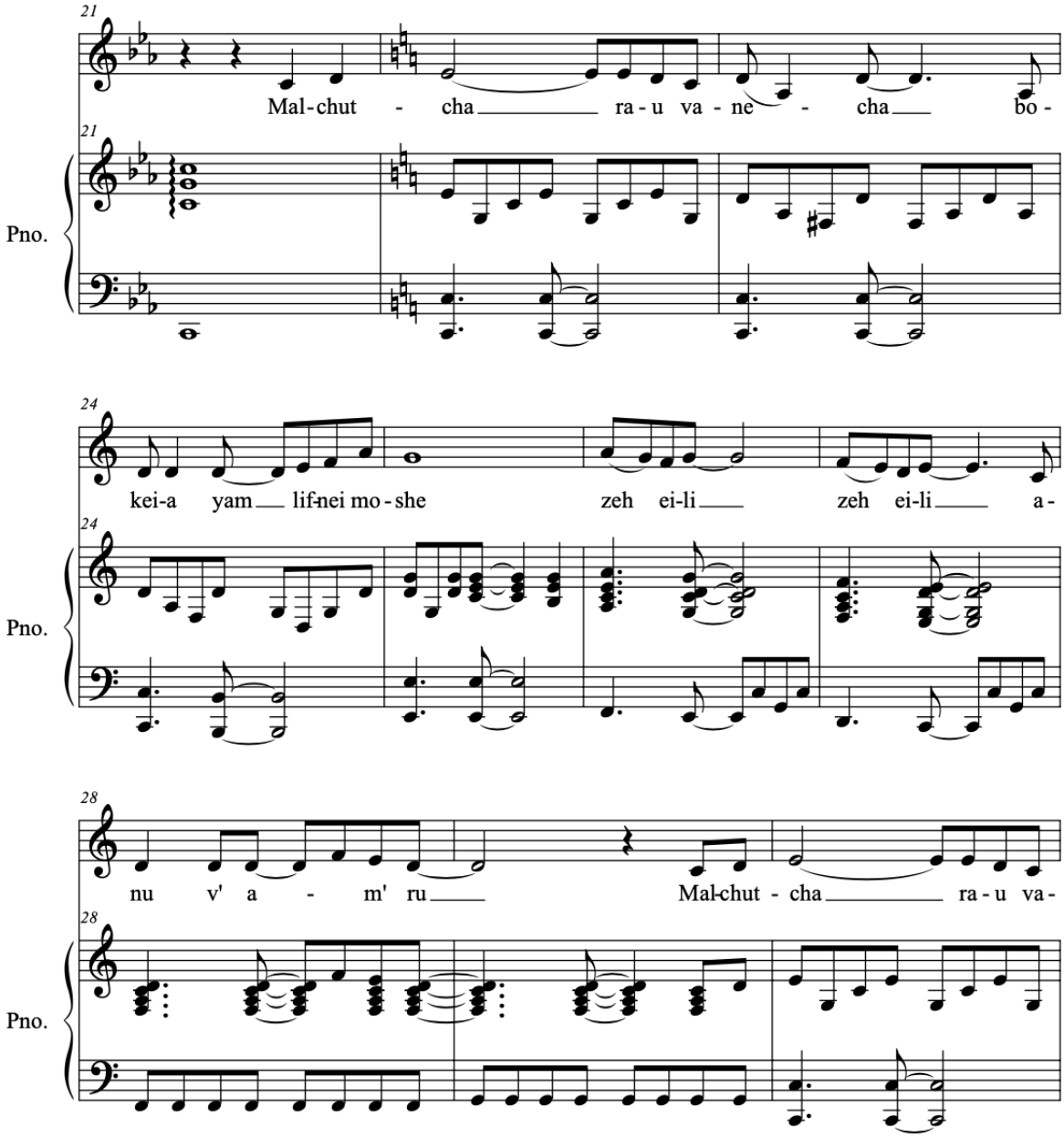
introduces a new English song every Friday night—songs of the Beatles now being community favorites. Finkelstein, who still works at Beth Jeshurun and currently resides in Houston said, "Coming to Beth Yeshurun, the congregation has heard my music for many years because of the previous cantor. So, it was easy to come onto the *bimah* and sing things I had written. Beth Yeshurun is a singing congregation. They love to join in. They're not shy. I love the fact that they join in and will encourage it."[28] The community is wonderful, welcoming, and open to musical change, allowing Finkelstein to be his full, authentic self, both Jewishly and artistically.

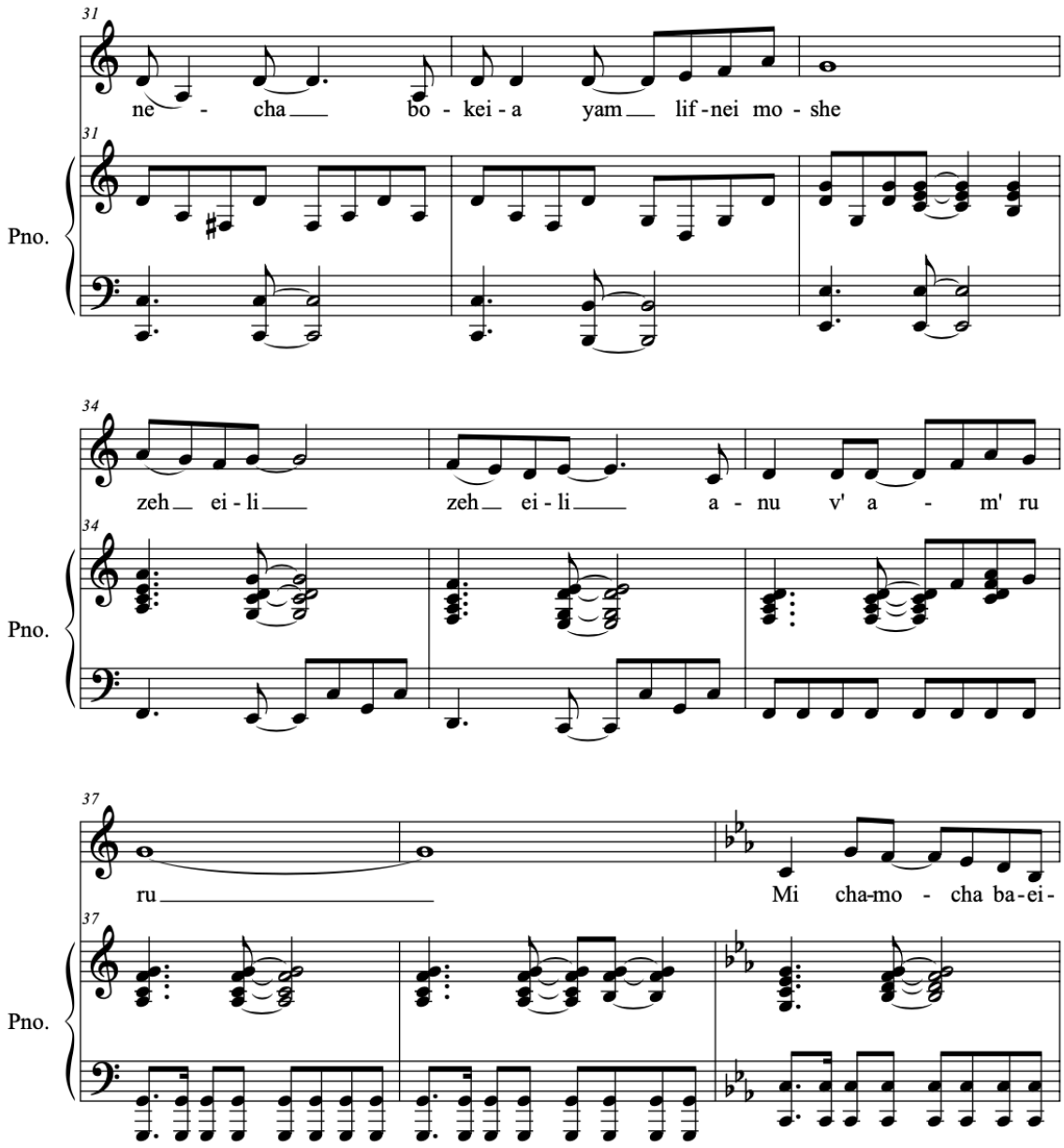
[28] Aaron Howard, "Cantor-Composer to Take Hazzan Post at Beth Yeshurun," Jewish Herald-Voice, June 10, 2013, https://jhvonline.com/cantorcomposer-to-take-hazzan-post-at-beth-yeshurun-p15261-96.htm.

Mi Chamocha

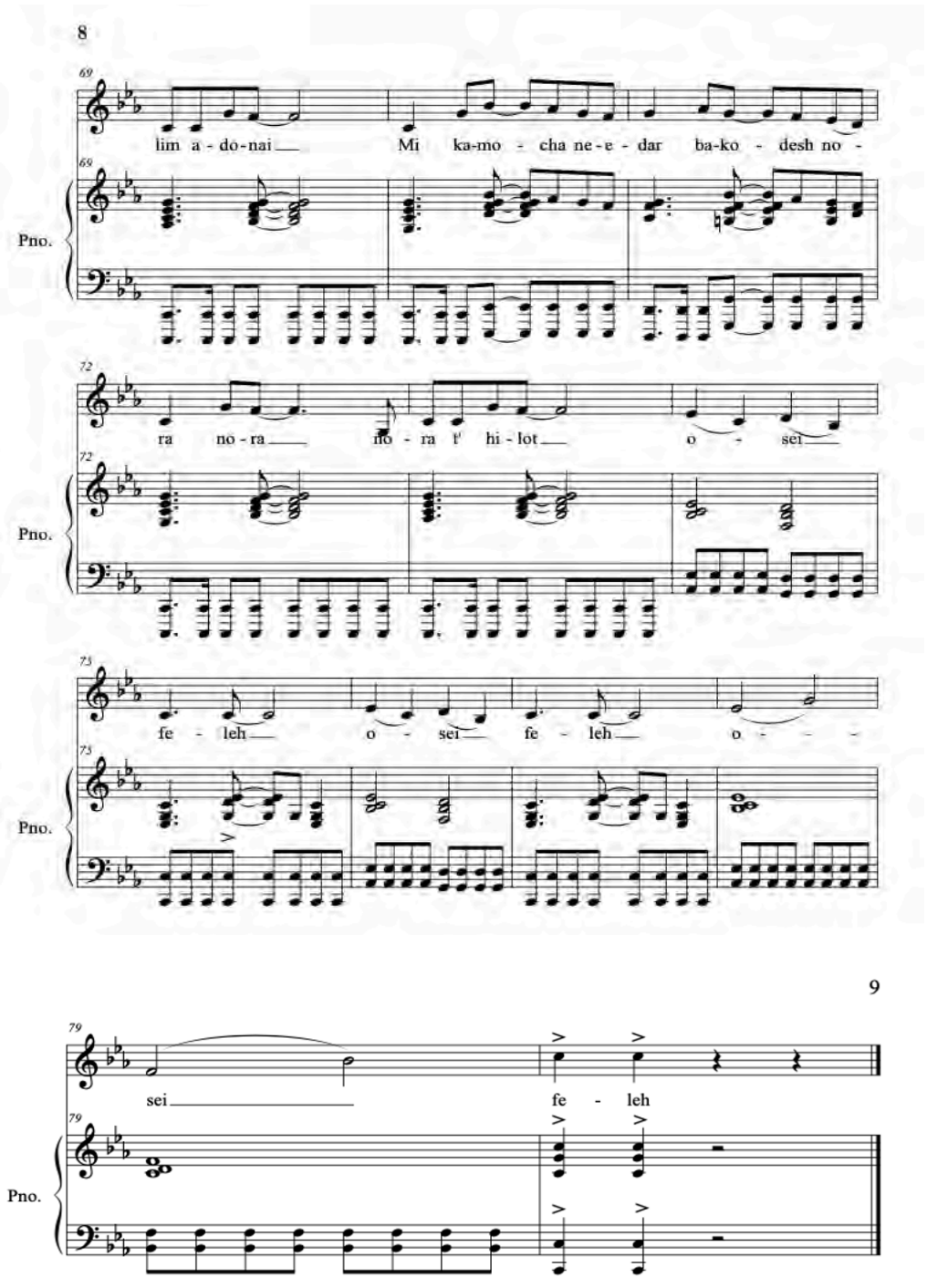

Medium Rock Beat
Meir Finkelstein
Voice
Piano
Mi cha-mo - cha ba-ei - lim a - do-nai
Pno.
Mi ka-mo - cha ne-e - dar ba-ko - desh no - ra no-ra no-
Pno.


10
ra t' hi-lot o - sei fe - leh Mi cha-mo - cha ba-ei-
Pno.
14
lim a - do-nai Mi ka-mo - cha ne-e - dar ba-ko - desh no -
Pno.
17
ra no-ra no - ra t' hi-lot o - sei fe - leh
Pno.


21
Mal-chut - cha ra-u va-ne - cha bo-
Pno.
24
kei-a yam lif-nei mo-she zeh ei-li zeh ei-li a-
Pno.
28
nu v' a - m' ru Mal-chut - cha ra-u va-
Pno.



Music excerpt skips to page 8.



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END OF MUSIC EXCERPT.

CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTIONS TO JEWISH MUSIC

Jewish denominationalism reflects the diversity of Jewish values, traditions, and practices among Jews with a desire to strengthen communal bonds on the basis of shared ideology and practice. In doing so, Jewish leadership and clergy are better able to serve the needs and desires of their particular *kehillah* (community). From a practical standpoint, denominationalism is very effective; however, it has the perhaps unintended consequence of creating strong division and tribalism within the broader Jewish context, and it perpetuates the notion that there is a single right or wrong way to be Jewish, encouraging feelings of both superiority and inferiority among Jews. Since the Jewish people are small in numbers and already so distinct from other cultural and religious groups, American denominationalism is sometimes counterproductive. It subtly supports the assumption that Jews of varying levels of religious and cultural practice cannot form a singular, cohesive community.

Jewish denominations are like the branches of a tree, growing in different directions, but stemming from the same sturdy trunk. Jewish music has the power to transcend these differences and unify *klal Yisrael* (the people of Israel) on the basis of shared heritage, values, and spirituality. My cantorial training has led me to the conclusion that it is the cantor's privilege and duty to share musical prayer that will inspire feelings of love, comfort, belonging, community, and connection to the universe. Cantor Meir Finkelstein's liturgical compositions have accomplished just that. Finkelstein has become a Jewish music icon because he successfully transcended the Jewish denominational lines by composing music that reflected his own diverse musical, cultural, and religious

background, ranging from European, Israeli, and American culture, to Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism, to Chazzanut, Classical, Opera, Pop and Rock music.

Finkelstein's friend, the esteemed composer, Stephen Glass, likened Finkelstein to the "Jewish John Rutter," and recalled that when he first encountered Finkelstein, he asked him (partially in jest), "Why can't I compose like you do?", to which Finkelstein replied, "Because you don't have my background." Finkelstein elaborated that everything he has written Jewishly has been a reaction to how he was raised, the music he heard as a child, and his desire to break away from tradition and develop a style that was unique and reflective of Jewish ideology and liturgy. With regard to American Jewish denominationalism and its influence on liturgical music, Finkelstein has said:

> "There are always disparate groups with different biases, agendas, and nostalgias. If you are a cantor-composer like I am, you can sing your own music and introduce new things. In contrast, a cantor who doesn't compose is probably going to sing more 'traditional' melodies. If you're a composer living today, you're an innovator by definition. A cantor who isn't a composer is at the mercy of what has already been written…any new *chazzan* must weigh how much of a synagogue's current musical practices to keep and how much to change...having said that, there are certain parts of the service where different cantors will use traditional tunes, because they are so familiar and meaningful that it would be foolish to try to change that. An example is *Kol Nidrei*. Within the boundaries of innovation and continuity, a cantor-composer will put his stamp on the service with more innovative music. Over the last 30 years, I have spent my time composing synagogue music that is easily learned by the congregation. That helps the popularity of the melody allows it to become congregational."[29]

[29] Aaron Howard, "Cantor-Composer to Take Hazzan Post at Beth Yeshurun," Jewish Herald-Voice, June 10, 2013, https://jhvonline.com/cantorcomposer-to-take-hazzan-post-at-beth-yeshurun-p15261-96.htm.

Having such a range of Jewish and musical experiences, I asked Finkelstein to clarify what he thinks the role of music within prayer is. In his mind, music should be used to elevate the mind and spirit, provide comfort, joy, and beauty for the community. For this reason, Finkelstein believes that musical instrumentation is invaluable to the Jewish prayer experience. Anything that can help illuminate and beautify the text or provide inspiration should be utilized.

In an interview with the Jewish Advocate,[30] Cantor Elias Rosemberg of Argentina reflected, "Meir Finkelstein changed the way synagogue music sounds today…he writes music that gets into your heart using contemporary melodies and harmonies." Finkelstein's music is unique in that it is appreciated by people from all across the Jewish spectrum. As Cantor Chayim Frenkel said, "Meir is one of the best-documented composers of contemporary Jewish music in the world; his compositions are sung in synagogues everywhere. He has transformed synagogue music for modern services by adding the appropriate chords and modes to fuse ancient Jewish music with modern American music. He is pure talent."[31]

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[30] "The Jewish Advocate, founded by Theodor Herzl in 1902, was the oldest continually circulated English-language Jewish newspaper in the United States until suspending publication after 118 years with the issue of September 25, 2020" (Korff, Grand Rabbi Y. A. "About The Jewish Advocate." The Jewish Advocate. Accessed January 19, 2021. https://www.thejewishadvocate.com/about-us/).

[31] Carroll, Bill. "Freedom Sings." *The Jewish News*. June 22, 2006.

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