THE YIDDISH ART SONG OF LAZAR WEINER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Lazar Weiner was a musician of magnitude, a person of intellectual sensibility, and a Jew who treasured his people. As a musician, he was thoroughly involved with the musical forms of his day, as they evolved through his lifetime. He was willing to experiment and incorporate contemporary techniques in his composition. The various positions he held throughout his lifetime - at Workman's Circle, Central Synagogue, and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, were all involved with Judaism and Jewish life. Weiner engaged himself socially and professionally with an elite group of Yiddish poets, many of whose works he set. The love and preservation of Yiddish became Weiner's abiding concern; it was also the overriding obsession of the poets with whom he worked.

A great body of research has been done on cataloguing Weiner's works, and documenting his life.[1] Therefore, this paper will specifically focus on Yiddish art song, especially in exploring the relationship of the poetry to the music. In providing background on the Yiddish poets with whom Weiner worked, analysis of particular settings and through conversations with well-known performers of this particular milieu, this project will attempt to provide

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[1]Two papers will especially be referred to: Judith Tischler's unpublished doctoral dissertation, and Marsha Bryan's master thesis.

insight and inspiration into this exciting music and its connection to the poetry.

It is fitting, with the current resurgence of interest in Yiddish and Yiddish music, that a master of the Yiddish art song like Lazar Weiner should be studied and that his songs should be rediscovered on paper, and especially in the synagogue and concert hall.

CHAPTER I

Biography and General Background

Before undertaking a study of the music, it is necessary to have some understanding of the man.[2] Lazar Weiner's birth on October 24, 1897 was a humble beginning. His father, Shimon was a shoemaker in Cherkassy, a small town near Kiev in the southern part of the Ukraine. As was the custom, he attended heder, but only until the age of seven, at which time he continued his education with secular schooling. Primary musical seeds were planted when, at the age of six, he began singing in the choir at the local synagogue. Weiner told of singing as a small child, imitating street organ grinders and picking up songs his musically-inclined mother, Gussie heard in the theater.

At the age of ten, his family moved to Kiev where his lovely soprano voice gained him entrance to the Brodksy Synagogue Choir, conducted by Alexander Dzimitrovsky (1873-1943). The Brodsky Synagogue was founded in the later half of the nineteenth century, one of the Khorshuls (choir schools). This synagogue was influenced by the ideals of

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[2]For more detailed biographical information, see these two predominant biographical resources for this paper:
1. Judith Tischler, "The Life and Work of Lazar Weiner - Master of the Yiddish Art Song (1897-1982)" (Doctor of Sacred Music, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989).
2. Marsha S. Bryan, "Lazar Weiner and the Yiddish Art Song" (Master of Sacred Music, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1976).

the Enlightenment and employed male choir, organ, and the music of Lewandowski, Sulzer, Nowakowsky, etc. At this time, Weiner also was chosen to sing in the children's chorus at the civic opera house, where the strong influence of Moussorgsky was still felt. He studied piano with Dzimitrovsky and obtained a partial scholarship to the Kiev Conservatory at age thirteen. In 1913, an event took place which would change the shape of his life. A neighbor of the Weiner family, Mendel Beilis, was charged with ritually using the blood of a murdered Christian child. Papa Weiner went to America to find a better life and the rest of the family followed soon after.

Brooklyn became the new home for the Weiner's and Lazar set out to find work. He was uncompromising in relinquishing his ideal of working as a musician. Through the Russian newspapers, he found employment as an accompanist for a voice teacher. This proved elemental in shaping the young musician as he was exposed to vocal technique, repertoire, and to some of the finest hazzanim of his time. Weiner's skill as accompanist grew as he accompanied Yossele Rosenblatt, David Roitman, Gershon Sirota, Zavel Kwartin, Berele Chagy, and opera star Rosa Raisa. Weiner also taught piano and played for the silent movies, which led to his weakened eyesight.[3] Weiner made

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[3]Yehudi Wyner (Lazar Weiner's son), Taped interview by Ida Rae Cahana, 1 February, 1993.

his debut as a conductor with the Mendelssohn Symphony Orchestra where he made an acquaintance which would lead him into new professional and social paths.[4] One of the violinists in the orchestra was Nahum Baruch Minkoff, a person better known as a leading Yiddishist than for his fiddling. He became a friend of Weiner's and introduced him to his hevre of Yiddish intellectuals, including the great poet Yehoash and playwrights David Pinski and Peretz Hirschbein. Hirschbein's wife's sister was Sarah Naomi Shumiatcher, who would later marry Lazar.

These small gatherings of poets, musicians, and artists were important for the participants as a means of exchanging ideas and for the friendships which grew out of the soirees. According to Weiner's son, Yehudi Wyner, his father found a way to express his own deeply personal, anti-clerical Jewish religiosity through the cultural, political, emotive avenues which Yiddish opened up to him.[5] Weiner preferred "a well-defined, literary Yiddish."[6] The poets with whom Weiner became acquainted at Hirschbein's apartment and whose poetry he set to music included Moishe-Leib Halpern, A. Lutsky, J. Rolnick, and Itzik Manger. Bertha Kling, a poet herself, would sing Yiddish folksongs with Lazar at the piano.[7]

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[4]According to Tischler; Bryan gives the name as "Little Symphony Amateur Orchestra."
[5]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Tischler, pp. 17-18.

The immediate musical forerunners of Weiner include Moses Milner, Joel Engel, Alexander Krein, and Joseph Achron who were all founders of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music. They were all conservatory trained Russian musicians who were mostly ignorant of their Jewish musical heritage until awakened to its singularities by the popular call of nationalism which swept Europe in the late nineteenth century. Elements of the Russian international song style, ala Balakhirev, can be discerned in one of Weiner's early songs, "Vollt Mayn Tate Reich Geven."[8]

Eastern European Jewish folk song had a definite distinguishable character; it was ". . . created out of the people [and] remained anonymous."[9] The synagogues held no province over these songs, which were mostly in Yiddish and centered around themes of cradle, love, and family life. Most Jewish Eastern European folk-song falls into two categories: Biblical and prayer modes, and minor scales. However, prior to the formation of the Society for Jewish Folk Music, its young composer/ founders were either ashamed or unaware of the existence of this wealth of musical material.

> In St. Petersburg in about 1902, Rimsky-Korsakov used to refer all his non-Russian students to [Russian] folk music. He also urged the Jews among them to cultivate their "wonderful music

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[8]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.

[9] A.Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Music in its Historical Development (Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1967), 380.

which still awaits its Glinka" (according to Saminsky).[10]

Similarly, Joel Engel of Moscow was awakened to thoughts of his own cultural identity after the mentor of the Russian national school, Vladimir Stassov, asked him directly,..."'Where is your national pride in being a Jew?'"[11] Only a few of Engel's fellow musicians such as Skliar, Gnesin, and Rozovsky who had been disciples of cantors, had any relation to living folk and traditional music. Soon after his arrival in America, during the time that Weiner worked as an accompanist to some of the great hazzanim, some of the same kinds of Jewish musical sense must have been imparted to him through these cantors.

The early attempts of people like Achron to meld Eastern based Jewish and Western art music presaged Weiner's own musical experimentation and journey. M. Milner's famous song, "In Cheder," combined the commonly used Russian device of the ostinato with the imitations of the natural inflections of Yiddish speech. L. Saminsky experimented with chant motives and imitation of cantillation. A. Krein's music is full of the lavish influences of Debussy, Ravel, and Scriabin, but he also used folk-song and Biblical chant.[12] Weiner studied and admired the work of these men

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[10] Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "Music," col. 659-660.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Albert Weisser, The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music (New York: Bloch Publishing Co. Inc., 1954) passim.

and was particularly gifted in melding Western and Jewishly inspired music. For him, dominant influences of Balakirev and Moussorgsky gave way to impressionistic shadings of Debussy. Like Moussorgsky, the song had to be a complete marriage of text and music; Weiner also loved Moussorgsky's dedication to the mood. However, Weiner's songs owe less to Moussorgsky or the French recitative, than to the Yiddish language.[13] The main difficulty lay in juxtaposing a self-sustaining melodic line, often based on prayer chant, with modal harmonic structures with western harmonies.[14] Weiner favored quartal harmonies versus western triadic practice. He also preferred modulations to the subdominant, as will be shown later in analyses of a few of the songs.

Weiner sent three of his earliest songs to Engel for an opinion. Engel responded favorably to them, from a general musical perspective, but commented that it was unfortunate that there was no Jewish melos in the music and suggested that Weiner utilize his rich Jewish tradition in music. Weiner admitted that this remark opened his eyes, which were practically those of an apikoris (heretic). He proceeded to teach himself nusach hatefillah and cantillation.[15] Those traits which can easily be perceived as "Jewish" are prominent throughout the songs: parallel fourth's, superimposed fourths to create quartal harmonies, and

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[13]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Bryan, p.8.

melodic augmented second's all came from Eastern European models. Through his work as vocal accompanist at Carnegie Hall, Weiner also retained contact with the rest of world music. From a more Western European orientation came his preference for the short form and his early preoccupation with impressionism.[16] Most of the songs are brief miniatures like those of Duparc, Wolf, and Debussy, each setting its own tone by a careful melding of music and text. Like another miniaturist, Chopin, he was a pianist, and the songs reflect this pianistic emphasis. Weiner's songs were intended for a virtuoso, like himself.[17]

Between the years 1917 and 1925, Weiner wrote twenty-seven pieces, six of which were instrumental, and the rest either solo vocal or choral. He gave this explanation for his distinct medium preference:

> Generally, I have always felt vocal music to be the most highly expressive medium. I consider the human voice the highest expression in music. The reason may be that I sang as a child, or because I spent many years in a vocal studio, or because I conducted choruses for the major part of my life. I love poetry and I love the human voice. It was therefore natural for me to write songs.[18]

One of these early songs, "Dos Gold fun Dayne Oig'n" (1923), clearly shows the impressionistic influence of Debussy, in

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[16]Tischler, p. 20.

[17]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.

[18] Tischler, Dissertation, p. 25, quoting My Life in Jewish Music, a lecture delivered in October, 1975 at the University of Washington in Seattle, at the inauguration of the "Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectureship in Jewish Studies," p. 20.

its sweeping colorful arpeggiated figures. (See analysis in Chapter 3)

In the same year, 1923, Weiner made his debut as a choral conductor which began another important part of his career. He directed the Communist Party Chorus until it tried to restrict his musical activities whereupon he resigned. He was then asked to conduct the chorus of the Yiddishe Kultur Gezelshaft (Yiddish Culture Society).[19] In 1929, he was invited to be the conductor for the Workmen's Circle Chorus and remained with it until 1966. Under his firm direction, the chorus grew, was shaped into a cohesive group, and its repertoire of predominantly socialistic pieces was expanded.[20]

Weiner's involvement with these various choral groups, including the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), was based on his commitment to the worker's philosophy which inspired the formation of these choruses. Immigrants who came to New York in the late 1800's and early 1900's bonded together through commonly shared political ideals, love of their cultural heritage, and their mame-loschen: Yiddish.[21] Weiner was determined, along with his poetic friends, to elevate Yiddish and smooth out its inconsistencies.

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[19]Tischler, pp. 44-50.
[20]Ibid, p.52.
[21]Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1976), pp. 417-419.

The years 1926 through 1930 were important ones for Lazar and his wife, Naomi; he became a naturalized citizen first and she followed in 1930. Many of Weiner's songs were dedicated to Naomi, including one of the earliest, "Dos Gold fun dayne Oig'n." Their relationship was truly a love match; Naomi ". . .just adored him and his music."[22] In 1929, their first son, Yehudi, was born. Later, when Yehudi had become a respected pianist and composer himself, Lazar trusted him absolutely with the task of editing his music. Weiner would not revise anything; he wrote the songs very quickly and then would tell Yehudi to ". . .do whatever you want."[23] Any changes would be subtle and small; the intent was only to simplify and emphasize the song's essence.[24]

Weiner's growing reputation as a fine choral conductor for amateur choruses led to another appointment. In 1930, he was recommended for the position of Music Director of the Central Synagogue in New York, which he held with distinction for forty-four years. In the 1930's he organized the musical portions of the "Message of Israel" radio program which was instituted by Dr. Jonah Wise, the Rabbi of Central Synagogue. During his tenure at Central, Weiner composed pieces for the synagogue, chose new repertoire for the choir, and introduced works of his

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[22]Robert Abelson, Interview by Ida Rae Cahana, December, 1992.

[23]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.

[24]Ibid.

contemporaries, Lazare Saminsky, A.W. Binder and Joseph Achron.[25] He also directed the synagogue premieres of other larger pieces such as the new work of Ernest Bloch, the Sacred Service (1934) and the first New York performance of Darius Milhaud's Sacred Service.[26]

The devastating outcome of World War II reinforced Weiner's commitment to Yiddish; it's survival became equated with its people's survival. The fear for the demise of Yiddish was certainly legitimate after at least one third of the world's Yiddish speaking population had been slaughtered. Many of the survivors and their children were rejecting Yiddish unconditionally. Zionistic fervor emphasized Hebrew as the new language of the day while Yiddish had become equated with a "ghetto" mentality. Some simply desired assimilation. Weiner's fears for the survival of Yiddish were fervently echoed in the writings of the post-Holocaust poets he chose to set. A positive addition to the Weiner household in the midst of the world tragedy for Jewry was the birth of their second son, David, in 1938. David Wyner is a fine chamber musician and psychologist, currently residing in New York.

Weiner was recognized for his expert knowledge in the field of Jewish music and was asked to speak on the subject at the Juilliard School of Music. In 1952, he was asked to

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[25]Tischler, pp. 57-58.
[26]Bryan, p. 14.

join the faculty of the Hebrew Union School of Education (Later called the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion) where he remained as teacher and coach until his death in 1982.[27] Throughout the years, many other offers from Canada, Europe, and the United States came to Weiner asking him to lecture, accompany, and conduct.

In addition to Weiner's prolific outpouring of choral compositions, arrangements, piano pieces, liturgical settings, and art songs, he also wrote an opera, Golem. The first attempt was begun as a collaboration with the poet Leivick, who did not complete the project, and was finished as a cantata called the Golem Prologue. Cantor Raymond Smolover later commissioned Weiner to write an opera and Smolover himself ended up writing the libretto for Golem, as the opera was called.[28]

These were busy and productive times for the Weiner family. In 1956, Lazar won the "Jacob Weinberg Synagogue Composition Prize" for his choral setting of Ashrei Hoish.[29] Yehudi Wyner had established himself as a fine pianist and composer, and father and son began a series of "Weiner/Wyner" joint programs in 1958. During the summers, the family often retired to favorite vacation spots, such as "Grine Felder," and when Weiner was not occupied with synagogue music commissions, he would indulge his passion

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[27]Tischler, pp. 119-120.
[28]Tischler, pp. 150-151.
[29]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

for the writing of Yiddish art songs. Between 1957 and 1965, Weiner wrote exclusively in Yiddish. Yehudi remembers his father with ashtray in hand (he was a chain smoker until his first heart attack in 1957) wandering out to the porch or "outhouse" which served as music room to sit and write.[30]

The first recording of Weiner's Yiddish art songs was produced in 1970 with a young soprano named Bianca Sauler. She had sung with him at many of his lectures during which he would accompany his own songs as part of the demonstration. There were also two later recordings of Yiddish art sings for which Weiner was responsible. These resulted from his collaborations with bass Leon Lishner and were released in 1976 and 1980.[31]

One of Weiner's final commissions for a new work was from the "Jewish Welfare Board-Jewish Music Council." Its objective was to use the Yiddish poetry written by the then very young (age seventeen) Abraham Joshua Heschel, the acclaimed philosopher and scholar. After a careful perusal of the poems, Weiner chose five which he set as a song cycle.[32] The last commission, in 1981, was for "Merciful God," a poem by Kadya Molodovsky, translated into English by Hazzan Samuel Rosenbaum. It is ironic that Weiner's last song setting was in English, rather than the Yiddish to

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[30]Wyner Interview.
[31]Tischler, pp. 195-196.
[32]Ibid., p. 190.

which he had been so dedicated. Rosenbaum collaborated with Weiner for many years. Another fine fruit of their joint creative labors was the cantata, The Last Judgement, based on the Yitzhak Peretz story of "Bontche Schweig."[33]

Hadassah Markson, director of the YM-YWHA at 92nd Street, invited Lazar to teach a master class in "Yiddish Art and Folk Song." He continued to teach there until his death. This teaching engagement also opened the way for an invitation to produce the opera, Golem, at the Y. Unfortunately, reviews in the New York Times were not particularly favorable, and the production did not agree with the wishes of its author, Cantor Raymond Smolover, and created an irreparable rift in the friendship between the two men.

In these last days of Weiner's life, there was another devastating blow; he was involuntarily retired from his years of service at Central Synagogue.[34] He wrote no more liturgical music after this dismissal. However, Weiner was busy performing, lecturing, and writing until his death in 1982.

According to Yehudi, his father never had a love of religious institutions. It always seemed somewhat ironic to him that a person like Lazar who led a secular life in which there was no home observance of Judaism, worked for so long

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[33]Ibid., p. 199.
[34]Ibid., pp. 191-195.

under the auspices of a clerical institution in which he had no interest.[35] Weiner's negative attitude toward "organized religion" was the natural outgrowth of the immigrant Jew, struggling to shake the fetters of traditionalism. His world was shaped by that of the intellectual and artistic elite, the Jewish bohemians of music, literature, and art. Theirs was a cultural, political Judaism.

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[35]Wyner Interview.

CHAPTER II

The Yiddish Poets

Many esteemed musicians, including Yehudi Wyner, Albert Weisser and Cantor Robert Abelson, have speculated that if Lazar Weiner had been less committed to setting his art songs in Yiddish, he would have become much more widely known in the general field of music. In the Encyclopaedia Judaica entry under his name, there is no mention at all of his songs.[36] However, noted musicologist, Albert Weisser, asserted that

> had Weiner's songs -which I consider his most characteristic and personal works-been written to texts other than Yiddish, say French or German, he would surely have been reckoned among our finest contemporary art-song writers-easily the equal of Poulenc and far more deserving of esteem and approbation than most of our well advertised native talents.[37]

His dedication to Yiddish did not keep him from exploring and utilizing new musical forms. Weiner's keen intellect and demanding musicianship kept him from writing music which was hackneyed and sentimental.

> He would fly into a rage if Yiddish were not represented on programs of Jewish music or if Yiddish words were mispronounced by singers. He

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[36]Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "Lazar Weiner," p. 713

[37]Albert Weisser, "Lazar Weiner-A Tribute," Congress Bi-Weekly 16, (November 20, 1967): 34.

also railed against what he regarded as the vulgarization of Yiddish culture in show tunes.[38]

Cantor Robert Abelson who worked with Weiner, especially in his later years, noted that Weiner's high standards kept him from jotting down ditties for the Yiddish musical theater, which would surely have brought him recognition and income.[39]

The hevre which Weiner associated with, almost from the beginning of his emigration to America, were forward-looking poets and writers who were uninterested in propagating established styles and themes. Weiner's ear was as finely attuned to great poetry as it was to music. Therefore, the poetry and its authors were a tremendous inspiration and guiding force. A fuller understanding of the poets, their writing, and their backgrounds are essential in appreciating Weiner, the times in which he lived, and the resulting products of these associations, his Yiddish art songs.

According to Max Weinreich, Yiddish poetry can be divided into three periods: Old Yiddish (1400-1800), East European (1800-1900), and Modern Yiddish (1900-present). Yiddish first emerged in the Rhine area around C.E. 1000, the speech of newly arrived immigrants from Italy and France who adopted the language of their German neighbors and eventually spread throughout Europe. It was natural that a

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[38]Darryl Lyman, Great Jews in Music, (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc.,1986), 244.

[39]Robert Abelson, Taped interview by Ida Rae Cahana, New York, NY, 3 February, 1993.

people who lived in separate communities with distinct organization, history, and beliefs should use their own separate alphabet as well. Although at its inception, Yiddish primarily used elements of High German and other dialects, fused with Hebrew and Aramaic, it also blended in words from Romance languages, and later, Slavic languages.[40]

> ". . . [In] its grammatical structure as in its semiotic world, Yiddish was a bridge between the traditional Jewish culture and languages and cultures of Europe, their beliefs, folklore, proverbs, and images.[41]

The second Yiddish period, East European, was highly influenced by the rise of the Hasidim, and as such contained many of the Hasidic legends. The advent of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) produced verses which reflected the individualistic stress of modernity. Co-existing with these attempts at bridging the old world to the new, were the folk-songs of the popular elements; troubadour and Badkhen (marriage entertainer) songs.[42] A commonly held misperception, and one that Dr. Weinreich cautions against is that

> the older literature was religious and the newer worldly. That is not right. . . Old Yiddish

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[40]Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, American Yiddish Poetry, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986), 10.

[41]Ibid, p. 11.

[42]Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg, eds., A Treasury of Yiddish Poetry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969; New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 6.

writing was strongly characterized by worldly elements.[43]

It can also be said of Modern Yiddish poetry that strong religious elements exist in it, although the surrounding world of its creators is primarily secularist. Modern Yiddish began simultaneously in Eastern Europe with artists like Itzik Peretz and Abraham Reisen and in the United States with the "sweatshop poets."

Large scale immigration of Eastern European Jews started in the 1880's and many of them settled in large cities as a Jewish working class. They were primarily people from a lower social and cultural level who fled conscription and persecution in Europe, but found horrid working conditions in the goldene medine. As under-paid garment workers in the sweatshops, they found a voice in Yiddish dailies like Di Fraye Arbeter Shtime (The Free Workers' Voice) and the Daily Forward, founded in 1897, which published political commentaries, fiction and poetry.[44] Reflecting the frustrations resulting from the sorry state of the workers' conditions, the literature was rousing, to the point, and often unsophisticated in form and tone.

The most popular of these new poets was Morris Rosenfeld, who was truly adored as the voice of the

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[43]Ibid, quoting Max Weinreich, Bilder fun der Yiddisher Literaturbeshikhte.

[44]Harshav, p.29.

proletariat. By the turn of the century, poets such as Abraham Lyessin, Yehoash, and Abraham Reisen were attempting to bring more of a sense of self-consciousness to their writing. The slogans of socialist internationalism were viewed with a more critical eye.[45]

After the failure of the Russian Revolution in 1905, the Socialist ideals of the Bund and the revolutionary ferment of Russia gave way to moods of defeat. A sense of weariness and resignation along with disillusionment with political ideals pervaded the people and the writers. The Jewishness of the new poets was cultural, not political.

Lazar Weiner's association began with this first group of distinctively modern Yiddish poets called Di Yunge (the young ones). This title was originally used as a term of derision by older writers, but was picked up and used proudly by the rebellious young bohemians. Their rise was definitively marked by the publication, in 1907, of a magazine called Yugend. H. Leivick, Zisha Landau, Mani-Leib, and Moishe Leib Halpern were its founders and most important members. They were mostly self-taught shop-workers with little extended secular education. The modern European poets, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud as well as Rilke and Hofmannsthal were great influences.[46] Most likely, Di Yunge frightened the older writers with their

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[45]Howe and Greenberg, p. 20.
[46]Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 431.

revolutionary innovations. Di Yunge were concerned with musicality of phrase, rather than political incitement. One of their primary goals was to rid Yiddish of newspaper vulgarisms and "Deutschmarish" (Germanisms).

> Yiddish is not a kind of German any more than it is a kind of Hebrew. It is a language that has evolved from Middle High German and Hebrew in almost equal halves, and has gone its own separate way for centuries.[47]

As a language, Yiddish was still in a state of flux, and Di Yunge set about to mold it into a language suitable for higher artistic expression.

"The Young Upstarts" (as they are labeled in the Encyclopedia Judaica) certainly did not have the broad popular appeal of the Sweatshop poets.[48] They were largely influenced by European impressionism, Russian symbolists, and the irony of Heinrich Heine. European impressionism was characterized by romanticism, individuality, subjectivity and by free and indirect means of expression.

For the most part, these poets were interested in form, in art for art's sake; there was great experimentation in technique, in "purifying" Yiddish.[49] The innovations in language did not extend to literary forms. Instead, mastery of the newest techniques, of verse forms and adherence to metrical regularities were held in high esteem as a sign of

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[47]Joseph Leftwich, An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Literature, (The Hague-Paris: Mouton and Co., Publishers, 1974) pp. 11-12.

[48]Howe and Greenberg, p. 28.

[49]Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 430.

their adoption of the highest intellectual and artistic standards. Di Yunge longed to uplift Yiddish from popularist vulgarity. They shunned didactic moralizing and sentimentality, focusing instead on the communication of personal impressions.[50] H. Leivick, an early ally who eventually went on his way, voiced his own rebellion:

> I am sick to my stomach of. . . the diaspora themes, the shoyfer peals and the shtetl stories. I am bored by Hasidic tunes, folksy sing-songs, clerical sonnets.[51]

Beginning with H. Leivick, a few biographies of important members of Di Yunge will now follow, all of whose poetry Weiner set to music.

H. Leivick, born in 1888 in Byelorussia, had been a political prisoner in Siberia who escaped to the U.S. in 1913. The theme of redemption or "messiah" frequently occurs in his works, as well as his own personal guilt regarding Jewish suffering and extermination.[52] He was both the great denouncer and apologist, but always stressed the sanctity of human life.[53] He was a master of short forms, but within their boundaries, combined lyric and

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[50]Ruth Whitman, An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Poetry, trans. and selected by Ruth Whitman (New York: October House Inc., 1966) pp. x-xi.

[51]Irving Howe, Ruth R. Wisse, and Khone Shmeruk, eds., The Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987) p. 28.

[52]Leftwich, p. 22.

[53]Israel Chaim Biletzky, Essays on Yiddish Poetry and Prose Writers of the Twentieth Century, Part 1, trans. Yirmiyahu Haggi (Tel-Aviv, Israel: I. L. Peretz Library, 1969) p. 61.

dramatic genius.[54] He also produced several verse plays, the most well-known being The Golem.

During his lifetime he became a culture hero. At first, his preoccupation with the mystique of martyrdom was seen as neurotic and even un-Jewish, but during the Holocaust, it seemed an anticipation of modern reality. He aspired to pain, sharing it with his people, which ". . . [approached] the religiosity of Dostoevski as it [declared] the necessity of receiving pain in order to be ready for grace."[55] A powerful example of this is his expansion of "Ani Ma'amin." As most of his fellow poet-newcomers to the U.S., Leivick was also a blue-collar worker, a paper-hanger.

Moishe Leib Halpern (1886-1932), was born in Galicia, but moved to Vienna at the age of twelve. In America, he earned a living as a waiter and a jack-of-all-trades. His first Yiddish poem was rejected by an editor as "too beautiful for a beginner."[56] His work is earmarked by an internal struggle between concern and disgust for the human condition. It is explosive: "Help me, O God," he wrote, "to spit on the world and on you and on myself."[57] Halpern has been compared to Baudelaire, because of the turmoil of urban malaise and exhaustion of spirit inherent in his work. What differentiates him from Baudelaire is his lack of

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[54]Whitman, p. xii.
[55]Howe and Greenberg, pp. 36-37.
[56]Aaron Kramer, ed. and trans., A Century of Yiddish Poetry, (New York: Cornwall Books, 1989), p. 129.
[57]Howe and Greenberg, p. 34.

preoccupation with sin.[58] Halpern flaunted his sarcasm and was purposefully provocative in clowning. But his work also flows with a lyric tenderness and a weighty expression which belies the clown/cynic.[59]

Where Halpern was a poet of psychic turmoil, Mani-Leib was a poet of aesthetic detachment.[60] Mani-Leib (1883-1953) was born in the Ukraine and was active in the revolutionary movement. He finally left Russia for London in 1904 and one year later, moved to New York. He was a handsome, romantic figure who had, in abundance, the Eastern European Jewish intelligentsia's love for refinement and delicacy. One of Mani-Leib's missions was to strip Yiddish of the Slavic and Hebrew components of guttural consonants, thus creating effects of hushed alliteration and assonance.[61] He also loved Pushkin and the simplicity of the Yiddish folk song. Some of these folk tales and legends make their way into his writing. The echoes of village life and values imbued some of his poems with a rich imagery, as in "Shtile Licht," which has in it a folk charm and the melodious murmur of prayer. For Mani-Leib, Verlaine's credo -music above all- was his guide.[62] It was natural that Lazar Weiner should find Mani-Leib's poetry so appealing, and in fact, took his song setting of "Shtile Licht" and

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[58]Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 438.
[59]Biletzky, pp. 31-33.
[60]Howe and Greenberg, p. 34.
[61]Ibid., pp. 32-33.
[62]Biletzky, p. 98.

inserted it into his opera, The Golem. Mani-Leib's poetry is decorous in form, using conventional quatrains of rhymed iambics, or other set lyrical forms, but he was more daring in theme. The Russian Symbolists influenced him with their belief that poetry transforms the commonplace through art. Supporting himself as a shoemaker and laundryman, Mani-Leib described his split life as artist and worker in the poem, "I Am." These workers who aspired tom rarefied levels of poetic artistry might be compared to the Hasidim who also lived split lives, the body in this world and the soul reaching beyond.[63] As with all of the poverty-stricken immigrant Yiddish poets, his actual life experience was completely at odds with his dream of being a pure poet.

Zishe Landau (1889-1937), born in Poland, was a descendent of a Hasidic dynasty and a leader of Di Yunge. Naturally, he was strongly influenced by Hasidic tales and celebrated the joy of the commonplace.[64] As Landau expressed the primary goal of Di Yunge, they

> would not harness their verse to any political purposes, not become "the rhyme department of the labor movement". . .rather, they centered on the experiences of the individual.[65]

Jacob I. Segal (1896-1954) was born in the Ukraine and moved to Montreal at the age of 15. First a tailor and then a Yiddish teacher, he also led the Canadian Jewish Writers

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[63]Harshav, p. 34.
[64]Howe and Wisse, passim.
[65]Harshav, p. 33.

Association. Although his early poems were in Russian and Hebrew, from 1916 on he dedicated himself exclusively to Yiddish.[66] To him, Yiddish was a "Holy Tongue" which captured the essence of the subjects of day-to-day Jewish life. He was a voluminous writer who was a keen observer of the details of ordinary Jewish life. Segal's wistful love poem to the language and its people, "Yidish," also reflected Weiner's devotion to Yiddish.

In 1919, a new trend in Yiddish poetry was launched by what came to be called "The Introspectivists" or the In Zikh group. The original founders, A. Glanz-Leyeles, Jacob Glatstein, and N.B. Minkoff, published a journal entitled In Zikh, which lasted from 1920 - 1940. In this unique publication which involved the participation of 100 poets and writers, they declared

> We are part of the world, but for us the world exists only insofar as it reflects itself in us, and insofar as it touches us. The world is nonexistent, a falsehood, if it has nothing to do with us. It manifests itself through us.[67]

World War I and the Russian Revolution shocked these writers out of complacency. Instead of aspiring to standards of form and content set by Europeans, as Di Yunge had done, they challenged the Expressionism of Europe. An original technique developed which was a kaleidoscopic method of bringing together principles of modernity: the psychology of

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[66]Kramer, p. 174.
[67]Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "In Zikh."

the stream of consciousness and the "multidimensional nature of modern life."[68] The trends in modern art of futurism, expressionism, and imagism as well as the works of Nietzsche, Freud, and T.S. Eliot all informed their work. There was nothing unusual about mixing ". . . religious attitudes and daily politics, world events and personal emotions, universal history and Jewish news in one kaleidoscopic whirl."[69]

The dividing issues between Di Yunge and the In Zikhists centered around a few issues. Few of Di Yunge mastered English, while the Inzikhists were educated here and were influenced by American as well as European poetry.[70] The In Zikhists might be called impressionistic, but only insofar as the world was refracted through the lens of their own individual self (sich) or ego.[71] The aim was to follow a method of minute self-analysis.[72] They also believed in "art for art's sake," but art as an authentic expression of life. They left behind neo-romantic sentimentality as they faced the world with honesty and harshness scored by irony and understatement.[73] The cardinal dividing point between the two groups of poets was that of free verse. Pre-World War I, only a few Yiddish

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[68]Harshav, p. 41.
[69]Ibid., p. 39.
[70]Howe and Greenberg, pp. 40-41.
[71]Whitman, p. xii.
[72]Samuel J. Imber, ed., Modern Yiddish Poetry, (New York: The East and West Publishing Company, 1927) passim.
[73]Harshav, p.42.

free-verse poems existed. The "Introspectivists" valued all themes, rhythm and vocabulary so long as the poetry accurately reflected their own personal experience.[74] A common struggle, however, was for recognition and employment. The "Introspectivists" were accused of being too cerebral, and many turned to journalism for income. This was considered "selling out, " especially to J. Glatstein who admonished his fellows,

> Every genuine poet. . . should have a lot of opportunity to write journalism so that he can write it out of his system, steam it out of himself, so that when he comes to write a spoken poem, he is already shouted out.[75]

Jacob Glatstein (1896-1971) was born in Poland and his poetry was published at age seventeen. He is not an easy poet to read, embracing wide resources and standpoints. As the original manipulator of the Yiddish language, he made up words to express his bold, angry conceptions. Glatstein ". . . [resembled] T.S. Eliot in his intensity, difficulty, and lyricism."[76] He came up with original sound effects, replacing rhyme and metrical stanzas with complex assonances, alliteration, and onomatopoeia.[77] Glatstein's early poems were influenced by psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious. Later, he drew more from Jewish tradition and contemporary Jewish concerns and insisted that the

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[74] Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1971 ed., s.v. "In Zikh."
[75] Harshav, p. 28 quoting "Sum and Substance," p. 131.
[76] Whitman, p. xii.
[77] Sol Liptzin, The Maturing of Yiddish Literature (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1970) p. 49.

cadenced verse of the Bible served as a greater influence than his American contemporary Whitman.[78] He was transformed by the events of the Holocaust, but he also cautioned against the post-Holocaust "wailing together in a collective stammer."[79]

A. Glanz-Leyeles (1889-1967), also born in Poland, certainly felt the influence of Walt Whitman and other great American poets. He was the spokesman for the In Zikh school and as co-editor, wrote in an issue of In Zikh,

> . . . The creative word and the Yiddish sound have leaped to the heights of modern universal poetry. Complex forms have taken up their abode in it.[80]

Glanz-Leyeles studied literature at Columbia University. He championed free verse while experimenting with strict verse forms like rondeaux and villanelles.[81] Both Glatstein and Leyeles developed "conversational" rhythms, the rhythms of speech which Halpern had first begun to mimic in his poetry. In this way, they brought out the full flavor of Yiddish conversation.

N. B. Minkoff (1893-1958) believed, along with the "In Zikhists" that poetry is intellectualized emotion. He also stressed subjectivity in verse.[82] As with all the Inzikhist poets, Minkoff experimented with the subtle

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[78]Howe and Greenberg, p. 41.
[79]Harshav, p. 44.
[80]Biletzky, Essays, p. 69, quoting Glanz-Leyeles from an issue of In Zikh.
[81]Howe and Wisse, passim.
[82]Liptzin, p. 55.

rhythms of free verse. His training as a musician served him well; he had an impeccable ear for tonal effects.[83] As mentioned earlier, it was Minkoff who originally drew Weiner into his association with Yiddish poets and poetry.

Eastern Europe, in between World War I and World War II, developed a rebellious parallel group to the In Zikhists called Di Khaliastre ("The Gang") who also shared a kinship with European expressionism. They were centered in Warsaw and were headed by poets Melech Ravitch (1893-1976) and Peretz Markish (1895-1952). Cantor Abelson related this tragic story: Although Markish had won the Lenin Prize in 1939, he was later put in prison. While he was imprisoned, Paul Robeson visited him, as a representative of the Red Cross. Peretz's wife managed to smuggle a jacket in to him so that he would look respectable for the interview, and Robeson reported back that all seemed fine. Peretz Markish was executed shortly thereafter in an unknown place.[84] In attacking all fixed beliefs: religion, the Bund, politics, the Establishment, "The Gang" captured the chaos of the moment.[85] A group of more subdued temperament and lasting literary significance developed during the early 1930's, pre-World War II, and called itself "Young Vilna." Vilna was a learning center and rising interest in Yiddish culture

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[83]Ibid., p.54.

[84]Cantor Robert Abelson, Interview by Ida Rae Cahana, New York, N.Y., December, 1992.

[85]Howe and Greenberg, p. 50.

figured strongly in its breaking the ties of ghetto confinement. Young poets with innovative ideas, such as Abraham Sutzkever, were responded to with enthusiasm.

Sutzkever (1913-) was trapped in Poland during the War and fought with the underground. He testified in the Nuremberg war crimes trials and later moved to Israel.[86] His writing contains a feeling for the language of nature and its inner melody which led one scholar to call him ". . . without a doubt one of the most musical poets in Yiddish. . ."[87] In much the same way, in the poem "Tsela Tseldi," which Weiner set, Jacob Glatstein associates autumn with deep sorrow and the changing of life which aging brings. Sutzkever also links the fall season with disturbing sounds and a disgruntled present state.[88] In his poetry, Sutzkever uses words and spatial images to defy the damage of time and unites the dead with the living. The "collapsing" of time, interspersing figures from Biblical or Talmudic times with modern situations, served the expressive needs of the new Yiddish poets in both Eastern Europe and America.

During the post-Holocaust years, Yiddish poetry returns to concerns dealing with the collective destiny of the Jewish people.

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[86]Ibid., p. 51.

[87]Yitzhak Kahn, Portraits of Yiddish Writers, trans. by Joseph Leftwich (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1979) p. 105.

[88]Ibid.

> In the desolation of memory, Yiddish poets find themselves turning back to the old Jewish God, not so much the God of orthodoxy, or even the God their fathers had worshipped, but a God inseparable from Jewish fate, a God with whom one pleads and quarrels.[89]

Melech Ravitch, Aaron Zeitlin, and Kadya Molodovsky, moved (respectively) to the New World, the United States, and Canada. All three harangue and rant in dialogue with God.

Aaron Zeitlin (1899-1974) drew from the Jewish religious and mystical traditions as well as secular cosmopolitan sources.[90] There is an esoteric vision of worlds beyond. He displayed a reverence toward the Jewish word; he prays in his writing, in compositions in both Yiddish and Hebrew. There are also many contradictions, perhaps reflecting the unbelievable tragedy of the times in which he lived. "He wept and laughed at once."[91] His own life mirrored the depth of the world suffering. In 1939, while in New York for the premiere of a play he had written, Zeitlin's parents, wife, and children perished at the Nazi's hands when they invaded Poland.[92]

Kadya Molodovsky (1894-1975) was born in Lithuania, then taught and published in Odessa and Kiev. She became a Yiddish schoolteacher in Warsaw and was persecuted by the police for anti-Fascist activities. In 1935, she emigrated to New York and has become known for several volumes of ". .

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[89]Howe and Greenberg, pp. 52-53.
[90]Howe and Wisse, p. 40.
[91]Biletzky, p. 181.
[92]Kramer, p. 324.

. luminous, prophetic poetry. . ."[93] After the Holocaust, she became a mourner, like the poets of Lamentations.[94] Her writing is modern and confessional, especially in her works dealing with women's themes. Molodowsky was one of the first to break past the traditional reticence imposed on Jewish women.

In summary, the move toward an embracing of modernity became a technical move toward rhythmical innovation and free verse. Meter and sound orchestration were central to Yiddish poetry and can still be seen in Russian poetry. Various effects were achieved through repeated metrical patterns, symmetry, and parallelism.

> As in a song, the "magic" is not in the sound patterns themselves, but in their interaction with a few, perhaps quite elementary words and suggested themes, which give the sound patterns certain emotive and thematic directions and which are, in turn, reinforced by them.[95]

Simultaneously, free rhythms enabled the writers to capture the irregular feel of speech. In addition, strict forms were not abandoned, if they fully served the purpose of expression.

Thematically, poets reached inside themselves, touched by the tremendous ramifications of psychological awareness. Individualistic expression was also affected by the state of the surrounding world. Drawing on their rich and diverse

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[93]Kramer, p.169.
[94]Biletzky, p. 121.
[95]Harshav, p. 45.

history, Yiddish poets re-imaged Biblical and Talmudic figures confronting the issues of modernity. Folklore, myth, tradition, and relationships with God were not shunted aside as old-fashioned. Rather, modernity provided new tools of expression and the impetus for reexamination of such recurring Jewish themes as singularity, chosenness, adaptation/assimilation, and suffering.

CHAPTER III

Song Analyses

It is essential to have an understanding of the poets and their art in order to explore a few examples of how Lazar Weiner set their poems in a way which was completely in keeping with their philosophy and techniques.

"Gramen Geshribn in Zamd"

RHYMES TRACED IN SAND

by Melech Ravitch

At summer's end I sit on a bench
In the garden at dusk.
The last tall column of sunlight
Flames in the west.
The evening breeze grows cool
As with a twig
I trace a poem in the sand.

Man, you are evil and callous.
Your brother's blood means no more to you
Than so much water.
My God, brother, tell me why!
It is so easy to be good.

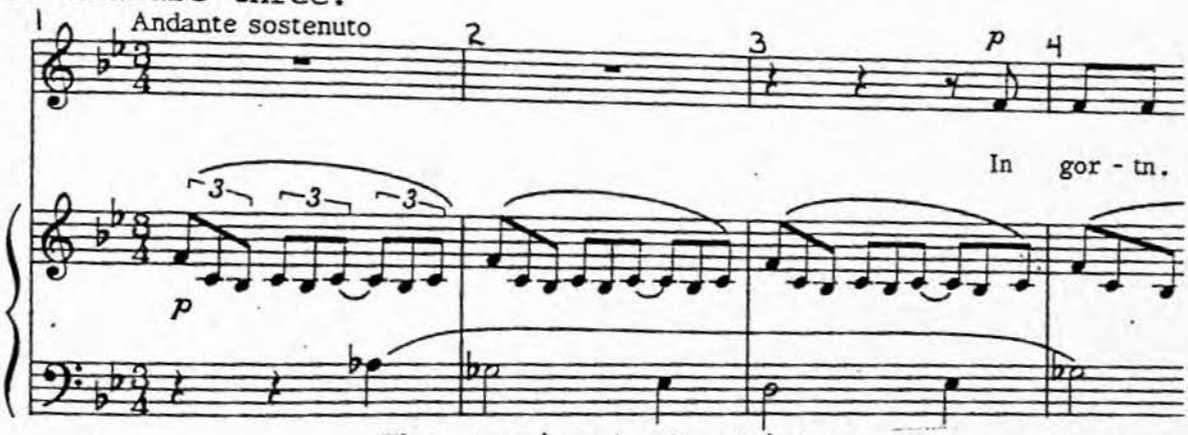
Man, you are evil.
Like a slaughter-knife is your cry.
My God, brother, tell me why!
It is so hard to be bad.

Man, you are evil.
And yet you sing to God
Of turning the other cheek.
But there, under your coat, barely out of sight
You carry a freshly honed ax.

At summer's end I rise from my bench
In the garden at dusk.
The last column of sunlight has faded.
I call out good-night to no one in particular
And with my foot
I tread out my poem in the sand
As the darkness gathers about me.

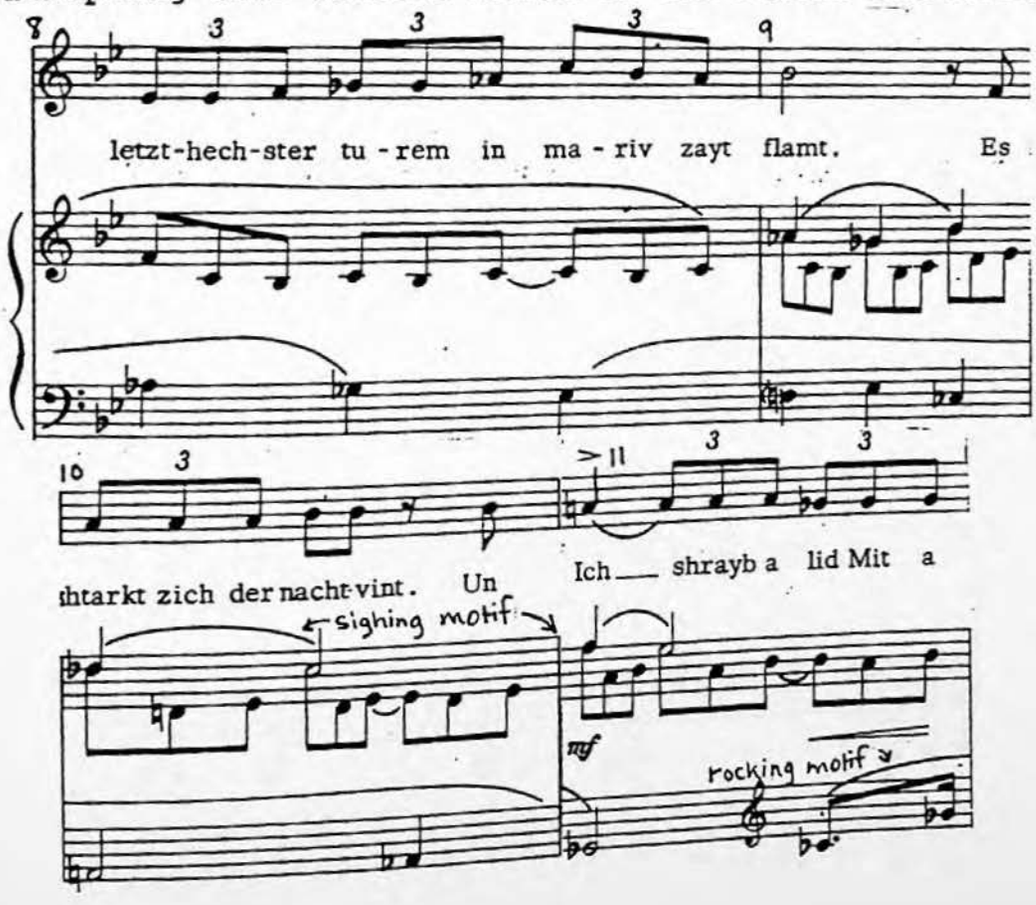
The piano begins with a pentatonic melodic figure in the right hand, the triplet rhythms creating a lulling sense

of calm. In the left hand, a simple bass line moves as a harmonic ostinato, the second note of the bass' melody line creating the first of many minor seconds with the right hand - a brief moment of tension. There is not a definite tonal center, although f minor is strongly suggested with the vocal line hovering about it, the piano's right hand repeating it each downbeat of each measure, and the use of the a flat. G flat appears as a color note, creating minor second's and augmented fourth's. The mood is mysterious, an uncomplicated introduction gliding into the voice's entrance in measure three.

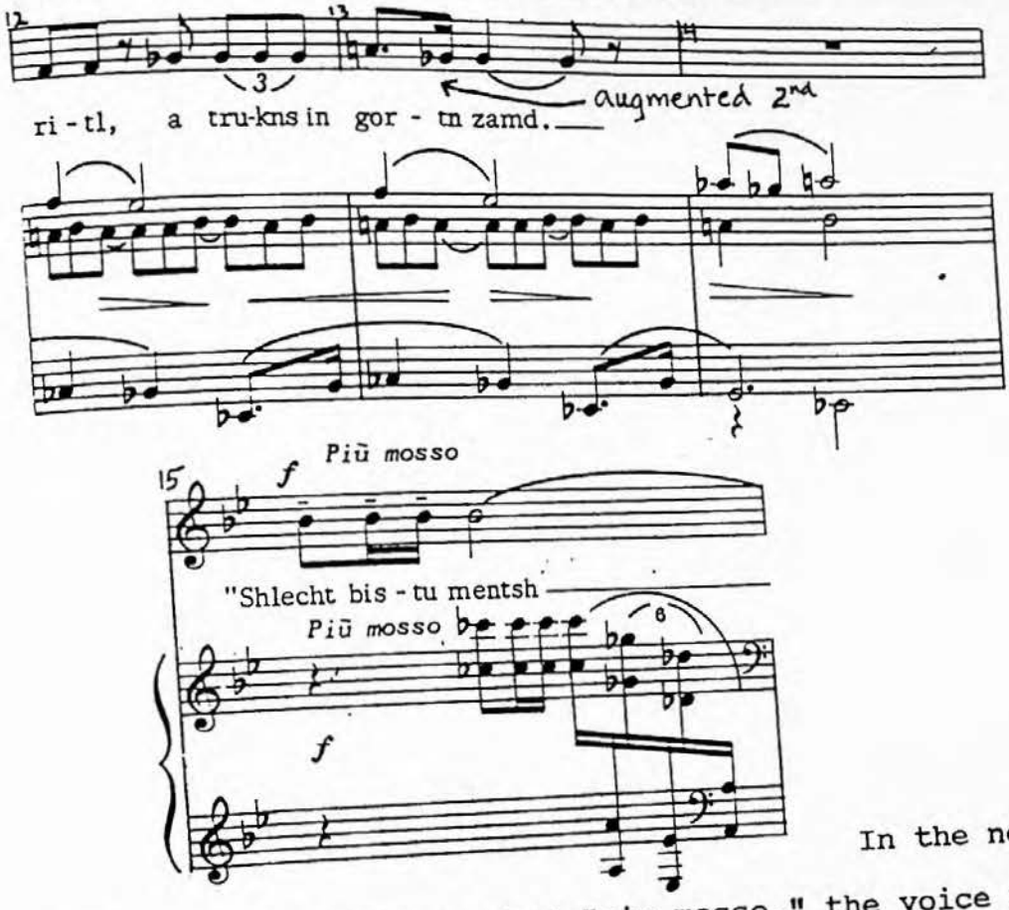


The opening text, which continues to set the scene, is presented hesitatingly, as if spoken or chanted, within a small melodic range. The voice is in 2 against the piano's 3, a sense that perhaps all is not in agreement. As the narrator tells how the "last tall column of sunlight flames in the west," the opening bass line returns and the voice ascends, opening the range and making a slight crescendo for the first time as it reflects the text. Now the piano also widens its range while continuing

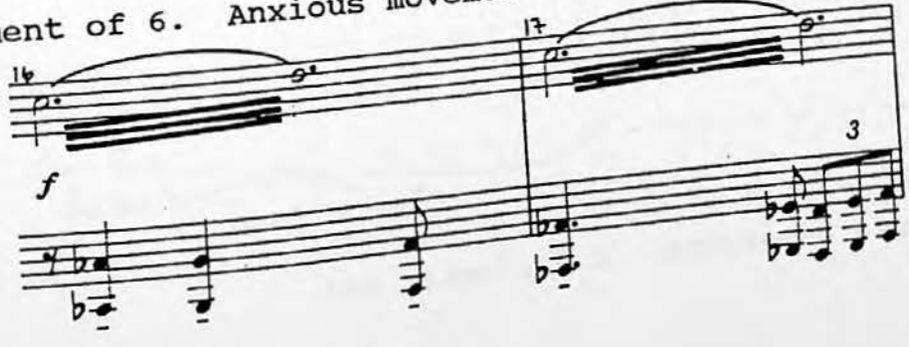
to use minor second's, and their inversion to increase tension. The first admittance of the personal connection of the narrator is accented on a naturalized "a" while the piano punctuates with an octave plus major 7. The piano's R.H. has begun a sighing motif (ms. 10) in the right hand, which is further accentuated with messe di voce in ms. 11-13, and continues through the narrator's description of writing a poem with a twig in the garden's sand. The vocal line introduces the augmented second here, which will also appear later. It gives a sense of "Ahavah Rabah" mode, the Jewish voice. In the piano's L.H., ms. 11, there is a sudden jump to treble clef as a rocking motif begins which intensifies the sense of yearning, of innocence. Disrupting this wistful moment is the sudden announcement by



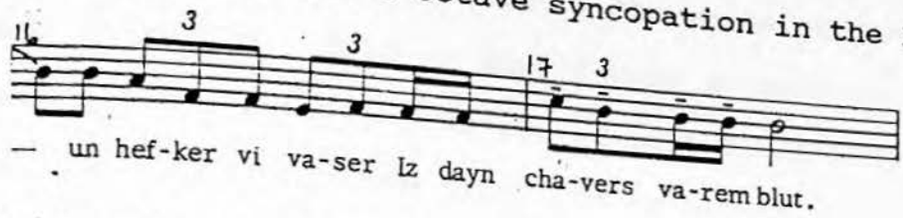
the piano, with its parallel major 7th's.



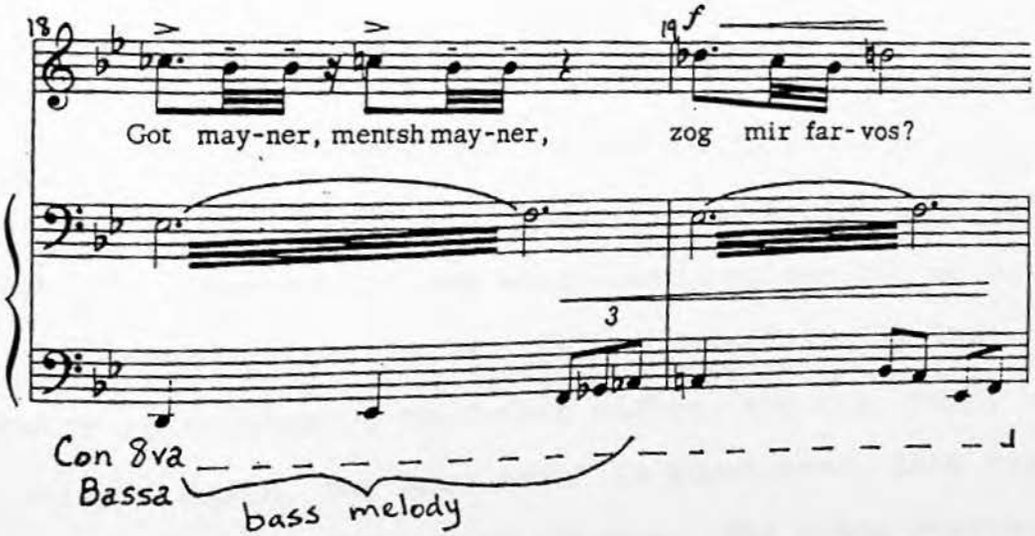
In the next section of the song, marked "piu mosso," the voice picks up this jolting change of mood. The entrance is forte, for the first time, with an accented statement of mankind's evil. The agitation in this initial use of sixteenth notes is immediately acknowledged by the piano in octaves which clash in minor 2nd's with the voice and continue in a sweeping movement of 6. Anxious movement in the piano continues with



a tremolo R.H. and broad octave syncopation in the L.H.

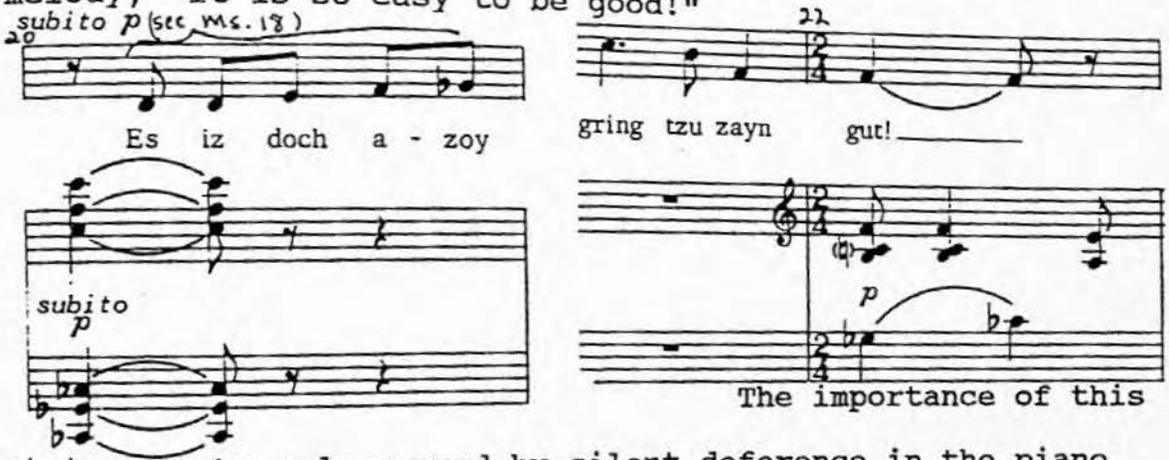


Meanwhile, the narrator continues reading what is actually a poem-within-a-poem with a recitative-like statement of condemnation. The voice has rhythmically augmented the piano's earlier melodic pentatonic figure in ms. 16-17. A rare, complete major triad sets the word, "havers" (brothers'), pointing at the sarcasm inherent in the use of the word "brother's." Each important word of the sentence of condemnation falls on a downbeat, "Shlecht bistu mentsh un hefker vi vaser iz dayn chavers varem blut." Rhythmic diminution and a rising chromatic line in the voice continue the relentless pounding of the damning question, "my God, man, tell me why?"



The piano's L.H. introduces a melody

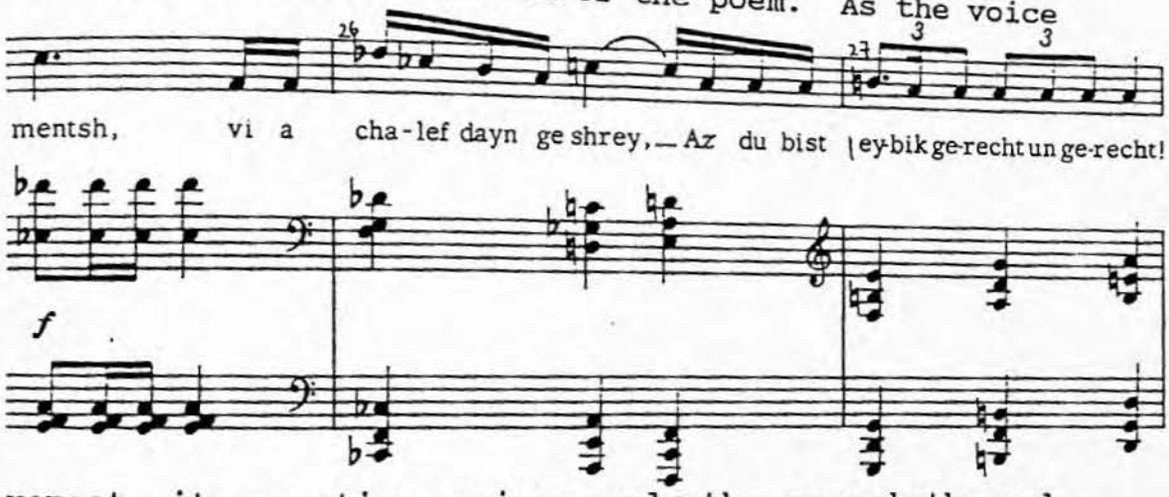
(ms. 18) which is then repeated by the voice, two octaves higher, in ms. 20. This is one of many example of how Weiner uses the recurring device of musical anticipation to foreshadow and depict the text. It is almost as if the music and the poem are in canon. The outburst grows to a climax with a crescendo in ms.19 which is dramatically cut off by a subito piano in ms. 20. The piano holds an unstable dominant 7th chord while the narrator enters, in a thoughtful tempo, and admonishes in a beautiful, romantic melody, "It is so easy to be good!"



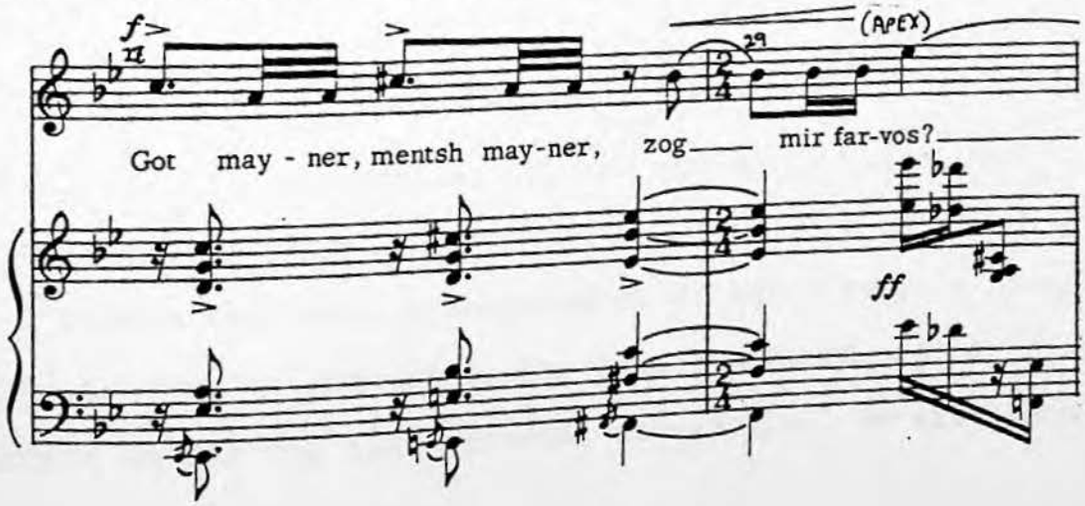
The importance of this statement is underscored by silent deference in the piano. Further agreement is musically stated as the piano reenters in 2/4 with a gentle syncopation set in fourths and fifths superimposed on each other. Weiner changes time signatures subtly, in order to fit the word accentuations and moods.

As the meter shifts back to the original 3/4, the narrator reiterates, a half-step higher, the cry, "Man, you are evil." Again, the word "man" is punctuated, this time with melodic 9th's instead of octaves. The piano overlaps with the voice the same rhythmic pattern of eighth and two

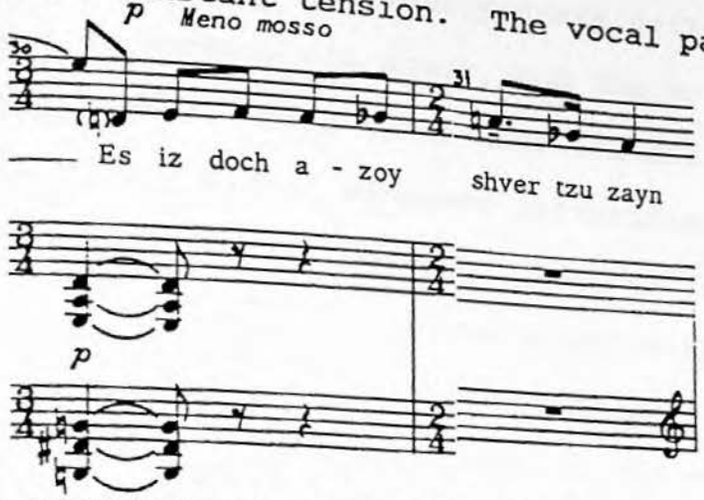
sixteenth's. It then continues, melodically ascending, while the chords of quartal harmonies serve as punctuation on the downbeats of the next two measures. The vocal rhythm seems to increase with added sixteenth notes and a dotted triplet figure accenting that ". . . you are always right!" All is not right with the make-up of the underlying chords; the left hand's open and diminished fifths create dissonance with the right hand's fourths. It is as if the piano reflects the bitter sarcasm of the poem. As the voice



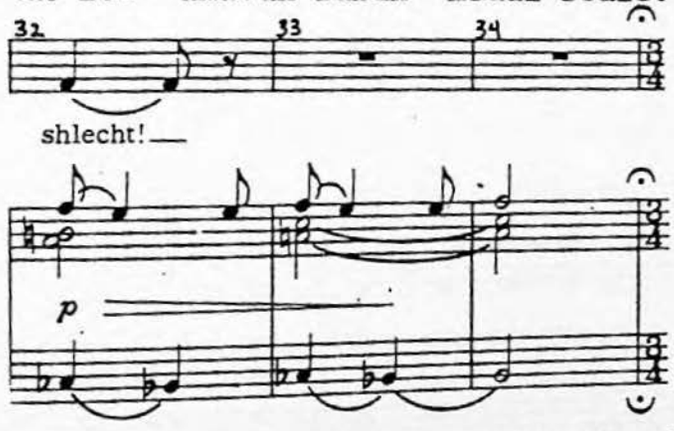
repeats its question, using nearly the same rhythm and melody, the piano lurches in a sixteenth syncopation. The punctuation chords again contain second's and sevenths which



sustain the constant tension. The vocal part reaches its



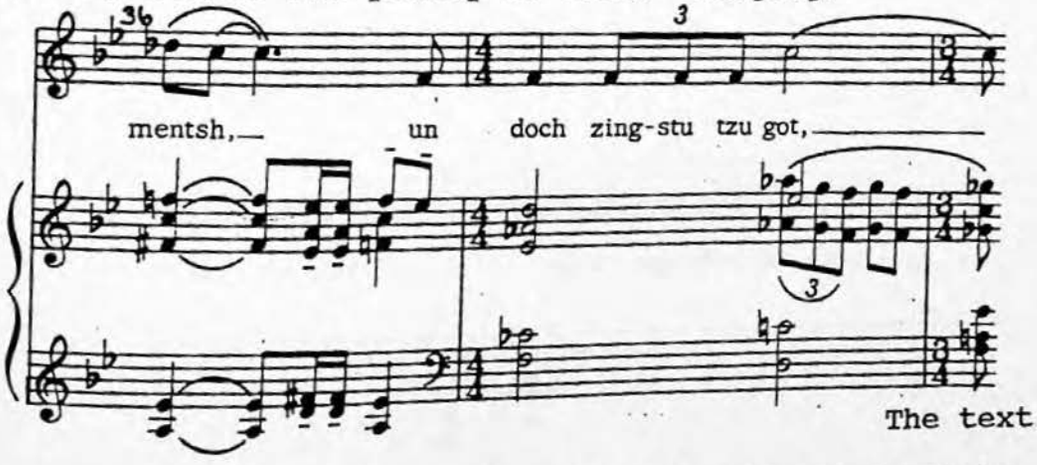
melodic apex here on an e flat with the word, "why?" It is supported by octave e flats in the piano which immediately fall away to a chord cluster of fourths, marked "p." The voice begins the identical melodic statement, "It is so. . ." and only reaches to an augmented second for the next word, "difficult." This sounds as the true Jewish voice of conscience, in its "ahavah rabah" modal scale. In measures



32-34, sighing, descending seconds appear in the piano's right and left hands.

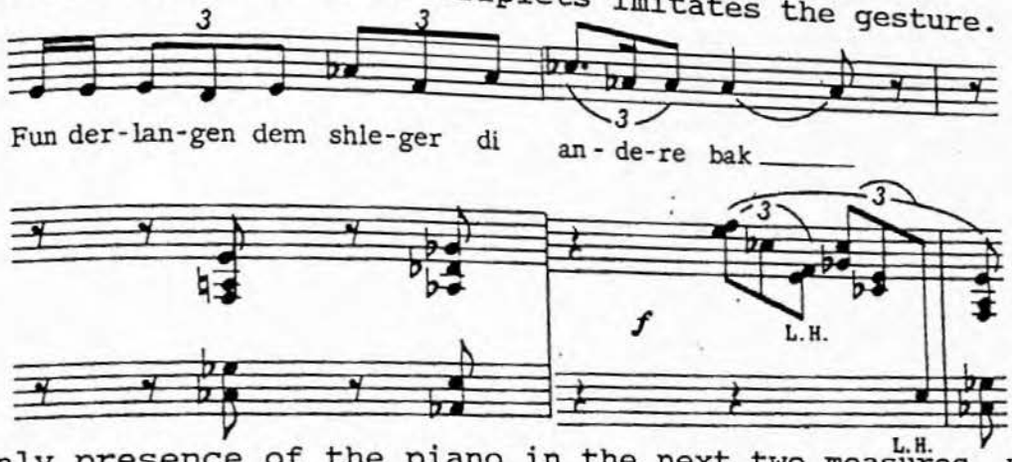
Before the final pronouncement of man's evil, a fermata gives us time to reflect on the last statement and to prepare us for the last, pivotal accusation. As with each

previous declaration of "Man, you are evil," the tempo increases as marked, piu mosso, and the vocal line is one-half step higher. This three-time melodic rising by half-steps in a "Kol Nidre" maneuver intensifies, melodically, the mounting angst of the text. For the last time, the word "shlecht" (evil) is held two beats while the piano enters with a d ninth chord in a more rhythmically stately pronouncement. Melodic variation in the voice and a d flat appoggiatura adds color and emphasis in ms. 35-36. The diminished octave in the piano's right hand gives the same kind of disturbing accent to the word "mentsh" as in ms. 25. The piano also mimics the voice, both rhythmically and melodically, directly after the words, "Shlecht bistu mentsh." A diminished d 9 chord lies beneath the vocal line as it continues, ". . . un doch zingstu tzu got,. . ." The voice leaps up a fifth in a shofar call, imitating the "other" singing to God. The next chord, consisting of three tritones, belies the purity of their "singing."

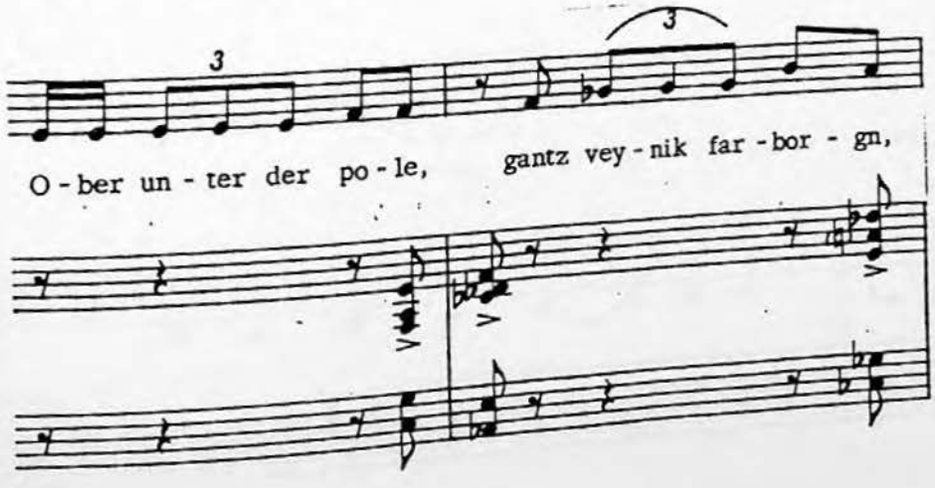


The text continues in a spoken manner, while the piano interrupts

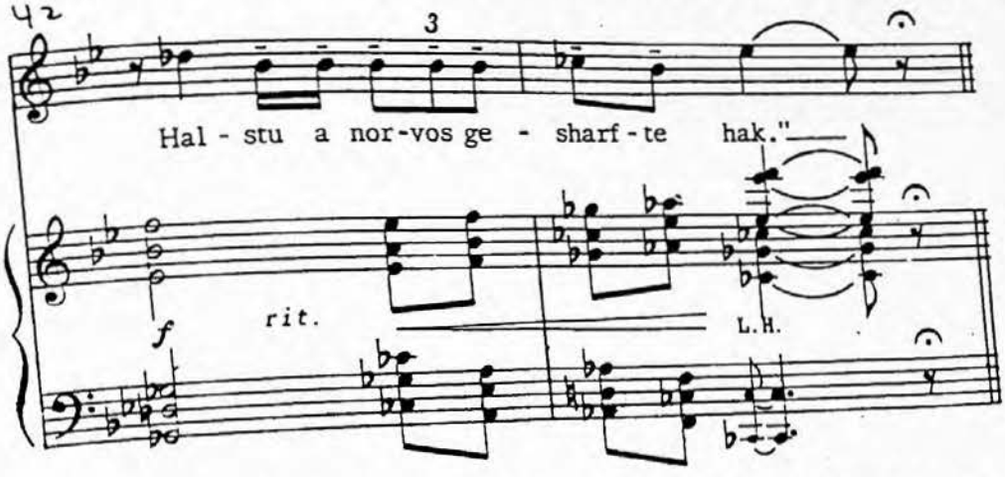
with brief, syncopated, seventh chords, in a 2:3 configuration with the voice. As the text finishes the first part, "of turning the other cheek," the piano's descending movement of triplets imitates the gesture.



The only presence of the piano in the next two measures, with ninth chords, is to move the voice along as the drama builds: "But under your coat, barely out of sight. . ." The suspense is terrible until finally, with an open ninth chord, both piano and voice rise. The piano opens up, both hands steadily marching in opposing motion to a final extreme over four octaves apart. This sequence of alternating a flat 7 with f 7 chords ends with what would be a c flat major chord, but for the extremity, where an f sits

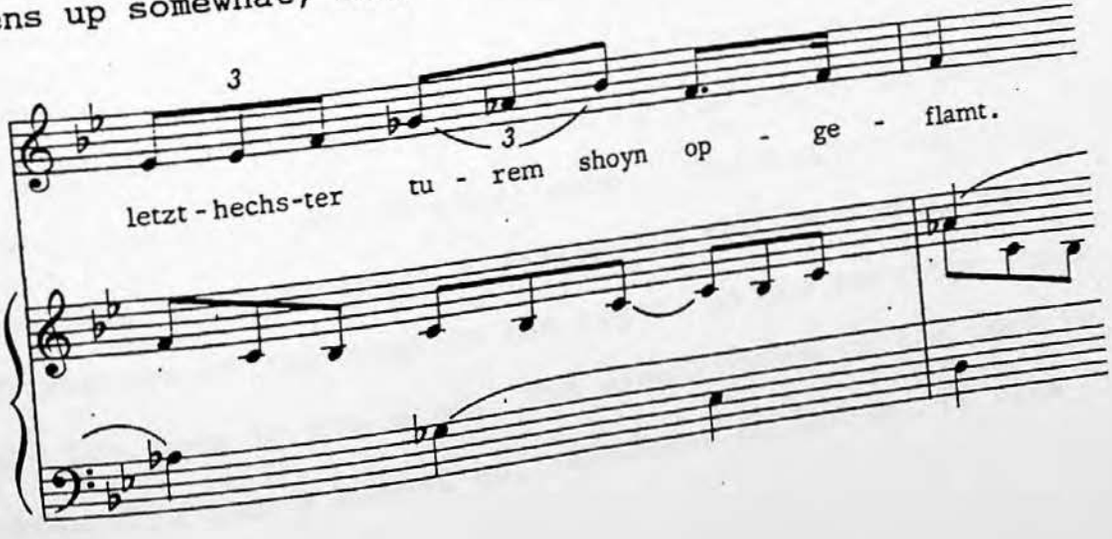


next to the e flat. This high, squeaking dissonance is

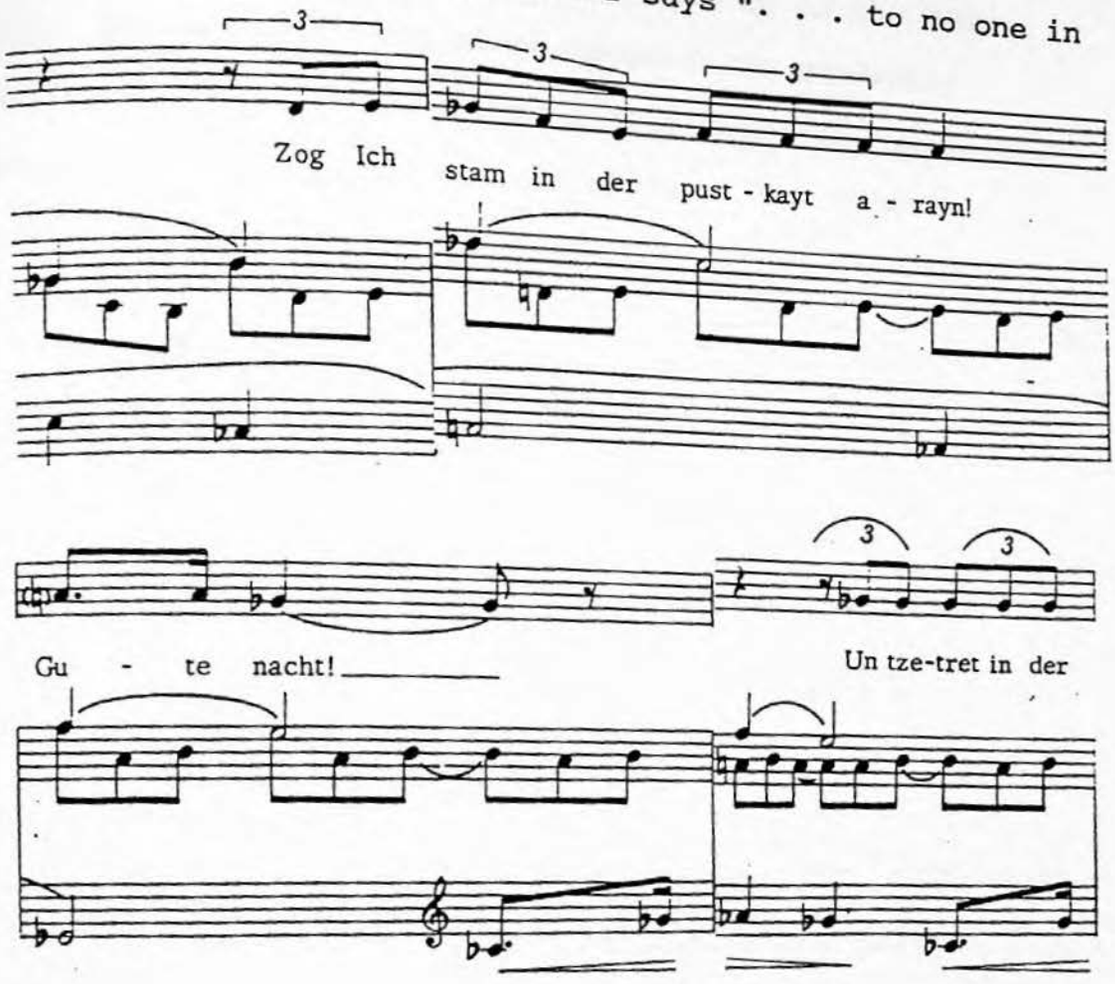


heard as the stabbing of the freshly sharpened axe, as the song reaches its peak. It is more painful to hear a nearly consonant chord betrayed by a second "a" up where one least expects it, a brilliant musical interpretation of the text. A fermata again marks a division; this time, between the end of the narrator's poem and the original scene.

The A section returns, with minor melodic variation as the narrator stands up from the bench. The vocal line descends in resignation as "the last column of sunlight already has faded." The triplet figure in the piano R.H. opens up somewhat, while the voice remains within a narrow,

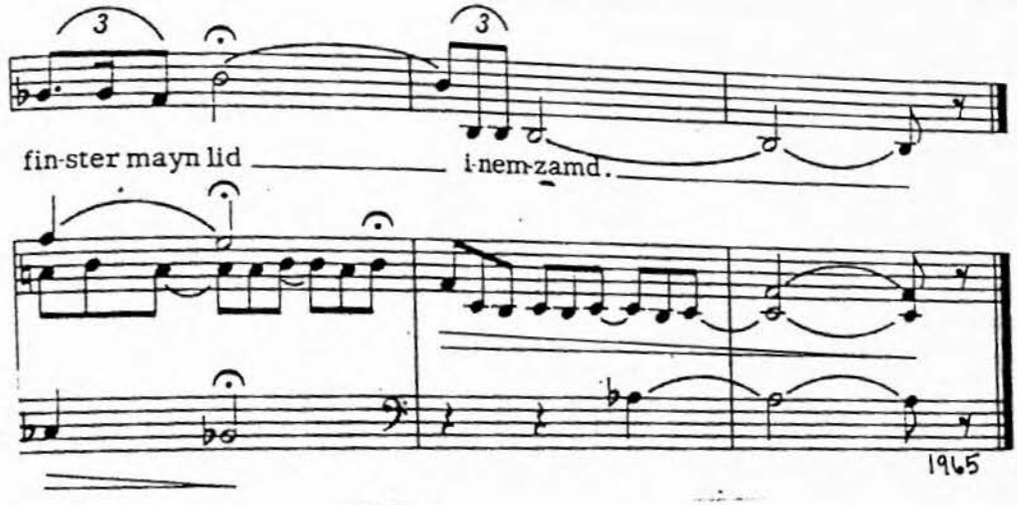


chanting range. As the narrator says ". . . to no one in



particular," "Good night!" The farewell is emphatically uttered on the downbeat, unusual for this speaker who usually stays out of sight, on the offbeats, when beginning a statement. It is also colored by the augmented second, the interval of Jewish conscience. Ironically, the soothing, rocking motif reappears in the left hand, and an intimation of the sigh in the right, as the narrator wipes out the poem in the sand. The significance of the poem is celebrated for a moment as, reluctant to let go, it sits

with a fermata on it, which is picked up in the piano. Then, both let go; the piano resumes its wandering pentatonic motif which never really resolves, while the voice dies out in a low, held b flat. The fact that the



vocal line resolves while the piano does not, reveals more of the sub-text which exists throughout the piece, the underlying feelings of tension, irony, and lack of agreement. The composer speaks in two voices, as does the poet.

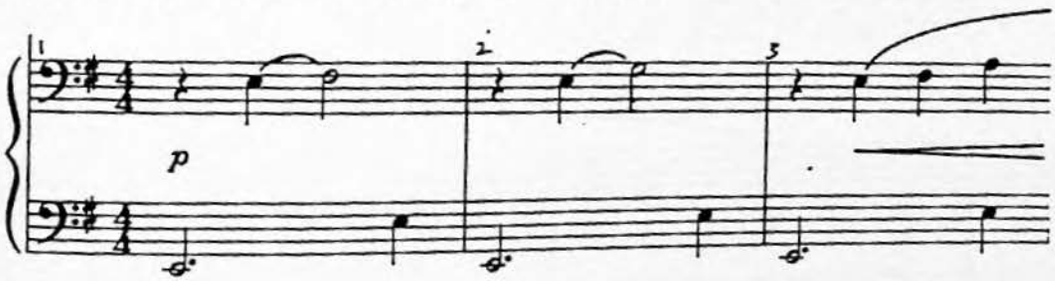
"Yidn Zingen: Ani Mamin"

JEWS ARE SINGING ANI MAMIN (I BELIEVE)

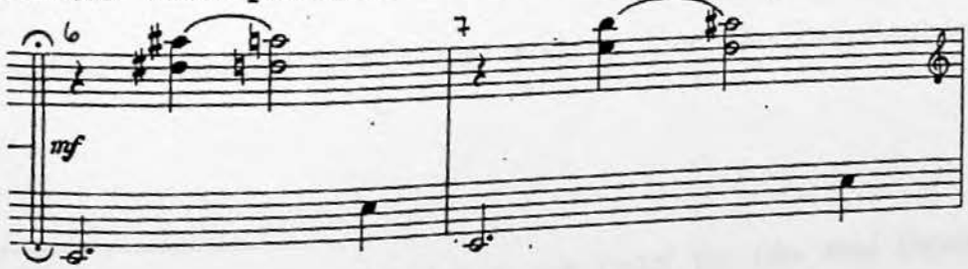
Jews are singing in the bunkers: Ani Mamin
I believe in the coming of the Messiah. Ani Mamin
And though he may be delayed in coming,
He will come. Ani Mamin
Jews are singing in a camp: Ani Mamin
Even though he lingers Ani Mamin
I believe like a believer, like a DP.
Now let us all sing: Ani Mamin–
If we do not sing–it sings within us.
In the evening, in the morning Ani Mamim
He will come, he must come–Ani Mamin.
Ask no one when and where.
Jews are singing Ani Mamin, Ani Mamin
He is coming, he is here. Ani Mamin.

H. Leivick

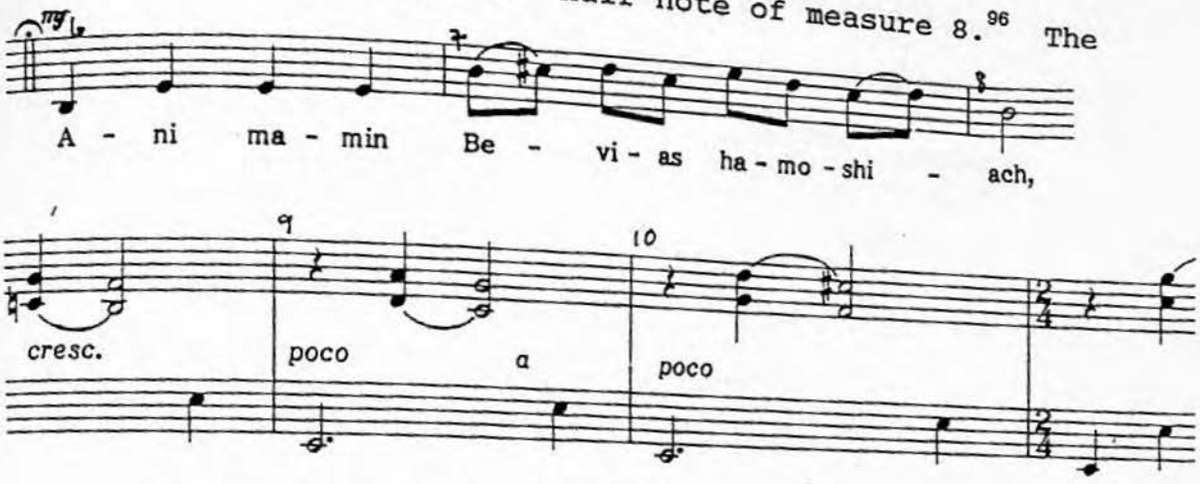
The song opens with a stark, steady walking motif as the narrator comes in, reinforcing a sense of e minor with the tonic and third of the scale. "Jews are singing in the bunkers:" leads to a decrescendo and fermata before the actual voices of the Jews are heard. The walking motif



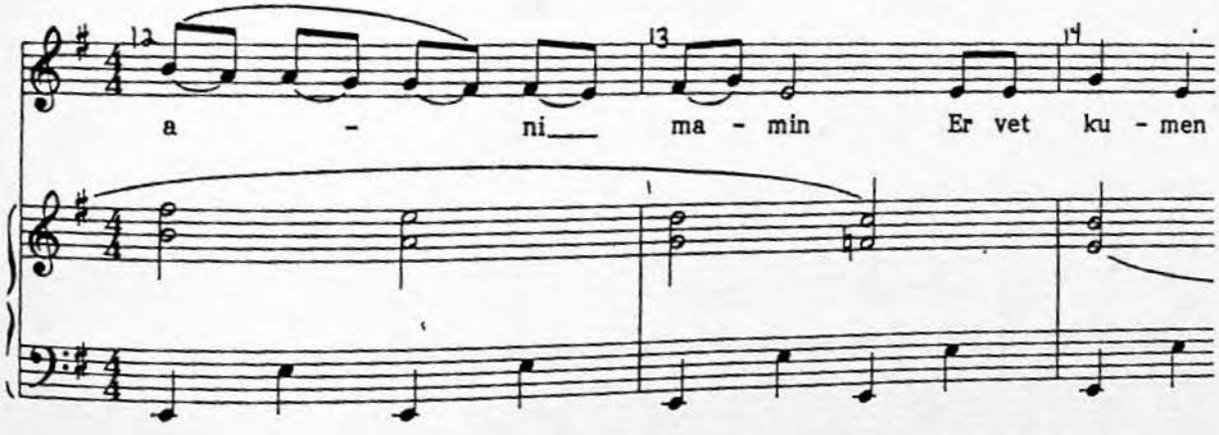
continues with parallel fifth's in the right hand



contributing to the feeling of openness. Cantor Robert Abelson contends that the vocal line was originally written and intended to be sung a fifth lower than written in measure 7 and through the half note of measure 8.[96] The



crescendo marked in ms. 8-10 is aided by the piano's ascending right hand. The open parallel fifths then descend with the vocal line as it finishes its initial statement of the "ani mamin" folk melody in ms. 13. The fifths continue



to slide downward until the end of the opening section as

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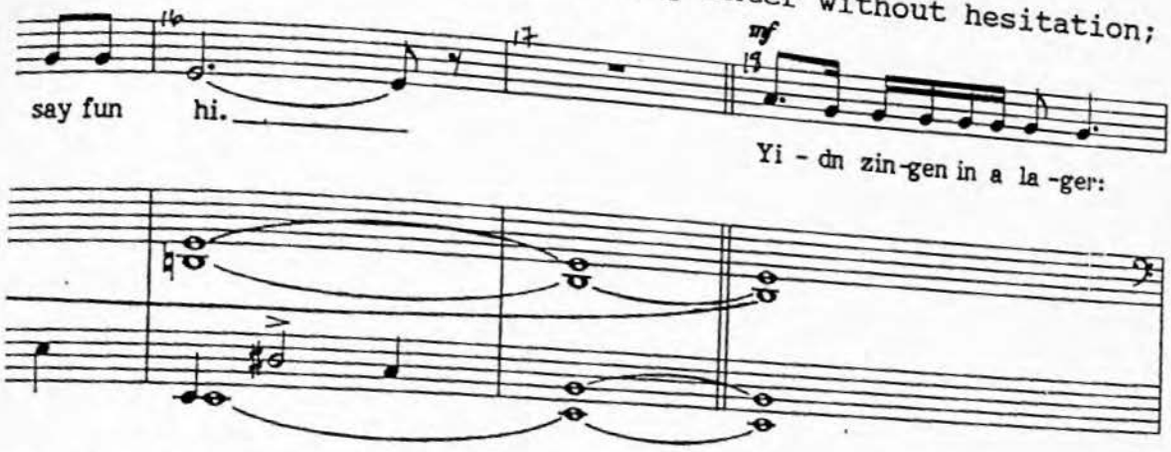
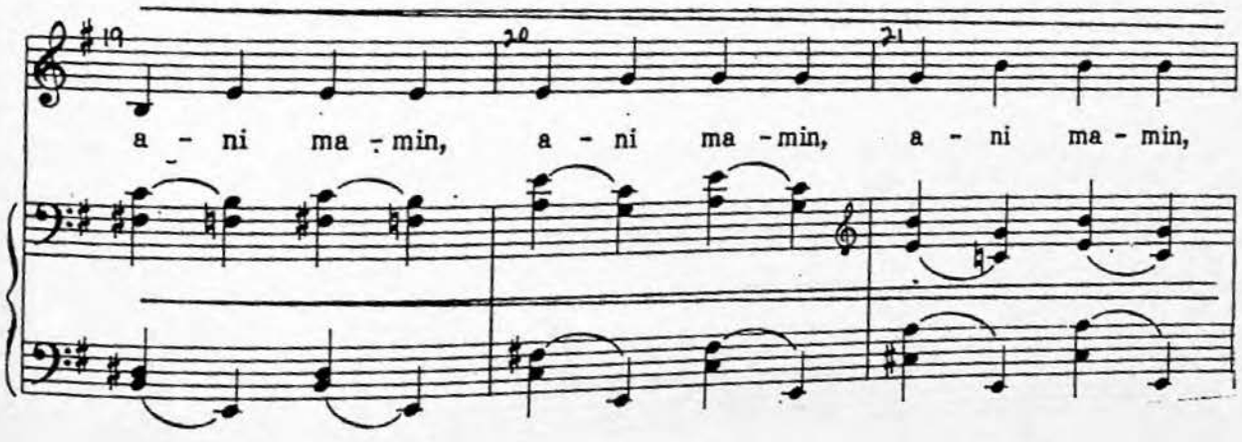
[96]Cantor Robert Abelson, as told to Ida Rae Cahana in a coaching session, December, 1992.

the text continues, ". . .he will come from there, from here."

As the narrator returns, the focus is on the text, with no additional accompaniment, save the tied e minor chord. This time, the voices from a camp enter without hesitation;

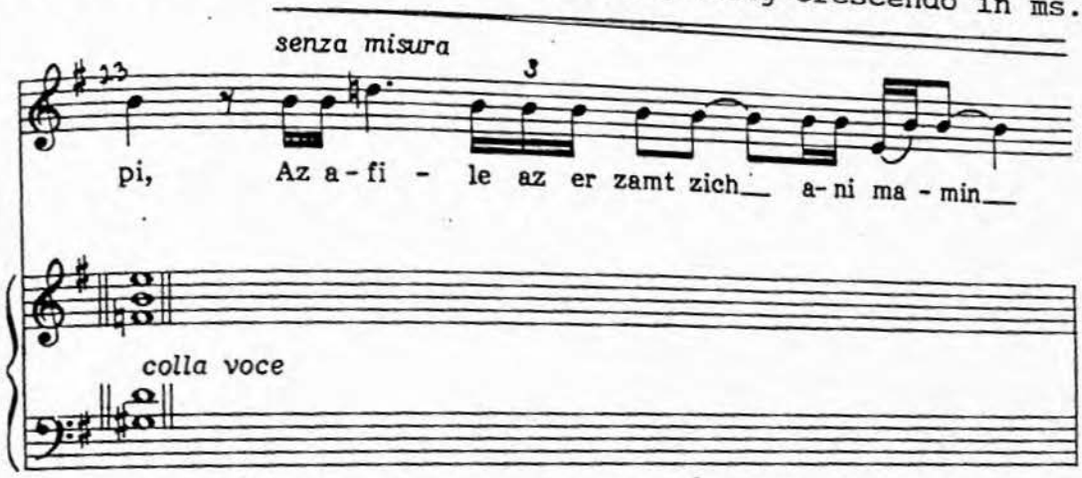


there is no fermata to signal the fearful quiet of the bunkers. As the words, "ani mamin" are repeated three times, in sequence, the accompaniment thickens in texture with harmonic changes of seven and nine chords every beat.

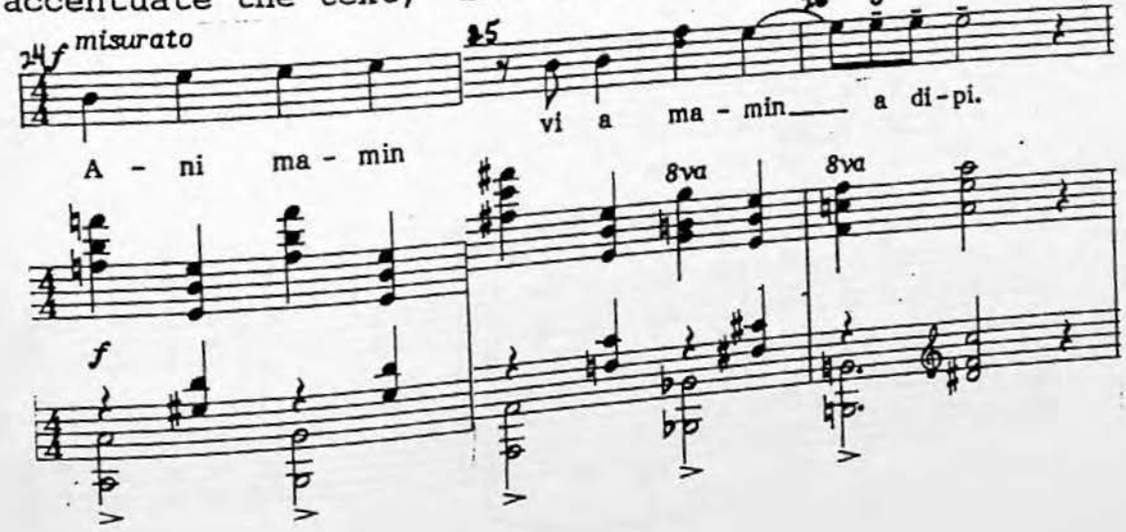


Also, the ostinato e in the L.H. is shifted from beats 1 and 3 to the offbeats, 2 and 4, which pushes everything forward and creates a sense of instability. The first big dynamic

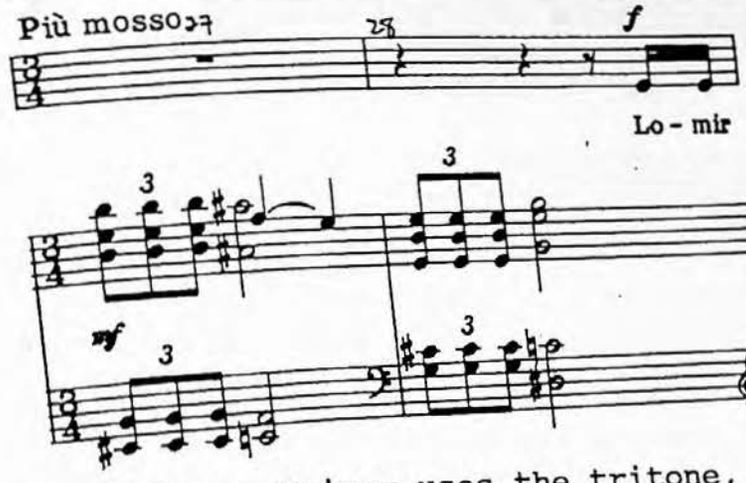
change swells through a long crescendo through the word repetitions to the double forte in ms. 22. Tritones of a dominant seven chord plus the ninth color the statement of faith, "Even if he lingers, I believe." This chord is held while the voice chants above it; the rhythms are those of cantillation or davening. Another long crescendo in ms. 23



goes into the insistent, measured statement of "ani mamin" raised one octave. Larger, fuller, more dissonant chords continue their walking pedal, and move in opposite motion from beat to beat. The delayed eighth note entrance of the voice in ms. 25 and the first use of a triplet figure in ms. 26 accentuate the text, "like a believer, a D.P." This

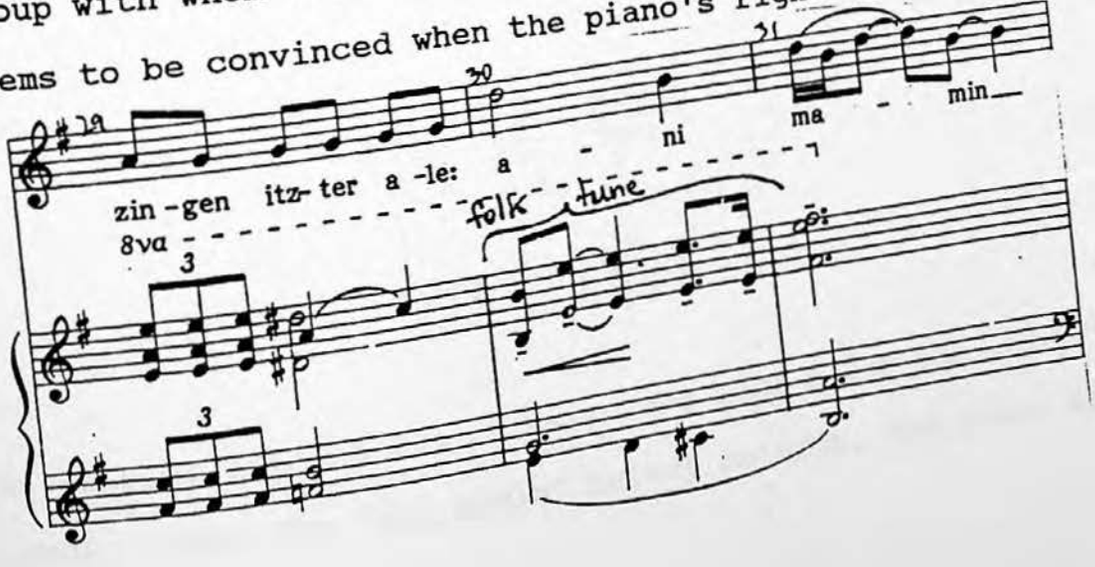


triplet figure also previews the triplets to come in the piano, where the walking ostinato disappears. As was

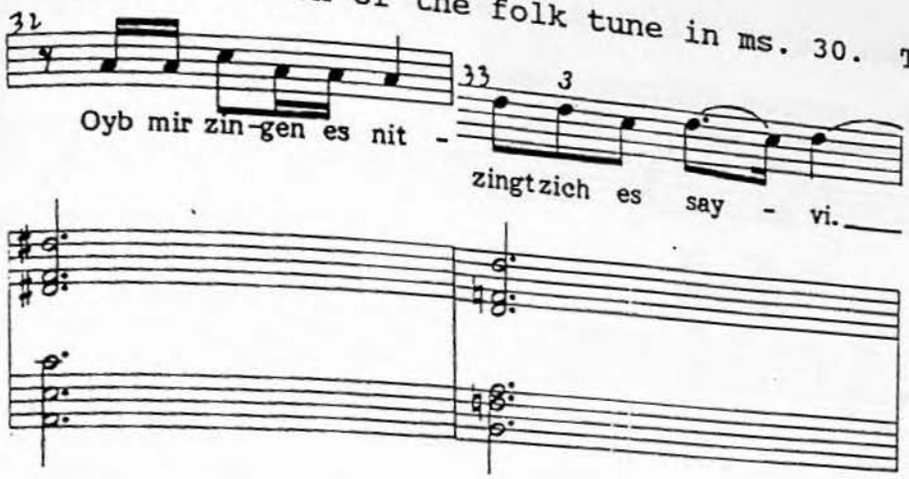


discussed earlier, Weiner uses the tritone, augmented seventh, and minor second intervals for color and to create moods of tension or suspense.

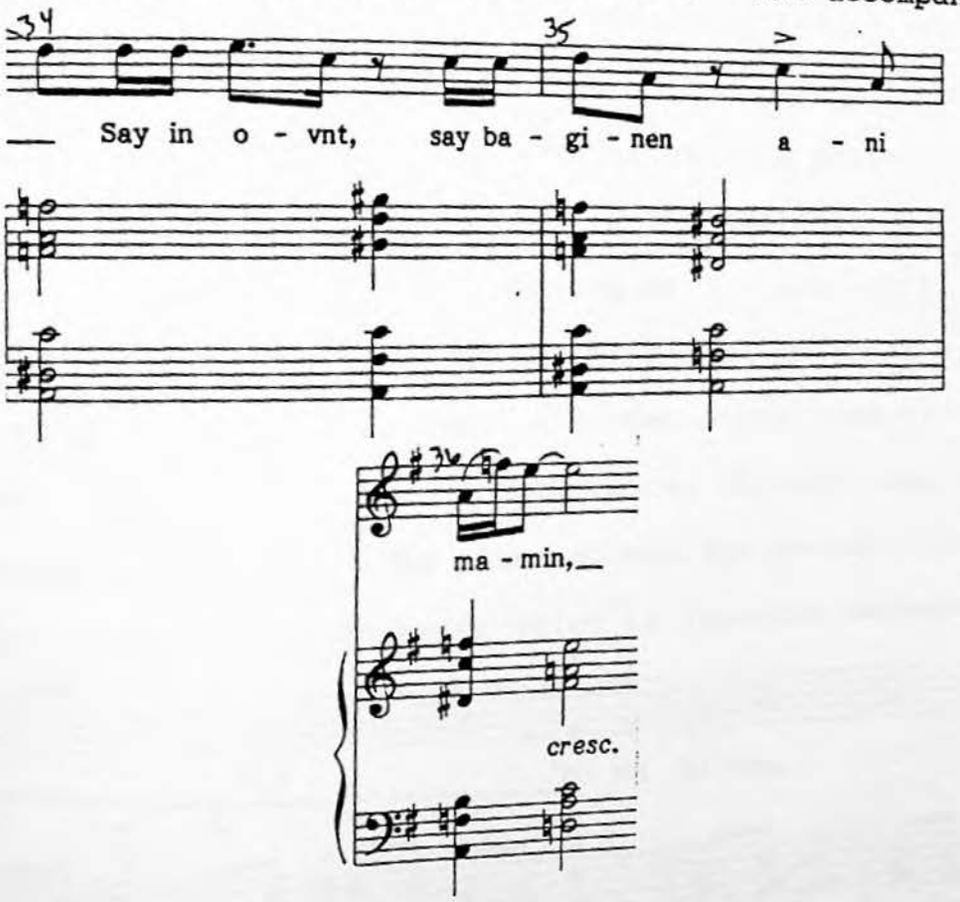
In the next section, marked by a "piu mosso," the narrator comes back, exhorting others, in a recitative line, to all sing "ani mamin." As in the rest of the song, it is significant when the voice picks up a piano motif and vice versa. In this section, the voice as narrator is persistent in explaining the necessity to sing. If the piano is the group with whom the narrator is pleading, then the group seems to be convinced when the piano's right hand carries



the ascending fourth of the folk tune in ms. 30. The

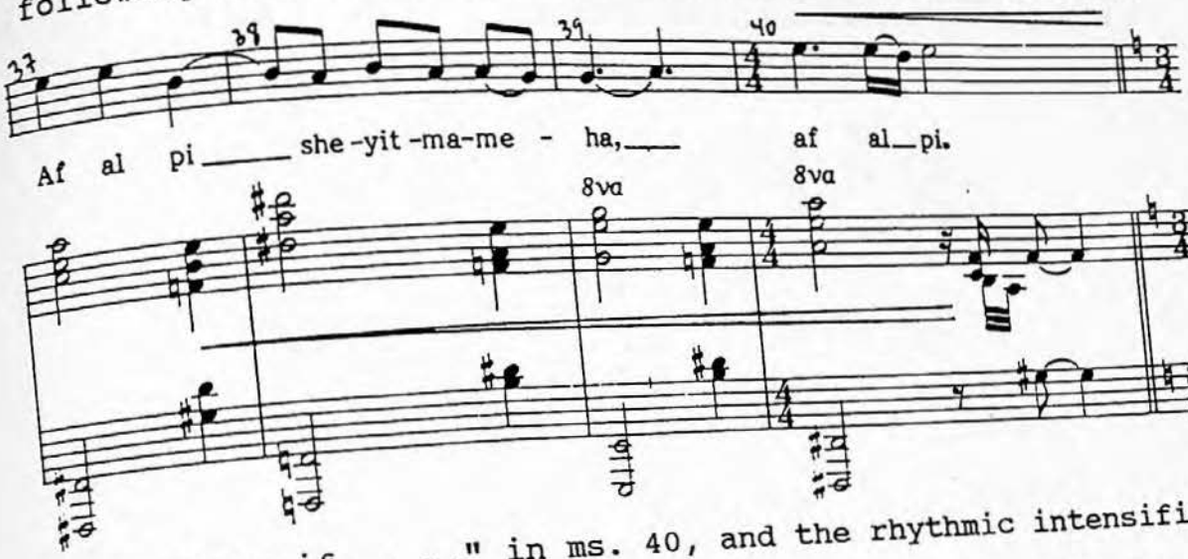


narrator continues, the rhythm and melodic inflections serving the text, "If we don't sing, it sings within us. In the evening, in the morning, I believe." The accompaniment



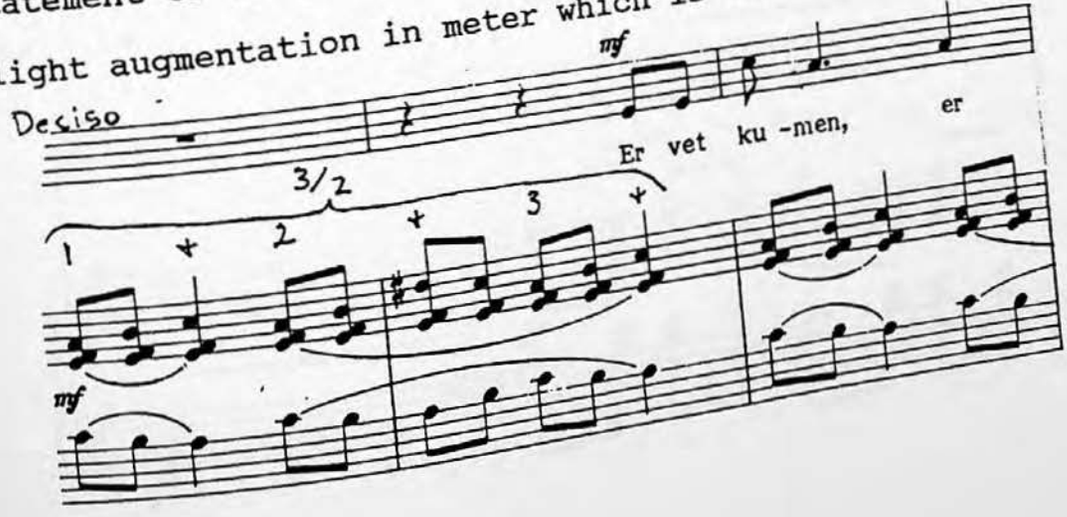
is simple; held chords of seven and nine allow the voice to speak. When the "ani mamin" melody returns, the piano again

stretches with chords of wide intervalic relationships, following each other in extreme contrary motion. With the

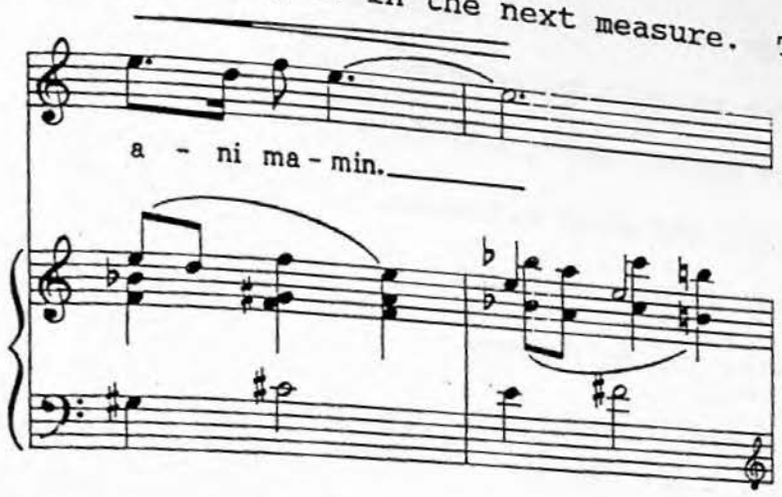


last "even if. . .," in ms. 40, and the rhythmic intensifier of the piano's immediate echo, a crescendo leads into the next section, marked "deciso."

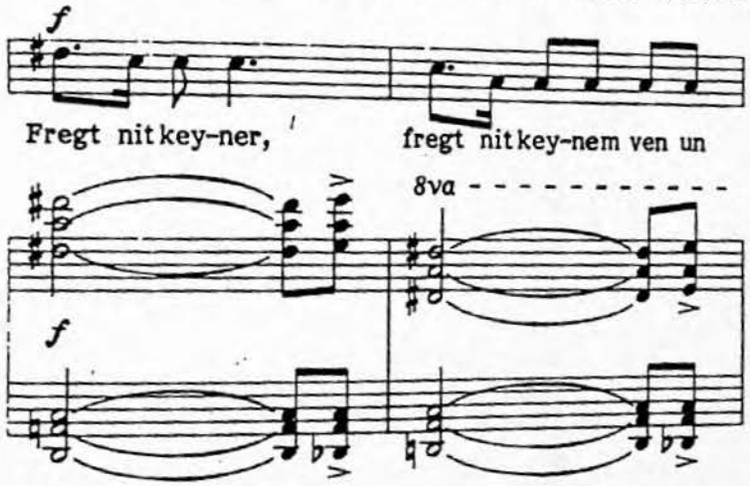
A different, more rapid kind of walking pattern sets out in the piano. Suddenly the piano's two hands are very close together. There is a feeling of 3/2 linking the measures; this combined with the step-wise movement creates a powerful on-going process. A dotted eighth and sixteenth appear for the first time in the voice, strongly making the statement of belief. The piano echoes the melody with a slight augmentation in meter which is repeated sequentially



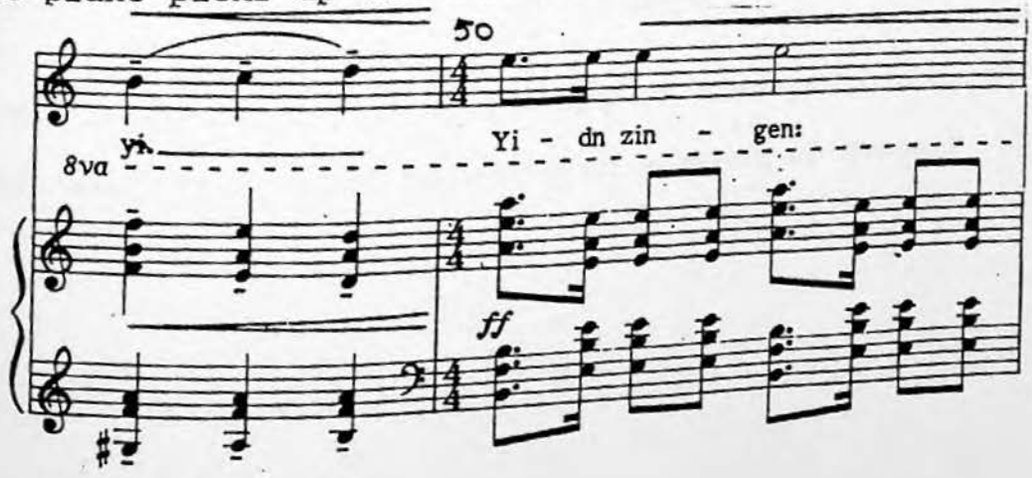
as the piano climbs higher in the next measure. The entire



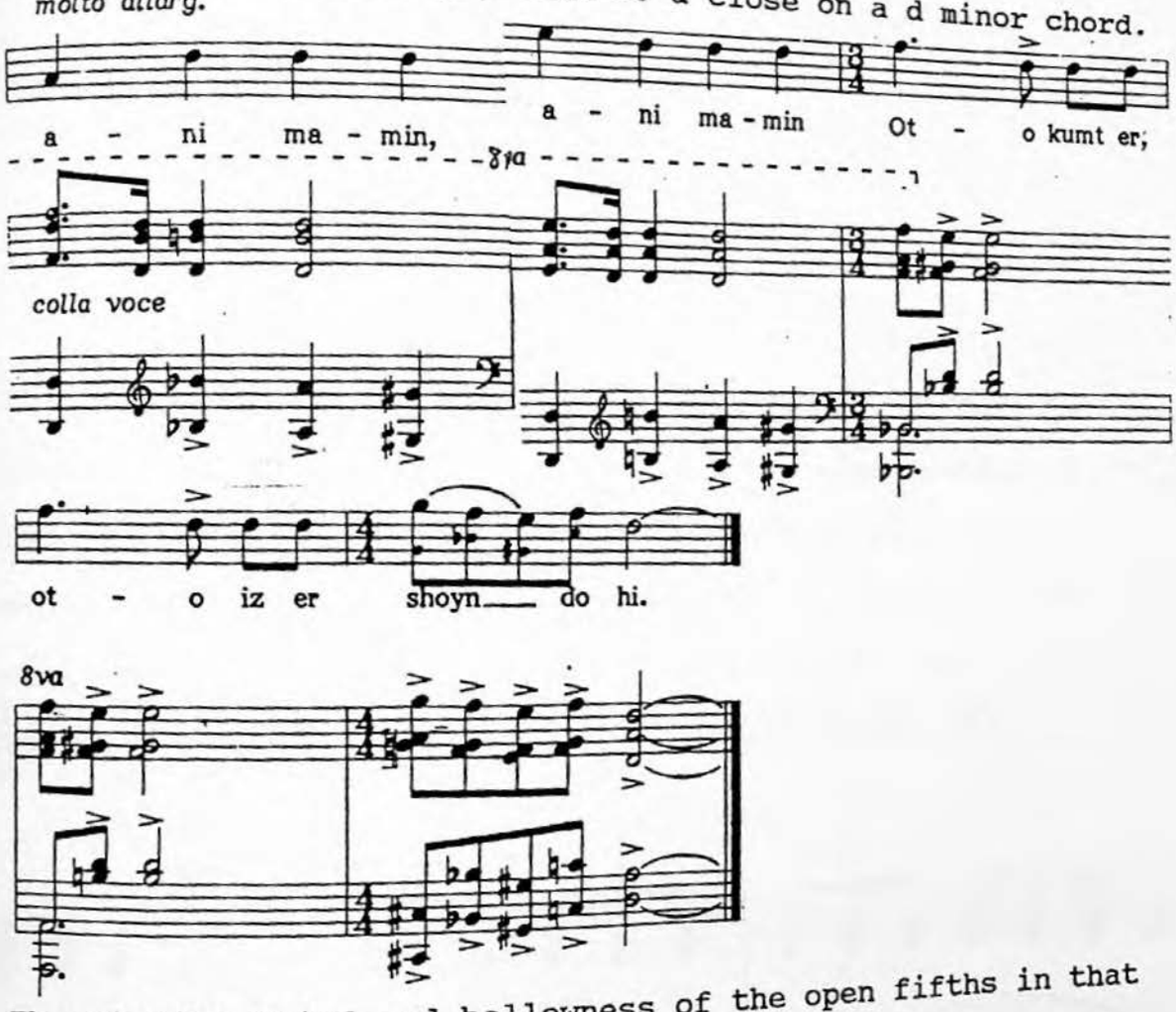
tessitura is raised with the words, "Ask no one when and where," with the voice continuing the dotted figure on the downbeats of the next two measures. The insistent slow building and repetition rises to a double forte in ms. 50.



The piano picks up the dotted figure as the narrator



exclaims that "Jews are singing," but does not specify where (perhaps everywhere). In a broadening closing sweep marked with descending octaves in the L.H., the belief credo is reiterated. The last three measures have the voice influenced by the piano to use accented eighth notes. Finally the piano and voice, in unison melody line, with dissonant underpinnings, come to a close on a d minor chord.



The missing third and hollowness of the open fifths in that last sustained chord maintain an element of despair.

"Fun Vaite Teg"

FROM LONG AGO

An old song from long ago
Rises in me with fresh sound.
A call to prayer
An evening hymn
To the one who hears
To the one who sees.

To the one who spreads
His gift, his bounty,
And brings grace
And comfort and compassion

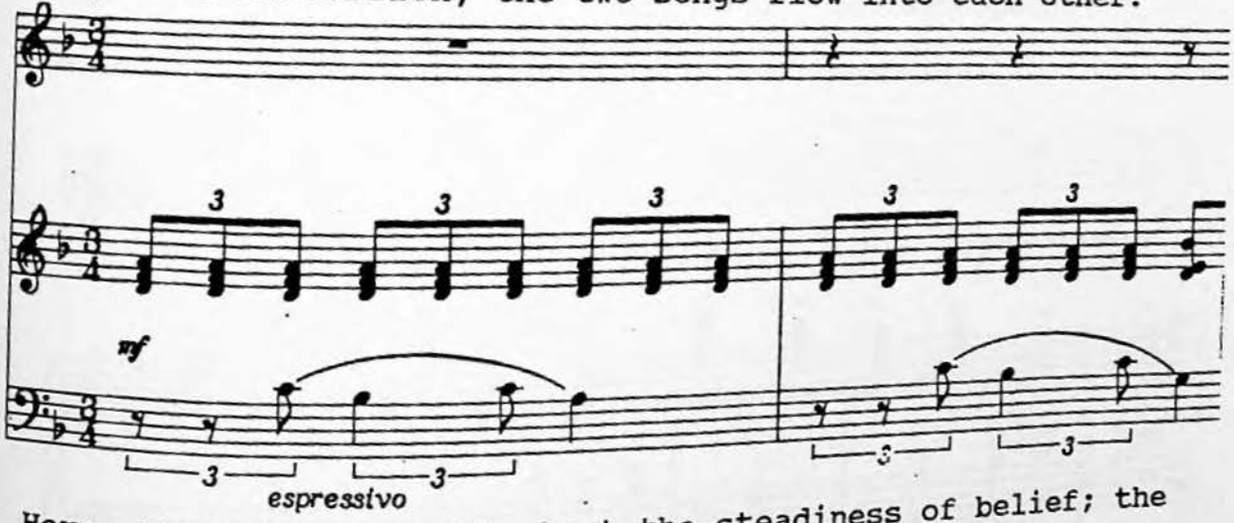
To the one who shields
To the one who guards
My sight and my steps

To the one whose light
Enters deep into my being
And rocks me gently, coursing through.

What a joy
In this late hour!
The old joy
That God is here.

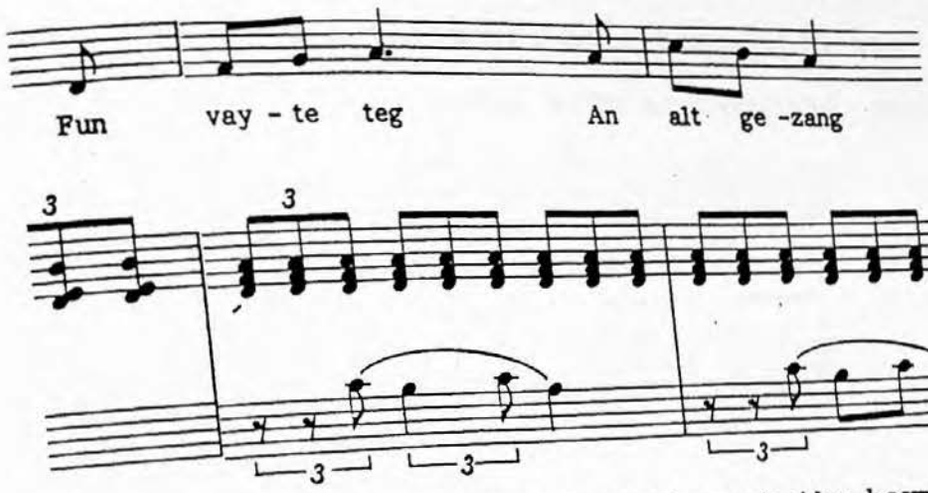
H. Leivick

It is interesting to note that the song which directly follows the "Ani Mamin" was written in the same year, 1977, to a text by the same poet (Leivick) and also deals with the issue of faith. The opening triad of "Fun Vayte Teg" is d minor, the same tonality as the end of "Ani Mamin." When played in succession, the two songs flow into each other.



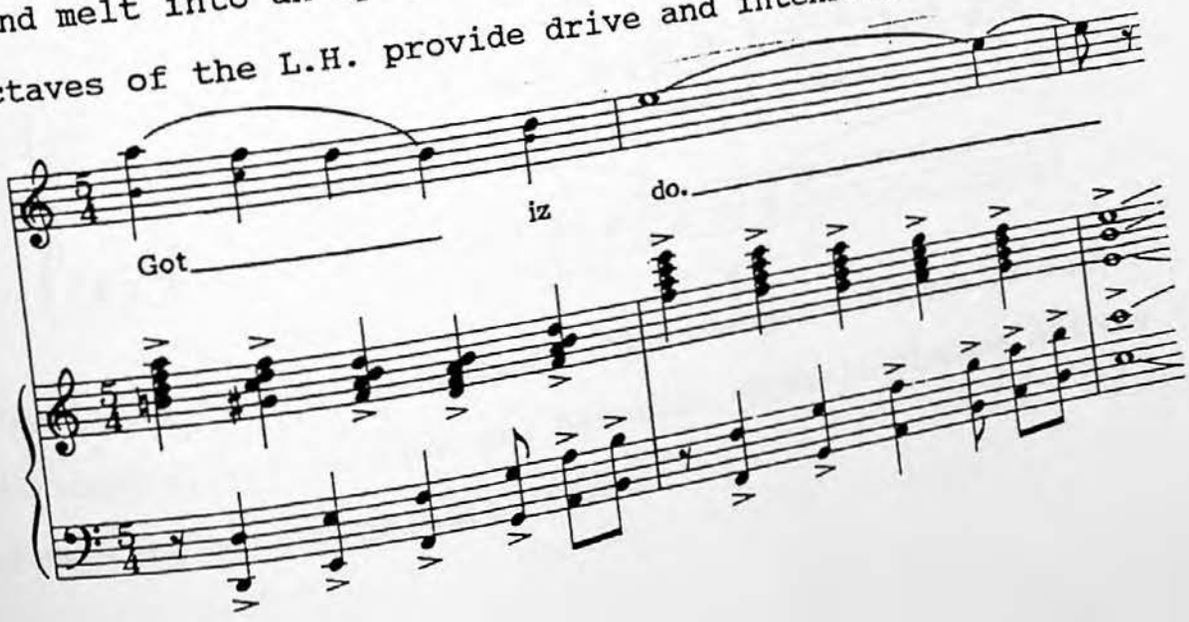
Here, there is no doubt about the steadiness of belief; the R.H. sustains triplets throughout the piece, while the L.H.

lays a beautiful counterpoint to the vocal line. Although he voice is in 2, there is no sense of disparity. A sense

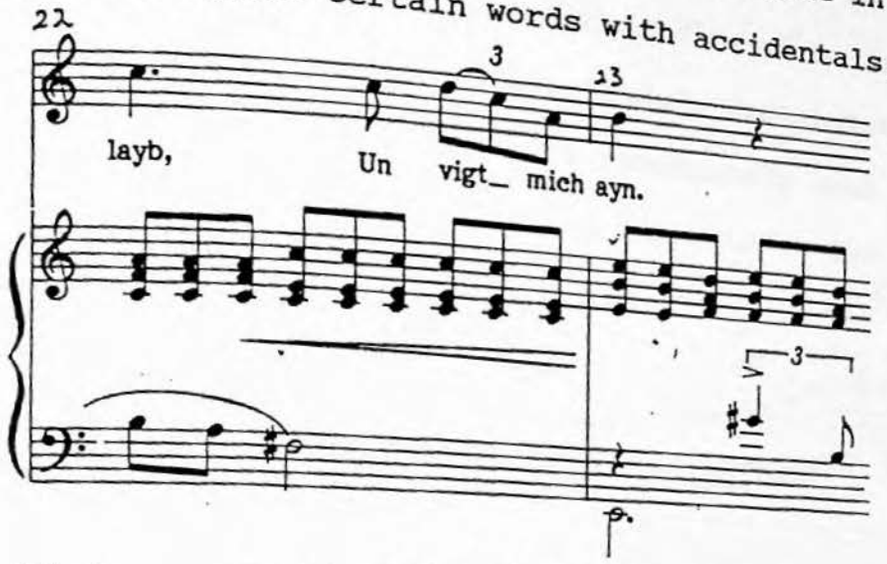


of smooth continuity is also maintained through the harmonic development from d minor to a minor and finally to e minor.

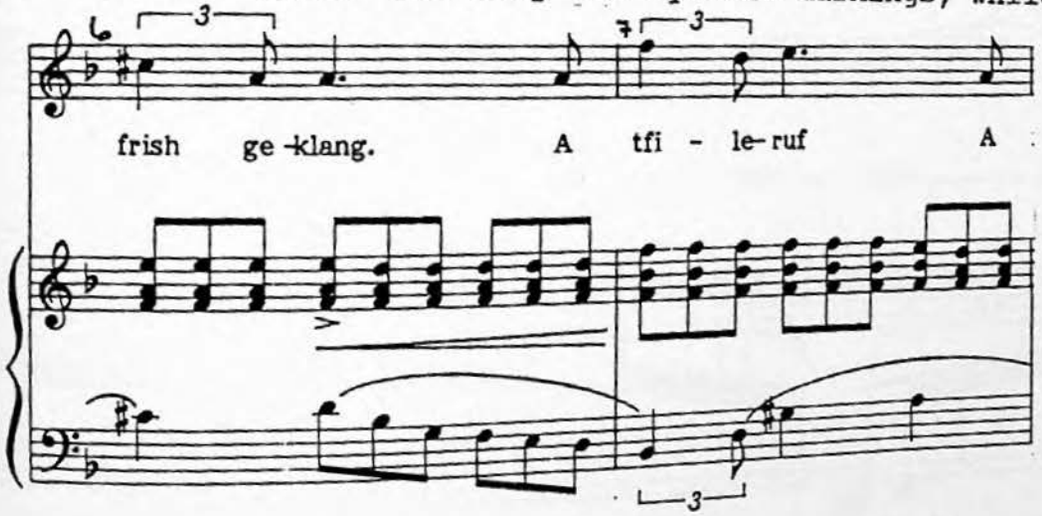
The vocal line is lush and builds to a triumphant climax with the last statement, "What a joy in this late hour, the old joy that God is here." Syncopation in the last measures builds tension as the two hands come together from opposing directions. The seventh chords of the right hand melt into an open e minor chord. The syncopated octaves of the L.H. provide drive and intensity.



Weiner carefully uses rhythm to set a large-scale mood and also to depict individual words or phrases, as in ms. 22 where the rocking of the text appears as a triplet in the voice. He also colors certain words with accidentals, such



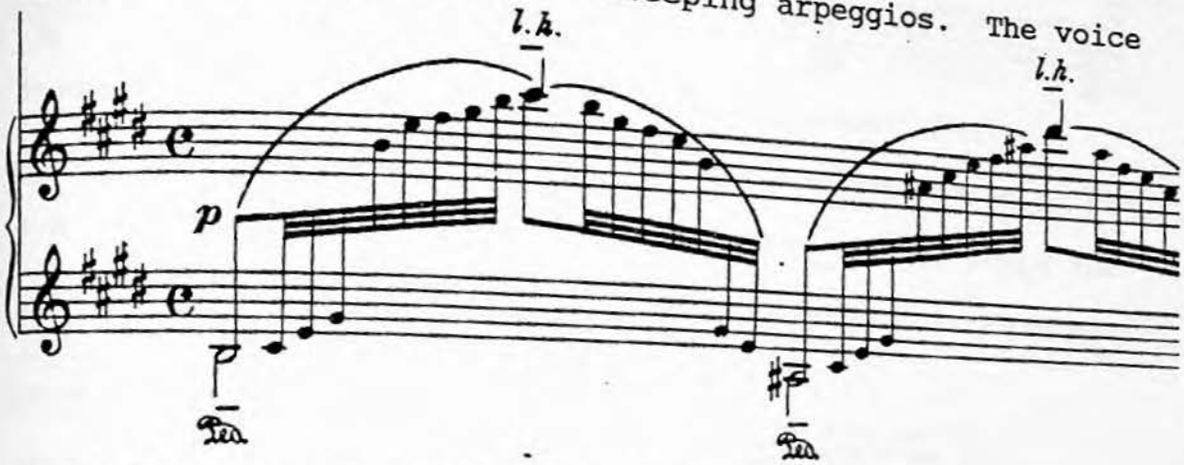
as "frisch" in ms. 6, or with arresting intervalic relationships, as the "tfileruf" of ms. 7 comes to rest on a minor second. There are only two dynamic markings, while



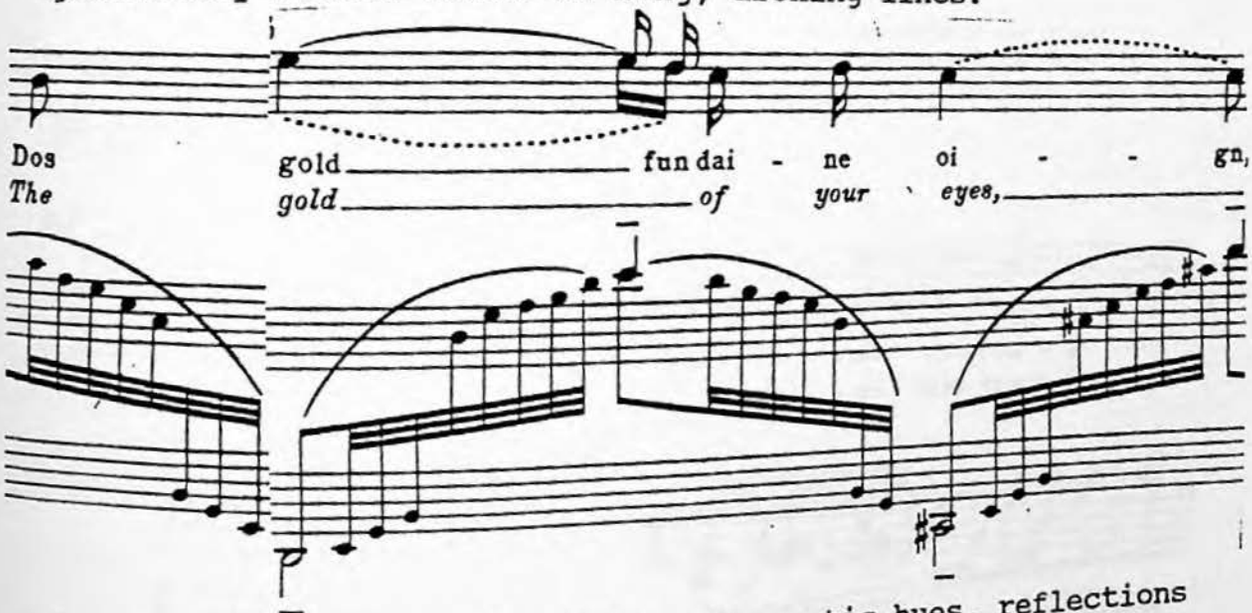
tempi are clearly indicated. The changes in dynamics seem to naturally flow from the harmonic rhythmic changes and the direction of the melodic lines.

A wonderful example of Weiner's early period of composition is the love song which he dedicated to Sarah Naomi in 1923, "Dos Gold fun daine Oign." Impressionism's (specifically Debussy) influence is immediately seen with a glance at the first page of sweeping arpeggios. The voice

(Trans. - p. 60)

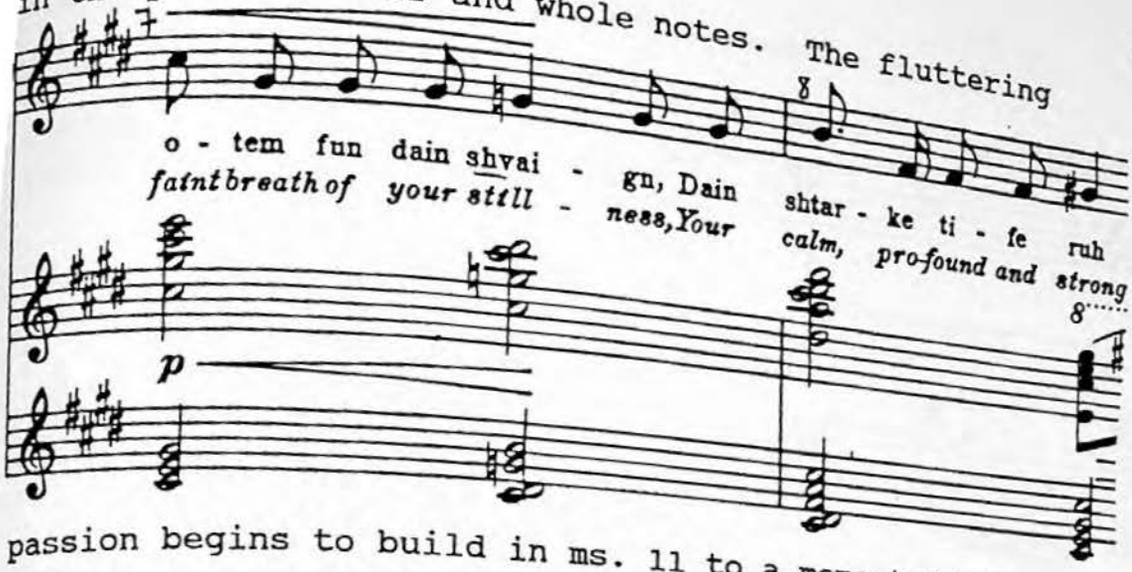


gracefully floats above in long, arching lines.

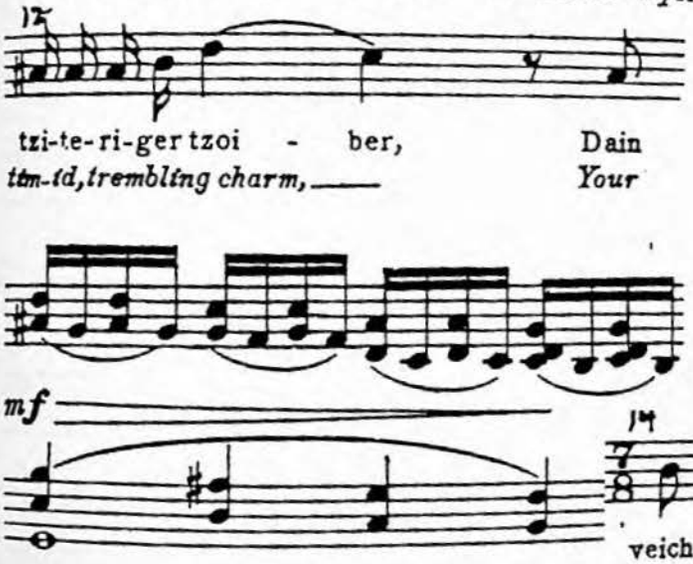


Chromaticism tinges the music with exotic hues, reflections of the gold and silver described in the poem. The "silence and peace" in ms. 7-10 are heard in the cessation of motion

in the piano to half and whole notes. The fluttering

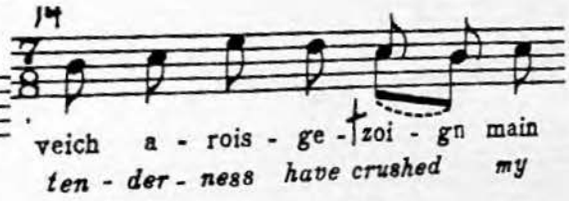


passion begins to build in ms. 11 to a moment fully capturing the unsettling feeling of love and desire in the 7/8 ms. 14. The sixteenth duplets in the piano sound the beating of the heart. Yehudi Wyner pointed out the striking



The gold of your eyes,
The silver of your voice,
With dazzling rays my vision have
Blinded.

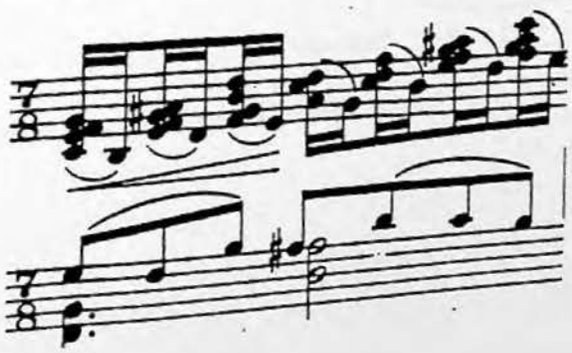
The faint breath of your stillness,
Your calm, profound and strong,
Have silently fettered
My hands.



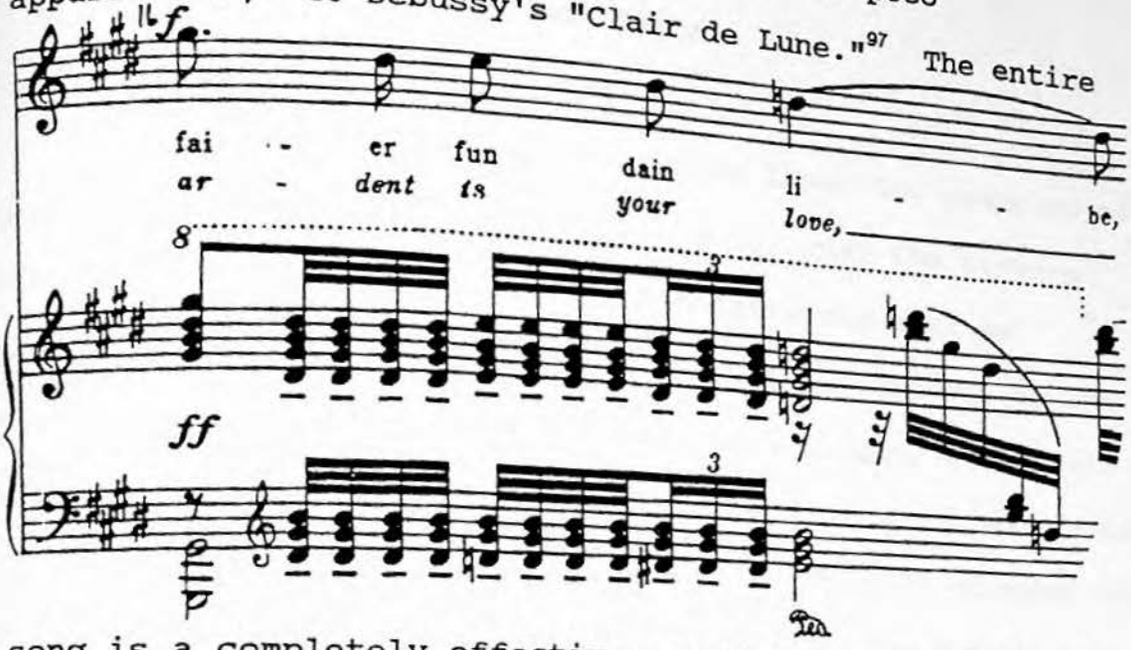
Your timid, trembling charm,
Your youth, now red, now pale,
With tenderness have crushed
My heart.

So ardent is your love,
So ardent is your hate,
That they have sweetly drained
My blood.

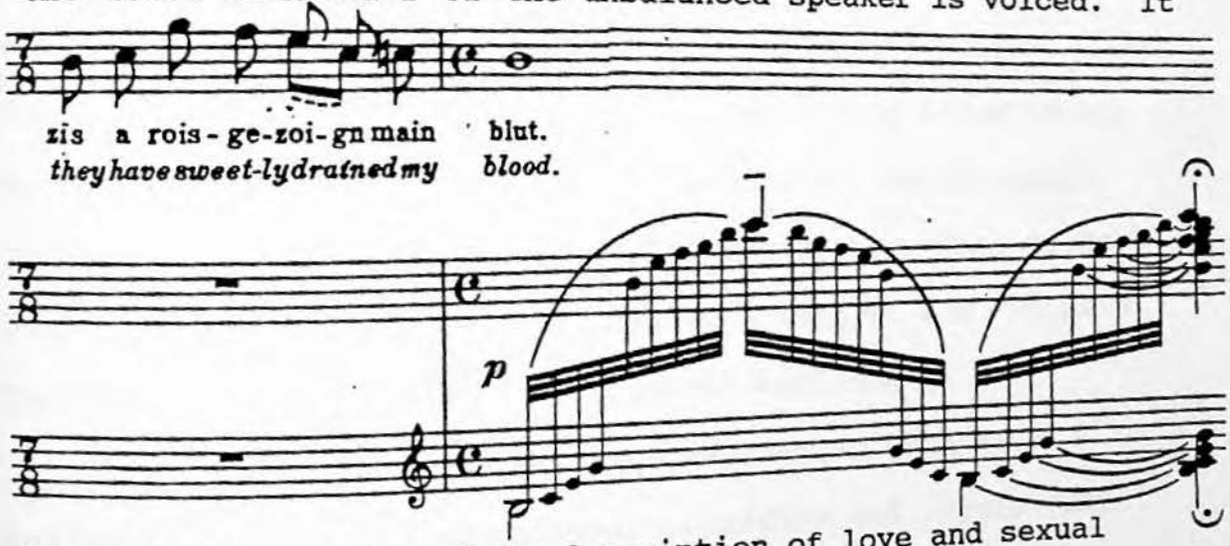
– S. Imber



similarity in the last section, marked "un poco appasionato," to Debussy's "Clair de Lune."[97] The entire



song is a completely effective use of someone else's musical language. The next to last measure returns to 7/8 time as the utter surrender of the unbalanced speaker is voiced. It



is a gothic-romance style description of love and sexual desire; the denouement, a vampiric aftermath of total oblivion.

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[97] Yehudi Wyner, Interview, 2/1/93.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

It is no wonder, after examining these few examples of Lazar Weiner's genius in setting texts, that the singers with whom he associated found performing his work so rewarding. Bianca Sauler described her experiences as "wonderful."[98] She emphasized that he was a perfectionist, a completely honest person who let you know where you stood. If a performer was unprepared, he could be sharp-tongued and dismissive. Ms. Sauler added that he loved good musicians, however, and if you were willing to do the work in mutual relationship with him, it was always thrilling to delve so deeply into the music. Ms. Sauler (now Bianca Sauler Bergman), also pointed out that Weiner didn't think of his songs as merely "Yiddish" songs; but rather as art songs. The main difficulty in singing the songs, according to Ms. Sauler, is not in the vocal tessitura (except for "Di Reid fun dem Novi"), but in the emotional challenge.

Cantor Robert Abelson also emphasized Weiner's insistence on being expressive. Lyricism and legato were paramount so that even when bringing out a dramatic text, "Your shouting always had to have music in it."[99] Abelson

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[98] Bianca Sauler Bergman, telephone interview with Ida Rae Cahana, January 1993.

[99] Abelson, Interview with Ida Rae Cahana.

was at the Hebrew Union College in the 1950's, and he rememebers that, "Lazar was a lone wolf. . . who stressed art song when no one else did."[100]

When voicing my own fears that Lazar Weiner's magnificent songs might fade into obscurity, his son, Yehudi, reassured me. "In time, these songs will enter the same area of art song literature as Faure, Duparc, and Wolf. . . In their own realm they are choice and absolutely true."[101] With the current ressurgence of interest in Yiddish around the world, hopefully this treasure of song literature will also be rediscovered and appreciated. Weiner's tremendous contribution was simply summed up by another fine composer, Yehudi Wyner: "He's obviously the Schubert of the Yiddish art song."[102]

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[100]Ibid.
[101]Yehudi Wyner, Interview.
[102]Ibid.

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