

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF HAZZAN GERSHON SIROTA

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The Life and Legacy of Hazzan Gershon Sirota

“The Hazzan is required to have a pleasant voice and appearance, wear a beard, have complete familiarity with the liturgy, and be married, possessed of a blameless character, and acceptable in all other respects to the community he serves.”¹

The statement above perfectly describes the persona of one of Poland’s greatest Hazzanim, Gershon Sirota. As his great-great grandniece, this has been a fascinating topic for me to research, on a personal level. I do not know much about my grandfather’s background and Sirota’s lineage, since any relative who would have known stories firsthand about him has since passed away. There is one story, however, that I heard from my mother, as told by my grandfather.

As a young boy, my grandfather was brought to one of his performances at Carnegie Hall. He recalls a booming voice coming from the stage, being surrounded by hoards of people, and that the crowd would not stop clapping for Sirota after his performance. He said he only met him for a brief time after the concert; for he was off to another city to sing the next morning.

As an artist, *ba'al t'fillah*, and upstanding member of Warsaw’s Jewish Community, Gershon Sirota put an indelible mark on the art of hazzanut today.

In my thesis I hope to share the impact of the artistry of Gershon Sirota, and its effect on the lives of Jewish Americans and Polish Jews, Jewish Life in Poland between the two World Wars, and how Gershon Sirota paved the way for the recording of Cantorial Music.

¹ Eliach, Yaffa. *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*. San Francisco, Back Bay Books. 1999 Pg. 139

Gershon Sirota's Early Years

Chazzan Yitzchock Gershon Sirota was born in Haysin, Podolia's guberniye in 1874. The son of the village cantor, the craft of chazzanut was in his blood. He took to singing like a fish to water. Even when he was at play, he would leave his playmates and run breathlessly to his father's side as soon as he heard the latter call him for another singing lesson.² He quickly made a name for himself, first as a member of the choir, then quickly advancing to leading Shabbat services, which he insisted on receiving monetary compensation for leading. His father soon realized that the town of Haysin was too small for his then 13 year old son and sent him to live with his grandfather in Odessa. It became evident that Gershon was no ordinary child, and between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, the reputation of Sirota's amazing voice traveled, and it was soon the talk of the Jewish community in Odessa.³ Soon after Gershon arrived in Odessa, his father followed him and became the cantor at a smaller synagogue.

Gershon took advantage of every opportunity that he had to make the rounds and listen to the great cantors of the many large synagogues that dotted the streets of Odessa. He used to run from one house of worship to the other...covering and taking in two cantors on one and the same Sabbath, whenever he had a free one from his duties in the chorus.⁴

It was in Odessa that he was taken under the wing of Yakovkin, the choirmaster of the Shalashna synagogue who recommended that he attend the Odessa Conservatory of Music. His immense talent was brought to the attention of Baron Kolbuss, the director of the school who decided to personally provide him with lessons in musical theory, harmony and

² Vigoda, Samuel. *Legendary Voices*, New York: M.P. Press, 1981. 518.

³ Bilgora, Alan. 1994 Brochure notes for Gershon Sirota, *Gershon Sirota 1874-1943 Symposium 1147*, 2.

⁴ Vigoda, 520.

even taught him opera arias. The art of opera was frowned upon by his father as a career path.

However, to his very pious father the whole business of studying at the conservatory was anathema...He feared that his son might be led into strange...thorny and dangerous roads...he would never give his blessing to his son devoting himself to a career in opera, nor to any other kind of secular singing profession on the stage. His future was in the synagogue; his destiny was to become a cantor, an intermediary before the throne of the Almighty on behalf of his congregation.⁵

He swiftly made Gershon quit school to focus solely on Chazanut. Soon he was hired as Yankel Soroker's assistant cantor at the Shalashna synagogue, but it was apparent that he was a far superior vocalist.

He (Sirota) did not, however, hold this job for a very long time. For Soroker and his wife paid a surprise visit to the parents of his assistant cantor. He came right to the point, pouring out his heart and complaints, "What do you want of me? Don't you see? You are ruining me. Because of your son, I cannot go anymore to the pulpit. He is overshadowing me and I am losing my grip on my position...For the High Holidays alone, he could earn more than for three years as my sidekick."⁶

He left the Shalashna synagogue, and at the age of 18, met his wife, who was the daughter of the gabbay, the chief trustee of the Prikaztchkes synagogue, ensuring himself a successful career. He soon had congregants following him so that they could daven at the synagogue where he was leading services.

Baron Kolbass had not given up on making Sirota a star and invited him to sing in a production of Haydn's "Creation", which many people heard.

Sirota's success was tremendous and for days after the event his brilliant performance was the talk of the town. "It is a shame," was the general opinion of the secular musical quarters, "that such a great potential talent goes to waste in the confine of the four walls of a temple."⁷

⁵ Ibid., 521.

⁶ Ibid., 522.

⁷ Ibid., 524.

He was soon sponsored by many of the patrons of the arts in Odessa, to study in Vienna. In Vienna, Baron Rothchild proclaimed him as “Vienna’s Obercantor” but his dreams of staying were shattered when he received news of his father’s illness.

After his father’s death, Sirota moved to Vilna, leaving his small synagogue in Odessa behind for the Great Synagogue of Vilna. He was greeted with hurdles from members of the congregation. His age (22) and lack of a beard was of a concern to these traditional men, but Sirota held his ground, even saying to them that “I’m bigger than Vilna”⁸. He led a *shacharit* service and was greeted by crowds of people. The audience was stunned by the new mighty sounds, which filled all the corners of the giant auditorium and electrified the atmosphere, as if it had been struck by lightning.⁹ Needless to say, eventually his voice won them over, but while he was waiting for the offer of the cantorial position at the Great Synagogue of Vilna, he was forced to officiate at other synagogues in the area. During his nine years in Vilna (1895-1905), He formed a choir under the direction of many important musical directors: Isaac Shlossberg, Nathan Abramson, Meyer Machetenberg, and eventually with Leo Leow. The partnership with Leow would change both of their lives forever.

With their talented choir, Leow decided that Sirota and the choir should sing outside of the synagogue. Leow persuaded Sirota that concerts of prayers, psalms and folk songs could be made available to a larger public outside the temple. This innovative idea, feared for its unorthodoxy led to a concert in the Baratzkoy Concert Hall, the largest in Vilna.¹⁰ This concert was the first one of many, and its success was heard in the surrounding cities, prompting invitations for their services. These concerts introduced Sirota to the gentile

⁸ Ibid., 530.

⁹ Ibid., 532.

¹⁰ Bilgora, 3.

population, meeting prominent city and state officials, members of nobility and the military, who all became frequent visitors to the synagogue. Sirota was soon invited to sing by Tzarina Fiadorowna at a benefit for the blind. The Jews of Vilna were overjoyed for this invitation and thought that their Cantor would solve their problems with the government, who were unfriendly and at times hostile. Sirota also was invited to sing for Theodor Herzl, whose “face shone as if their songs, heralding a brighter Jewish future, had infused a new soul and a new hope in him”.¹¹

Although Sirota would not remain in Vilna, he was quite comfortable there, and would mingle with his congregants, inviting them over for studying and music, but eventually he wanted some quiet time. Wives of these men would berate him for creating an environment that kept their husbands from working and taking care of their children. He had decided that he had learned all that there was to learn in Vilna. He was invited to sing in St. Petersburg by Baron Guinzburg and become the cantor of his synagogue, but Sirota declined the invitation, because at that time, he wanted to remain loyal to Vilna, until he heard news that they were interested in replacing him because of a severe case of bronchitis that kept him from leading services for several weeks. He was shocked that they would turn their backs on him so quickly and he vowed to quit his job there as soon as the opportunity arose. When the leadership of the synagogue changed, Sirota no longer felt the allegiance that he did before and when a call from the Tlomatzka synagogue in Warsaw arrived, he decided to leave.

In 1905, with Sirota just 31, he was invited to audition for the Tlomatzka synagogue in Warsaw. At the time, Tlomatzka was the largest temple and congregation in the world, and was seeking a cantor to match its status. Again, the call came easy, but the appointment wasn’t without internal struggle. This synagogue was entrenched in stodgy and time-worn traditions which held fast, and Sirota and his reputation were one of a cantor who had already broken with tradition.¹²

¹¹ Vigoda, 543.

¹² Bilgora, 4.

Sirota's Rise to Fame in Warsaw and Beyond

The Tlomatzka synagogue did not have a cantor before, because they had wanted a more modern service, without thrills or artistic embellishing ornaments. Eventually the people demanded a cantor to create the service of their hometowns, with a beautiful voice and the knowledge to properly interpret the prayers. Sirota became the cantor there in 1905. Only one detail stood in the way of his happiness, he would no longer be working with Leo Leow. Not wanting to transpose the entire liturgy from the range of a bass-baritone to a high tenor, Professor Sterling, the choirmaster of the Tlomatzka synagogue retired after Sirota arrived. In 1908, Leo Leow was again a partner with Sirota, and Leo Leow swiftly moved from Bucharest, where he was the musical director at the Reform Temple, to Warsaw.

At 31, Sirota was appointed the chief cantor and officiated at the Tlomatzka synagogue for 19 years. Warsaw remained his home for over three decades. The most notable people had come to hear him sing, and his reputation was known all over Eastern Europe. Sirota's voice was unlike anyone else's, had both a high dramatic and dark middle register. He wowed the congregation with his huge voice, vocal trills, but also knew how to sing in a sweet lyrical manner when the text demanded it.

Leo Leow, his choir leader, characterized his voice as without a beginning and an end. His voice stretched out over three octaves, and he traversed this range easily without strain. With a little effort, he could shoot out an E or F above the high C. The latter was for him child's play and he could „belt“ it out immediately upon opening up his eyes after a night's sleep, while still lying horizontally in bed.”¹³

Sirota was a star in the Eastern European cantorial world, and soon his legacy was known worldwide. Many cantors were trying to see if their success in their small *shuls* in Eastern Europe would sustain itself abroad. Leow first introduced the idea of going to

¹³ Vigoda, 573.

America in 1911 to Sirota, but Sirota was not convinced. Leow went to America without Sirota at first, to see if America was ready for him. Leow quickly decided that America was ready to hear Sirota's tremendous talent. Leow promptly signed Sirota up with the prestigious William Morris agency for a 25 concert tour of America. "Once he (Sirota) got a taste of America, he could not any longer be content with the poverty, intolerance and backwardness that he saw and felt all around him in Poland."¹⁴ By 1913, tens of thousands of his fans had immigrated to America, and Sirota realized that he should see what the shores of America had in store for him.

The press met up with the two of them on the ship when they arrived, and Sirota was asked by a reporter about the rumor of a \$75,000 opera contract in America. He stated that his wife, mother and late father wanted to shield him from the lure of opera and that he would not be signing that contract. His family was the most important aspect of his life. He went back and forth between Poland and America numerous times, always returning home to his family.

The time had arrived for the people of America to hear the great Chazzan Sirota. He debuted at Carnegie Hall on February 14th, 1913, and the hall was packed to capacity. Sirota appeared in full black tails and silk top hat and received a 10 minute standing ovation. Leow was dressed to match, and the choir was wearing long black cantorial robes and four cornered hats.¹⁵

The reviews in the newspapers were stellar, comparing him to the great Caruso and Tamanya, and left the crowd dying for more. The *Forward* said "He came, he sang, he conquered". He was most impressive in rendering the prayer: „Rachomo Deoni“. The *Sun*

¹⁴ Vigoda, 580.

¹⁵ Bilgora, 7.

wrote: “The effect was greatest when Sirota, accompanied by the choir sang: „Retzey“. The applause and the „Hurrah“ cries were deafening, and were kept up without letup for an even longer time than it took the cantor to sing the selection.”

That first night, he closed with the aria “*Celeste Aida*”. His immense popularity convinced William Morris to schedule three more concerts in New York City. At his second appearance at the Hippodrome, the whole “Cantors Association of America” took part in his concert.¹⁶

One fault in Loew’s planning was that Sirota did not set foot in a synagogue on his first trip, and Sirota was chastised for it. Sirota, several months later returned for another round of appearances in the United States, he changed course and made his initial appearance not with a recital, but with a Sabbath religious service, even though still not in a synagogue, but on a stage.¹⁷

World War I kept Sirota away from America until 1916, where he made other appearances at Carnegie Hall, as well as in other locales. (See Appendix “E” for a list of his concerts at Carnegie Hall). He had been successful in creating a concert that appealed to his diverse audience.

Gershon Sirota and music collaborator and arranger Leo Low had already pioneered and perfected his performance of cantorial liturgy in theatres inside and outside the Jewish community. These concerts, which interspersed *khazones* with homey Yiddish folk songs and operatic arias, were tremendously successful, and attracted popular acclaim among the “Enlightened” Jews.¹⁸

¹⁶ Vigoda, 585

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry. 1994. Program notes . *Mysteries of the Sabbath classic cantorial recordings, 1907-47*. Newton, N.J: Yazoo. 5

In 1921, Sirota told colleagues of the Cantor's Association of America of how his music saved him from the Russians and the Germans during World War I. On March 7, 1921 the New York Times wrote an article stating that:

The singer also told how he sung his way to freedom from a German cell. Soon after the beginning of the war in 1914, he was arrested in Germany as an enemy alien. While in a Frankfurt prison he sang some the old Hebrew melodies which so impressed his guards that they asked the commanding officer to release the singer. After promising that he would go to a neutral country, he was released.¹⁹

In 1923, he left with his son Naftali as his business manager, and toured with his daughter Helena, a sweet sounding soprano. It was at this time that Leow and Sirota's partnership ended for good. Leow saw how the Jews were being killed in Pogroms, and decided to immigrate to America with *Hazzan* Mordechay Hershman. Sirota also realized that he was no longer the only one on the market as he was nine years previously, now he was competing with the famous voices of *Hazzan* Yosele Rosenblatt, *Hazzan* Mordecai Hershman and *Hazzan* Zavel Kwartin. Nevertheless, he still sang at the Metropolitan Opera House with a 100 person choir, packed to capacity, with hundreds of others waiting outside, saddened by their inability to gain admission. With all of these extended stays in America, Sirota was neglecting his Tlomatska synagogue, but still decided to officiate at the New Kalvarier synagogue in Harlem for the High Holidays. He then returned to Warsaw, not knowing how much his home, and life would change.

¹⁹ "Cantor Faced Red Guns," *New York Times* 7 March 1921, p.10.

The Final Struggle

After some disputes with the synagogue because of his long absences, Sirota was again on the bima.

Quite understandably, he tried his best to satisfy the public, and to compensate them for the two years of his absence. He gave generously from his God given, bountiful talent. He threw his mighty voice about in careless abandon, belting out the highest imaginable tones with ridiculous ease, and in a sudden change of pace toning down his voice to the softest, whispering pianissimo with such masterful skill and artistry.²⁰

Although his voice to some could take their breath away, His style had changed from his visits to America, and most of his congregants were not impressed any longer. The “American Way” was not very popular with the leaders of the Tlomatzka Synagogue. Their taste ran in an opposite direction. They depreciated and shunned what they called “the vulgarities” relished by their co-religious overseas.²¹

Sirota wanted to sever his ties from the Tlomatska synagogue for good, and moved his family to another residence, while he took a short trip back to America. When Sirota left the Tlomatska synagogue, Cantor Moshe Koussevitsky succeeded him. A close comparison of recordings by these artists...particularly those of Sirota...reveal the deep and profound stylistic influence Sirota had on his young “replacement”.²²

Sirota then became a gypsy-like figure, making concert appearances all over America and even presiding over services at the Allenby Avenue Synagogue in Tel Aviv in 1928.

He was almost always en route. If he had just been in Warsaw, soon afterward he was likely to be found once again in New York, and vice versa...On the one hand, powerful ties bound him firmly to Warsaw and drew him time and again back home. His professional and financial interest, on the other hand, pulled him...with irresistible magnetism and lured him with the spell of golden promises to America.²³

²⁰ Vigoda, 597

²¹ Ibid., 600.

²² Sirota, Barry. 1972. Program notes. *Gershon Sirota: Sabbath in Warsaw*. Chicago, Ill: Musique Internationale.

²³ Vigoda, 580.

He soon tired from this nomadic lifestyle, and decided to occupy the pulpit at the Nozsik Synagogue in Warsaw. In 1934, Warsaw celebrated his 30th anniversary as a cantor with a huge concert. From 1935-1938, Sirota performed in Chicago, Buenos Aires, and again in Tel Aviv. Sirota continued making appearances abroad but left America abruptly when he received word of his wife's failing health. His friends begged him to stay in America, for he had no idea what life was like in his beloved Warsaw, but he said that he lived through World War I, and was not frightened at having to go through that experience again.

His devoted friends warned him and urged him to run for his life before the German hordes that were poised to overrun the city came into view, but he preferred to remain with his sick wife, his family and his people and to share their lot...Remembering the days of the previous German rule during World War I and recalling the respect and courtesy with which the occupation forces had conducted themselves toward him then, he was not unduly concerned or frightened at the prospect of having to go through another such experience.²⁴

But upon his return, he realized that he needed to get his family out of Warsaw. Numerous attempts to obtain visas for him and his family were made to people in America, but his pleas were ignored. Sirota had helped numerous people climb to prominence, and now no one was willing to help him.

It speaks volumes for the ungratefulness of human beings. Sirota at the height of his career was the toast of the scores of professionals, who he befriended and helped in the climb to prominence. His fair-weather friends, several of whom he similarly contacted, deserted him in the hour of his greatest need.²⁵

The last known sign of life of Sirota was a postcard dated April 24th, 1941. It was learned later that year that he led the imprisoned Jews of the Warsaw ghetto in Yom Kippur services. A man by the name of Abraham Ganzweich, the head of the Jewish Gestapo of

²⁴ Ibid., 607.

²⁵ Ibid., 608.

Warsaw, spared him and his family from being sent to an annihilation camp by making Sirota a chairman of the “Board of Combat Speculation”. This special treatment kept him and his family alive for a time. The Warsaw ghetto was liquidated on August 10th, 1942, and Gershon Sirota and his family died together, cowering in the cellar of their house on 6 Wolynska Street.

Sirota's Immense Talent

Praise of Sirota's talent was worldwide, from royalty, his throngs of fans, to his cantorial peers.

It was during his tenure at the Tlomatska (synagogue) that Sirota's career would reach its zenith. Contemporaries were as much interested in discussing and analyzing his unique gifts as were are in the reading of them today. What was it about this cantor that thrilled congregations and concert audiences alike?²⁶

World renowned scholar Issacher Fater speaks about Sirota's wonderful talents, both as a singer and as a human being. He states that he had an unbelievable range, that was fluid from top to bottom and that he improvised beautifully. "Sirota never composed but he did improvise when he was not hemmed in by the demands of singing set-pieces with the choir."²⁷ He recalls a visit with his father to hear Sirota before a service. "The windows rattled in their casements, the doors moved to and fro as the waves of Sirota's voice impinged on them and it seemed to us that the entire building shuttered".²⁸ Fater also said that Sirota was always a participant in an ensemble, and did not act like a soloist. "(David) Eizenstadt²⁹ confided in me that in his opinion Sirota was the most cooperative and the most pliant hazzan of all with whom he had worked in Warsaw. He was always receptive to the needs of the choir, took direction and suggestions without complaint."³⁰

His assistant cantor Pinchas Sherman wrote: "The prayers of „Unesane Tokef“, „Berosh Hashono“ and „Ki Keshimcho“ he sang with such bravura that he deserved to be paid his whole yearly salary for them alone."

²⁶ Bilgora, 5.

²⁷ Fater, Isaacher. "Gershon Sirota: An appreciation. Yiddish Musik in Polen 1918-39". *Journal of Synagogue Music*. Nov. 1969. 19

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁹ David Eizenstadt, the choral director of the Tlomatska synagogue

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

Cantor Samuel Vigoda recalls the story of Sirota reciting the prayer „Ata Nigleiso“ and of the shofar service at Rosh Hashanah:

When he came to the words “Kolos Uvrokim” (thunder and lightning), Leow used to instinctively in a reflex motion duck his head as if to hide from the vocal bombs...The whole congregation trembled at the tremendous “staccatos”, that sounded as if they were shot out from heavy Howitzer artillery...every *brocho* at the conclusion of “Malchios”, “Zichronos: and “Shofros” he used to end with a cadenza so high and mighty that it could have wakened the dead.³¹

Many also believed that Sirota’s voice was truly meant for the stage. Musicologist Menachem Kipnis wrote:” I would rather hear him in the opera *Africana*³² than in the synagogue. I believe in this opera he would be able to stick the famous Italian, Caruso, into his belt.³³

H.E. Krehbiel wrote in the New York Tribune after one of his concerts :

“When he sang the liturgical music of the synagogue, he compelled amazement at the flexibility of a beautiful tenor voice, which is truly heroic in quality, as that of Slezak. The music of the Jewish liturgy, like all Oriental music, is very florid and this music pours out of the throat of the great chazzan as fluently as it might out of the throat of Tetrassini.”

Perhaps the most famous quote referring to Sirota’s talent was stated by that famous opera singer, tenor Enrico Caruso himself: “Oh, if I had such a voice! Thank God that he has chosen to employ his heavenly gift in a different field and I do not have to compete with such a formidable challenger in opera”.³⁴

A contemporary of Sirota’s, Yossele Rosenblatt was asked who possessed the most powerful voice and he replied:

³¹ Vigoda, 573.

³² An opera about fictional events in the life of the explorer Vasco da Gama written by Giacomo Meyerbeer .

³³ Bilgora, 5.

³⁴ Vigoda., 584.

“Without any doubt, it must be Sirota...for it is written in the 93rd psalm, „Mikolos Mayim Rabim adirim mishverey yom.“ If you mix up somewhat the words of the text...you“ll get the answer clearly and explicitly, „mayim rabim mishberey yom“-„if one travels a great deal over big bodies of water...then „mikolos adirim“ he is sure to acquire the strength and power to belt out tremendously mighty sounds and who, I ask you, does use so frequently the big waterways of the ocean for journeys as does Sirota?”³⁵

Sirota certainly was a man of the seas, constantly on the move between his much-loved Warsaw and America.

³⁵ Ibid., 580.

His critics

However, not all of his enthusiasts admired him throughout his entire career. Cantor Samuel Vigoda even once stated “In his singing, one detected a kind of restlessness and occasionally even undue hurry, as if he was anxious to get an unpleasant task over as quickly as possible.” This could be because Sirota was in constant fear of losing his voice and was quite nervous by nature, only practicing in the sanctuary if he knew no one was around to hear him.

Even in America, Sirota heard criticisms from the masses later on in his career, some stating that his voice did not move them like it had in the past. Perhaps at that point in time, the American mannerisms that he had internalized had an affect on his style.

In America, Sirota encountered the criticism that he was too dry, that there was not enough heart and feeling in his chanting, that there was lacking the Jewish sigh, cry and lament. His brilliant, colossal voice shone with its might and bright, blinding color, but it failed to stir and move the heart. To these reproaches, his answer was, “The crying with crocodile tears, the sighing and the artificial moaning and tear-jerking sobbing I leave to the Yossele”ch, the Berele”ch and to the Moyshelch. I prefer to chant in a dignified manner, as befits a modern, cultured man of the cloth.”³⁶

Many of his critics were his own congregants, not because of his voice or demeanor, but because of his lack of dependability to his synagogue. Sirota was not a loyal *hazzan* to his Warsaw congregation on many occasions, making the decision to stay in America for various holidays instead of returning to Warsaw, like he promised.

Feelings ran high in the councils of the Tlomatska synagogue at the news that their chief cantor, after an absence of more than half a year, was still not even thinking of returning to his post, and to add insult to injury had in his defiance even gone so far as to leave his congregants flat on the holiest days of the year.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., 600.

³⁷ Ibid., 590.

Despite all of the criticisms, Sirota was still considered one of the most talented singers of his time, both abroad and in his beloved Poland.

Warsaw: the new center of torah study and cantorial art

In the period between the two world wars, Polish Jews played a large role in Jewish life throughout the world. Second only to New York in the size of its Jewish population, Warsaw contained a Jewish life that was traditional and creative, religiously conservative and nationalist.³⁸ Warsaw was a huge center of religious, cultural and social life of Eastern European Jewry. It was a city that had both modern and a historical feel. Its inhabitants were experts in their fields of history, rabbinics and literature. Warsaw was in the midst of a cultural change, due to the fact that many people were moving into this developing metropolis of Eastern Europe.

Warsaw...while also fondly cherishing the legacy of the past generations, lived at the same time very much in the present, with all of the characteristic attributes of a bustling metropolis, inhabited by a multifarious, sophisticated and lighthearted populace, imbued with modern-day ideas which had an appreciative eye and an inherent craving for earthly materialistic possessions, but it was also industrious in creating new intellectual and spiritual values of significant merit in various fields of Jewish arts and sciences.³⁹

Yiddish authors, most notably Isaac Bashevis Singer, went on to achieve international acclaim as a classic Jewish writer. Other Jewish authors of the period, like Janusz Korczak, Bruno Schulz, Julian Tuwim, Jan Brzechwa (a favorite poet of Polish children) and Bolesław Leśmian were less well-known internationally, but made important contributions to polish literature. Moses Schorr, the famous Rabbi, Polish historian, politician, and Bible scholar was also a resident of Warsaw at that time. These, and many other Jewish scholars, scientists, and writers were responsible for Warsaw's intellectual renaissance.

Throughout the years in between the wars, there were three classes of Jews in Warsaw that inhabited Warsaw: the entrepreneurs who built up Warsaw: the ones who

³⁸ Gutman, Israel, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Boston: Mariner Books, 1998. 174.

³⁹ Vigoda, 560.

remained Jewish but assimilated into Polish society, the ones who converted to Christianity, and the less fortunate families who clung to their Jewish roots. Most of the Polish Jews were in the last category. Although the lives of the Jews of Warsaw and its surrounding towns and villages were difficult, religious life flourished. There were numerous synagogues and schools of study and tens of Yiddish journals and newspapers in circulation. The publication houses in Warsaw printed new books of Talmud, as well as secular books about all different topics. As more Jews streamed into Poland between the wars, the Jewish population of Warsaw exploded, and by the beginning of World War II, over one third of its inhabitants were Jewish.

Warsaw had the largest number of publishing houses (36.2% of all Jewish periodicals and books published in Poland); there were Jewish theaters (including Eldorado, Bagatela, Ermitage, Centralny, Nowosci and Elizeum); famous choirs (such as that of the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street, directed by D. Ajzensztadt, or the Grosser Choir, founded by Bund members). There was the Jewish Musical Society, amateur and professional groups, and music courses. Jewish painters and sculptors worked in Warsaw under the aegis of the Jewish Society for the Advancement of the Fine Arts.⁴⁰

Although most Jews assimilated to life in Warsaw, they still were Jewish before they were Polish, proven by the language that they decided to declare in the census. According to the 1921 census, 74.2 percent of Poland's Jews declared their native language as either Yiddish or Hebrew; by 1931, the number of Jews declaring Yiddish or Hebrew as their native language had risen to 87 percent.⁴¹ These new, young Jews of Warsaw spoke Yiddish, but Polish was increasingly used by the young who did not have a problem in identifying themselves fully as a Jew, Warsawian as well as a Pole.

⁴⁰ Zalewska, Gabriela. "Warsaw". Museum of the History of Polish Jews. 11 May 2009. http://www.sztetl.org.pl/index.php?app=term&id=145&lang=en_GB&x=showTerm

⁴¹ Prizel, Ilya. *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*. Cambridge Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet studies, 103. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

An ever-increasing proportion of Jews in interwar Poland lived separate lives from the Polish majority, but they still managed to socialize with others in society. Because the Jews are a ferociously literate people...one image-cluster did not seamlessly lend into another; they clashed and coexisted in highbrow and popular culture alike, on opposite sides of barricades, and on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴²

The war's aftermath had a detrimental effect on the land and the Jews and non-Jews of Poland.

The inter-war period was in some ways an exceptional period of transformation for the whole of Europe, and certainly so for Poland; yet at the same time (as some have argued), it represented the culmination of the intellectual and social trends of the preceding century. The new Polish state - while jubilant in its reconstitution - was plagued with the practical problems of integrating territories and populations regained from the defunct empires. The economy was in shambles, the politics factious, and the neighbors hostile... The inter-war period was also a time of high nationalism, which only added flamboyant and often spiteful rhetoric to the mix.⁴³

There was not a rich history in Warsaw of Judaism like in the surrounding cities of Crakow and Lublin, but there was ample opportunity for newcomers to make Warsaw their home.

In light of the many new people with countless new ideas, some political Jewish movements were founded during this time. Three far sighted and politically realistic Jewish movements emerged on the eve of Poland's independence: Zionism, with its various orientations; the Bund and its organizations; and Agudath Israel which was founded in 1919, that united Orthodox, Hasidic, and the Orthodox opponents of Hasidism, *mitnaged*

⁴² Roskies, David G. *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*. The Helen and Martin Schwartz lectures in Jewish studies. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999. 43

⁴³ Rohozinska, Joanna. "A Complicated Coexistence: Polish-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries". *Central Europe Review*. Vol.2, No. 4. 31 January 2000.4.

(*mitnagim*).⁴⁴ Whole neighborhoods, inhabited mainly by Jews and families under the same roof, would have varying levels of Jewish observance.

Interwar Warsaw was mainly inhabited by two groups of people: the ethnic Christian Pole and the Jews. Normal economic and political friction between competing groups was intensified by the religious and ethnic animosity that became so pronounced in the two decades of peace.⁴⁵ With a flailing economy, and the beginning of the breakdown of social classes, both Jews and Christians were struggling to keep a semblance of the life that they knew before, and their current life.

The traditional social pattern of the Polish village, based on relations of neighbors and family and built around the squire's manor, the presbytery of the priest, and the Jewish inn, was quickly vanishing. New social relations and new forms of organization took its place. The old leaders of the peasant community were losing their authority, and new types of leaders emerged-the teacher, and the instructor of an agricultural group...new ideals and new ideologies came into being. Mental horizons expanded; new needs and new interests had to be stimulated.⁴⁶

While the Christians of Warsaw were employed in the occupational arenas of agriculture, transportation and domestic service, a larger percentage of Jews were occupied in the mining and industry fields than their Christian neighbors.⁴⁷ Jews also excelled in the leather, clothing, metal, foodstuffs, glass and paper trades. Many of these workshops were family enterprises that employed very few workers.⁴⁸ Although it is difficult to document the effects on Jewish craftsmanship on Polish products, one can see the Jewish artisans influence. Cultural influence is never a one-way process. Usually such influence ensues from

⁴⁴ Gutman, 36

⁴⁵ Wynot Jr., Edward D., "Jews in the Society and Politics of Inter-war Warsaw" 293.

⁴⁶ Hertz, Alexander. *The Jews of Polish Culture*. 182.

⁴⁷ Wynot Jr., Edward D. 294-295

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

the adoption by both sides of a certain design which is then fixed by the craftsmen executing it.⁴⁹ This is also true with the music of the Jews in Warsaw.

⁴⁹ Hertz., 233.

Cantorial Music in Poland

Both liturgical and non liturgical music were very important to the Jews in Poland. Their musical talents were shared with their Jewish neighbors, as well as their Christian counterparts at various gatherings throughout the year.

But there is no question that Jews were well represented among the musicians who played at the inns during parties or at celebrations...Roving bands of Jewish musicians were a counterpart to the itinerant tradesman...Village bands played without sheet music. They would take a musical theme and develop it. Such improvisation allowed the musicians to impart something of themselves to the music.⁵⁰

The popularity of the Eastern European cantor began in the first half of the nineteenth century and continued until World War II put an end to the communities in which their talents had been nurtured. At the beginning of the 19th century, most cantors in Europe were musically illiterate. They learned the melodies by rote, and would travel from town to town to sing liturgical music. They usually did not sing the entire service, and would only sing the prayers that could move people into keeping them in their worship space. Most of the time, their compensation wasn't even enough to feed them. They would travel with *meshoranim*, one bass and a boy whose voice hadn't changed.

The eastern *chazzanim* of the first half of the nineteenth century can be classified in two groups (1) those who possessed fine voices combined with marvelous talent of performance, and were at the same time gifted composers, and (2) gifted composers and choir-leaders who had poor or no vocal ability...The *chazzanim* of the first group created schools of their own not only by their original music but also by their original method of performance. There were those of them who created selections in fixed forms, in tunes; but for the most part they founded their strength upon their free spontaneous song, improvised while conducting the service.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁵¹ Idelson, Abraham Z. *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*,. 296.

Although musical reform took place in Western Europe in the late 1800's, Eastern Europeans were not privy to it. Only through the musical influences of Chaim Wasserzug, Nissen Blumenthal, David Nowakowsky and others, and their replication of the *chor-shul* method of Solomon Sulzer, did the music advance to the level of Western Europe. He (Nowakowsky) made a thorough study of harmony and counterpoint, and acquired the technique of the forms of the classic vocal music for choir, notably the oratorio style. His themes he often takes from the traditional modes and tunes.⁵²

Common characteristics among (the Jewish) cantors in Poland...were: "exceptional musicality, a fine strong voice, (and) intense spirituality and emotional interpretation, as well as the ability to improvise, which bordered on the creation of original compositions."⁵³

Polish cantors were not only popular among Jews but also among the non-Jewish musical elite.

Fame had its drawbacks however, for the shtetlekh were often ambivalent about these men and their dual roles as clergy and artistic performer. As a result, the hazzanim found that their movements were all closely scrutinized, their piety always a suspect.⁵⁴

This is one of the reasons why Gershon Sirota was not allowed to sing in the old synagogue in Eishyshok. He had made the decision to sing liturgical music for people who weren't Jewish, and took the liturgy out of context by performing in concert halls.

"Gershon Sirota, the Vilna hazzan who was regarded as one of the finest tenors of his generation, capable of moving his listeners to tears...was among those denied permission to perform in many synagogues in Poland. The fact that he had sung for Tzar Nicholas disqualified him."⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 308.

⁵³ Fuks, Marion. *Musical Traditions of Polish Jews*. Polish Music Journal. Vol. 6 No. 1 Summer 2003, 6.

⁵⁴ Eliach, Yaffa. *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*, 134.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 135

The development of synagogue music in Poland was accelerated to a great degree by the construction of many new, large synagogues at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

The space of the synagogue had changed to a remarkable degree; the world of the cantor as a composer and musician in the service of the Jewish community and the city of which it was a part had changed even more. The music of Europe's Jews was undergoing a radical transformation at the hands of the cantor, who had begun to compose music for the public spaces they, for centuries among Europe's Others, had never before occupied.⁵⁶

The great Tlomatzka Synagogue in Warsaw, the synagogue where Gershon Sirota resided as cantor was built for this reason.

The construction of the Great Synagogue may be regarded as the ideological swansong of the first generation of assimilationists and those of the second generation who likewise had difficulty in abandoning their sense of Jewishness to the role as „Poles of the Mosaic Faith“. They saw the Great Synagogue as the key to salvation: perhaps this splendid building would be able to preserve their offspring, their sons and daughters, and even more of their grandchildren, from the delusions of their age and from the temptation to convert to Christianity.⁵⁷

These new structures also had an impact on the cantor that was needed for such a grand religious space. The need of the cantor for such a large space led to the creation of cantors that were so highly trained that their voices could compete with the finest opera singers of the time.⁵⁸ Sirota brought a new spirit into the service of the Tlomatska synagogue.

The exterior of the Tlomatska synagogue was an impressive sight to see and visitors didn't dare bring their carriages up to the immediate vicinity of the synagogue.

⁵⁶ Bohlman, Philip Vilas. *Composing the Cantorate: Westernizing Europe's Other Within*. S.l: s.n, 2000. 2-3

⁵⁷ Guterman, Alexander "The Origins of the Great Synagogue in Warsaw on Tlomackie Street" *The Jews of Warsaw*. 199.

⁵⁸ Fuks, 8.

The Tlomatska synagogue at Tlomatska and Marschalkovska, generally referred to as the the “Deitshe shule” (German synagogue) was a veritable “Beys Mikdash M’at,” a miniature “Holy temple” (of Jerusalem) built with lavish generosity and rarely equaled splendour...from the sidewalk three steps up to a wide and broad landing. Another four steps brought one up to a still wider and longer platform at both ends of which Estrada stretched colorful flowerbeds and stood guard statues of large formidable looking lions, over whom rose high, majestic, brilliantly illuminated menorah candelabras with four round branches each plus the central one which was straight. The large rounded cupola on top shone brightly as the rays of the sun bounced off from its surface.⁵⁹

The interior of the synagogue was quite simple, although still beautiful.

There were no paintings, no excessive embellishments or rich ornaments in the sanctuary. The only beautifying touch was applied to the “Oron Kodesh,” the holy ark, which bore engraved in golden letters the inscription “Mah Tovuh Ohulecho Yaacov” (How good are your tents oh Jacob). Yet on entering one felt the holy atmosphere of a “Heychal,” a house of God.⁶⁰

The building adjoining the synagogue was the cultural center of Jewish life. On the first floor was a museum with artifacts of Warsaw’s Jews and a library of 30,000 volumes of books. The second floor houses the “Literaten Verein” (Association of Writers) and the Mizrachi religious Zionist organization. This center of learning and meeting played a large role in the cohesiveness of the different groups in the community, regardless of religious practice.

The Great Synagogue in Warsaw was one of the few in Poland, before the war, called “reformed” because, along with the choir they allowed the accompaniment of organ music throughout the course of the service.⁶¹ At this time many synagogues in Poland were not using organ accompaniment. The Tlomatska synagogue attracted worshipers inclined towards assimilation by leading sermons in Polish, when this was permitted by their

⁵⁹ Vigoda., 568-69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 569.

⁶¹ Fuks, 2.

government. If the sermon was not given in Polish, the sermon would either be delivered in Yiddish or not at all.

The effect of Gershon Sirota and cantorial music on the people of Poland

The European Jewish cantorate consciously created a music that transgressed the boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish Europe. The music of the European Jewish cantorate, far from eliminating the distinctive social and religious conditions of European Jewish culture, served as a vehicle that made it impossible to ignore those conditions. The music of the cantorate, moreover, situated Jewish culture more visibly in the long history of Europe, making it also impossible to ignore that culture in the present... The world of the European Jewish cantorate, therefore, is not a closed, isolated world, but rather one essential to the recognition of a multicultural Europe.⁶²

During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the means of how a Cantor became famous outside his community was by touring and by word of mouth. This fame however was not found overnight. It took years for a cantor's name, no matter how good he was, to become well-known outside the confines of his city, not to mention the time it took for his fame to pervade the whole *gubernie* (state) and to spread throughout the land.⁶³ Sirota would travel to different towns to share his talent with others. Samuel Vigoda speaks about the "medina (country) cantor", one who would tour the country, officiating at different synagogues. Taking along a few of his singers, he visited several communities, officiating on a Sabbath, participating in Mincha-Maariv services on weekdays, or perhaps giving a concert.⁶⁴ Once a cantor settled, people would come to hear him sing from all over the countryside.

If a resident of a provincial village was eager to hear great cantors, he usually managed somehow to betake himself to the great cantorial centers where the big shots of the profession were enthroned. On his return, this enterprising Jew was the hero of the day and young and old listened to his report open mouthed, as he related the wonders of the great cantors of the day, whom he had heard sing.⁶⁵

⁶² Bohlman, Philip V. The worlds of the European Jewish cantorate., 2

⁶³ Vigoda., 510

⁶⁴ Ibid., 511

⁶⁵ Ibid., 511

With the building of the massive, opulent synagogues in Poland, the cantor became like an actor on a stage. It was on the *bima* where the cantor could shape his identity as a *shaliach tzibbur*, interpreting the prayers through melody.

The stage (*bima*) empowered the cantor to transform both the sacred spaces of the synagogue and the public spaces outside the synagogue. It was, indeed, from the stage that the cantor was able to enact the transformation that was so crucial to the changing status of Otherness in the community. Historically, the stage upon which the cantor performed changed in the way it permitted the musical specialists of the community to mediate identity, an identity ascribed by different representations of Jewishness through music.⁶⁶

Sirota was well liked by his congregation in Vilna, and his house became the place for learning and music. At times he liked the attention, but eventually he wanted privacy, to be left alone and with his own family.

Sirota was one of the boys, who loved to mingle with the crowd and spend his spare time in genial companionship with friends. The circle of devoted fans, that swarmed around him...got larger by the day. His home became the “Bays Vaad”- “Lechachomim” (for wise men)...As was to be expected, the wives of these constant followers of his came to Sirota with their complaints, berating him bitterly for undermining their marriages...since on account of him their husbands were neglecting their businesses and professions, their mates and offspring, to the detriment of all concerned.⁶⁷

People would come from far and wide to hear Sirota’s voice for the High Holidays. There would not be any empty seats and riots would form at the outside of the temple. People were ready to pay whatever they had rather than let pass the opportunity to hear Sirota’s *Kol Nidre*. The synagogue itself looked forward to the High Holidays, for it meant that they would have a very large crowd to make an appeal for donations. Cantor Samuel Vogoda recalls an excerpt from a newspaper report picturing the scenes around the synagogue on the Holy Days:

⁶⁶ Bohlman, 11.

⁶⁷ Vigoda, 546.

“Several hundred people besieged the building and repeatedly attempted to storm the entrance and force their way into the main auditorium...Inside the temple the people were packed like sardines. The stuffiness was unbearable. Over four thousand people stood one on top of another; there was no air to breathe; many fainted, and were carried out into the street where efforts were made to revive them.”

Sirota’s voice touched his congregants’ souls. One service that they looked forward to was Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, where they would hear him sing “Ato Yotzarto”. When he stormed “*Chorvo ireyno veshomeym beis mikdosheyno*” (our city has been laid waste, our sanctuary destroyed), it went through the souls of all listeners and broke their hearts, so that tears glistened in many eyes.⁶⁸

Although *Hazzan* Moshe Koussevitsky physically replaced Sirota at the Tlomatska synagogue after Sirota decided to leave, no one could replace Sirota’s vocal presence.

⁶⁸ Vigoda, 573-74.

The effect of cantorial music on America

As a mass migration of Jews from all over Europe made the journey to America to settle, these new settlers founded synagogues, much like the ones that they had left behind.

In New York, the newcomers founded dozens of small synagogues; many named for the town of origin of their congregants... This meant that synagogue life became part of a cluster of fraternal activities centered on where you came from, not where you were, designed to support immigrants-both economically and spiritually-in their transition from Europe to America.⁶⁹

In 1885, one synagogue decided to hire a *hazzan* and paid him the impressive salary of \$1000. Soon, word spread and cantors were arriving to see if they could earn that much money for their work as a *hazzan*.

Reports of the New York cantor and his thousand dollar salary spread through Russia and Poland, and set off a cantorial migration to America. Each cantor left his home, filled with the hope that he would gather up “fistfuls of gold” in the new world... synagogues began to compete with one another, and to “snatch” the cantor of his competitor.⁷⁰

Other outstanding cantors would be lured to America to appear at a special Shabbat service or for a concert. The renditions of such *hazzanim* were the joyful moments in the lives of many Jews. Certain tunes were of such nature as to allow the individual worshipper to leave the mundane, material, harsh world of reality and be uplifted into new spiritual heights.⁷¹ In these new synagogues in America, they relished the opportunities that brought new cantors from Eastern Europe to America. They longed to hear the melodies of the past.

They would gladly set aside the extended hours of time to listen to long recitative-coloratura cantorial renditions, and to savor the pouring forth of familiar liturgical motifs along with newer melodic arrangements. Social and educational groups organized gala liturgical concerts, often as fund-raisers. Tickets would be sold for sacred services, and prominently advertised in the Jewish newspapers.⁷²

⁶⁹ Slobin, 52.

⁷⁰ Malachi, A.R. 1937. “The first hazzanim in America” trans. AJ Karp. *Hadoar*, 17 September.

⁷¹ Landman, Leo. *The Cantor: An Historic Perspective*, 91.

⁷² Pasternak, Velvel and Schall, Noah and Heskes, Irene. *The Golden Age of Cantors: Musical Masterpieces of the synagogue*, 9.

The First World War and its aftermath also influenced many more cantors to settle in America. They quickly found congregations throughout America who relished their great voices, respected their piety and learning, and were inspired by the intense and sincere singing of the liturgy.

Several *chazzanim* gained a reputation of popularity, such as Joseph Rosenblatt, Mordecai Hershman and Zavel Kwartin...these (*chazzanim*) gained their reputation and popularity not only because of their achievements in the synagogue, but also because of their vocal performances in the concert house, and notably because of their phonograph records...By the latter means, they have popularized...the synagogue song. Their strength lies in their rendition of the synagogue modes in un-rhythmical improvised form, with accompaniment likewise improvised, on piano or string-instrument.⁷³

Soon, the cantors who came to America decided that more money was to be made by singing opera or popular music. Many were able to balance careers in multiple genres, like Richard Tucker and Jan Peerce. Both loved to chant the cantillations and sing the festive songs...and their recordings made them both famous as cantors...but they earned their living singing opera...Their success encouraged many other young Jewish boys of their generation and the next to go into...popular music rather than into the synagogue.⁷⁴

In an article in *The Forward*, Cantor Jacob Mendelson states that another factor that led to the decline of *chazzanut*, was the growing affluence of America's Jews.

"One of the most common modes in cantorial singing is the so-called „crying mode,“ he said. "As Jews became rich, they didn't want to cry anymore. They wanted to have their cholent; they wanted to go home."⁷⁵

⁷³ Idelson, 334

⁷⁴ Rubin, Emanuel and Baron, John.. *Music in Jewish History and culture*. 176.

⁷⁵ Sanders, Gabriel. "After Years of Decline, Cantorial Music Gets a Second Act". *The Jewish Daily Forward*. 8 December 2006. <http://www.forward.com/articles/9583/>

In order to provide a setting to be trained in the art of *chazzanut* , three Cantorial Schools were founded in America. In 1947, The Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion opened the School of Sacred Music. In 1951, the Cantor's Institute of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary was founded, and in 1951, Yeshiva University opened up an Orthodox Cantorial Training Institute. The first woman, Barbara Ostfeld, was invested as a cantor by the School of Sacred Music in 1975 and the Jewish Theological Seminary invested two women, Marla Barugel, and Erica Lippitz in 1987.

Through a generation of scholars, enthusiasts, and cantors, they are passing on the love and techniques that have been passed down to them, to a whole new faction of eager individuals who will keep the music alive.

"It's beginning to come back because it had to," he (Jack Mendelson) said. "Why? Because it's good. Hazanut is a great art form. It's terrific and uniquely Jewish. How many uniquely Jewish art prayer forms can we afford to lose?"⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The Phonograph

Before the invention of the phonograph, there was little or no possibility of a cantor becoming well known in other countries. This new technology allowed people to hear the voices of cantors that they had only been told about and for cantors to have their voices reach lands that they hadn't even heard of.

The phonograph became a very popular form of entertaining guests, and a method of enjoying music when hearing it live was impossible.

There is a sociological element, too. Most of the Eastern European Jews lived in poverty and dwelled in places where there was no concert hall or opera house. As to the city people, they also rarely could afford to visit musical performances. However, music plays a very important part in the life of most Jews, and was enjoyed both at home and in their synagogue. So it became the task of the synagogue to provide them with beautiful sounds-the *hazzan* became a surrogate concert singer.⁷⁷

The phonograph companies succeeded in distributing records in a very short time to other countries and hemispheres by exporting the recordings on a master plate.

The Jewish catalog (Gramophone Company) was anchored by the presence of one performer: cantor Gershon Sirota. Sirota, who made more than 175 records during his career, was the first star of Jewish recording. In an era that venerated singers, he single-handedly established cantorial music as the equal of other vocal styles. In 1902, he made his first Gramophone recordings, which gained immediate and widespread notice..."Sirota of the golden voice"-as he was called by the press-continued to record for Gramophone off and on until 1912.⁷⁸

In 1903, Gramophone engaged Sirota to record a series of thirteen liturgical selections; among them was *R'tze* by Cantor Isaac Schlossberg and *Hashem Hashem*, by Cantor Abraham Moshe Bernstein, both with choir. Recording also enabled *chazzanut* to be sung with musical accompaniment.

⁷⁷Sirota, Gershon, *Eastern European Chasanut*: Pan Extra

⁷⁸Sapoznik, Henry. *Klezmer!: Jewish Music from Old World to Our World*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1999. 56.

One of the most interesting developments in the recording of traditional *khazones* involves the musical accompaniments. Outside of a few early solo discs and the slightly more plentiful a cappella choir accompaniments, the great majority of American recordings feature either organ or orchestral accompaniments, none of which would be permissible at a traditional synagogue service.⁷⁹

Although Gramophone was the largest record company recording *chazzanut* at that time, Sirota recorded for many other record labels during his career: Gramophone's American affiliate Victor, Odeon, Scala, United, Beka, Pathé and Favorite, which exported his recordings to Colombia records. This ensured his standing as the most widely available recorded European Jewish artist at that time. Gramophone knew that Sirota was a profitable performer to have on their label, and made sure that he was financially compensated for his recordings.

Correspondence in 1909 between the Gramophone Company and the 35-year old Sirota shows him to be a sophisticated and canny cantor, one who accurately calculated the value of his talent and saw to it that the company did too. He was receiving the unheard of amount of 3,000 rubles a year, out of which he paid his choir and leader for 25 recordings.⁸⁰

By recording on other labels during lapses in his contract with Gramophone during 1903-1912, Sirota enabled other *hazzanim* and other Jewish artists recording opportunities as well.

Startup companies like Beka, Odeon, and Favorite were stealing the thunder of the omnipresent Gramophone Company, recording regional performers and solidifying their own territorial markets. Though this kind of hot competition was not good for Gramophone, it did create a fertile environment for the widespread recording of numerous Jewish artists who may well have been overlooked by the smugly complacent larger label.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry, 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁸¹ Sapoznik, 59.

Because recorded music was so popular in the United States, many American records were exported to Europe before the Eastern European music was imported there. Yet of the hundreds of Yiddish records made in Eastern Europe from the turn of the century until the First World War, only the records of the great Sirota and a tiny handful of theater and klezmer records got exported to the United States.⁸²

Due to his constant traveling, there is a gap of recordings between the years of 1912-1920. In 1928 Sirota recorded the Orchestrola/Broadcast series and the Columbias, his first electrical recordings. These present Sirota toward the end of his recording career when the voice was much darker and less pliable...yet so seasoned and majestic.⁸³

These record companies also enabled Sirota to record some of the most well known male tenor opera arias, many that people had heard at his concerts worldwide. Early in his recording career, he made several operatic recordings under the name Sirotoni so as not to divulge his true identity, but later excursions into opera were all sung under his real name.

When Leo Leow parted ways with Sirota and began working with Cantor Mordechai Hershman, Sirota continued with his successful recording career under the direction of David Eisenstadt, and Samuel Altman.

Ajzensztadt became Sirota's choir master, and during this period they recorded together for Pathé, Favorite, and Zonophone. Sirota's most famed recording from this period is his rendition of Ajzensztadt's composition *Shlomo Vatichmach Tzion*. Some years thereafter Sirota began a series of electrical recordings for the British *Columbia* and *Imperial* labels, the former featuring organ and choral ensembles conducted by Samuel Altman.⁸⁴

⁸² Sapoznik, 61

⁸³ Bilgora, 16.

⁸⁴ Sirota, *Sabbath in Warsaw*.

Sirota was known to record some of his most favored pieces numerous times throughout his career, singing each piece a little differently depending on his mood and what the text meant to him on that particular day.

Though his dramatic tenor darkened through the years, Sirota's career was marked by a remarkable degree of vocal longevity. He was once heard to have spoken with pride of his least recording of the Schlossberg *R'tze* made in the early 1930's, when Sirota claimed to have been seventy years of age. Amazingly that version was the best of the dozen or so that he recorded over a period of two or three decades.⁸⁵

Recordings were not as precise and exact as they are today. Early recordings were made entirely acoustically, in which the sound was collected by a horn and piped to a diaphragm which vibrated to cut into the wax cylinder. Sensitivity and frequency range were poor and irregular, giving cylinder recordings an instantly recognizable tonal quality. In order for a singer to be recorded as accurately as possible, they had to sing right into the cylinder. "Acoustic" recordings made until the mid-1920's utilized a horn rather than a microphone, and relied on a strong, centered sound projection, something cantors had in abundance.⁸⁶

These recordings had an immense influence on the style of cantorial music. As more repertoire was recorded and released to the public, the music became codified and preserved.

Unfortunately, vocal distortion was quite common on early records, caused by many variables.

The Orchestrola/Broadcast group, produced eight-inch and ten-inch discs, trying to include the same amount of music on both. As a result, the grooves went too close to the center of the disc and amplitude was limited. Also the materials used to produce the discs were inferior...The eight-inch Orchestrola pressings, in spite of the limited sonic quality, give the impression of charged *live* performances, as if the great cantor was recorded in a temple.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Sirota, Sabbath in Warsaw.

⁸⁶ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry, 4.

⁸⁷ Bilgora, 17.

As technology has advanced, companies have painstakingly tried to re-master these recordings, when mastered from gramophone to LP (long playing) album. The latest technical advances have been employed to best represent the original voices in both range and sound. Special engineering skills were used...to offer you a recording of superior quality and the highest attainable standards.⁸⁸

The process again advanced when recordings were re-mastered from LP to compact disc. Although there are cantorial music collectors that insist on listening to the music in its original form, in order to preserve it, the masters had to be preserved on compact disc.

The original recordings are so rare (in some cases only one or two existing copies) that such a failsafe for preservation as a high quality CD is a necessity...the focus for remastering must be to maintain on the CD all the critical musical information of the original recording, so that every nuance of its performance and sound quality is preserved. We trust that you will endorse this approach as a basic commitment of the music and its preservation in a state that will convey to future generations all the power and eloquence of these amazing performances, the likes of which will not be seen again.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Sirota, Gershon. Liner Notes. *The art of Cantor Gershon Sirota*. Brooklyn: Greater Recording Co, 1969.

⁸⁹ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry, 4.

How the Gramophone changed the life of Gershon Sirota

The invention of gramophone records during Sirota's career made a profound impact on the swift growth of his fame. With this new invention, the chazzanut of Europe could be brought to the people of America. This in turn proved to be a reminder to the immigrants of the life that they left behind, and Sirota's recordings were able to bring them back to the shetl. "It was inevitable that Sirota would have to be heard in America, his recordings and his European fame had preceded him. Thousands, who had known and heard him in Odessa, Wilna, and Warsaw, had emigrated, and for those who had not heard him in person, his records were by this time widely distributed in the United States."⁹⁰ For the people of Poland, hazzanut was a daily part of many people's lives, and the art was thriving there during the Golden Age.

His entrance into the recording world is due to the insight of a congregant at the Shtatshul (state synagogue in Vilna). A man by the name of Mr. Isserlin, a prominent observant member of the Wilna community came up to Sirota and told him about the invention of the phonograph. Sirota was skeptical if, as a sacred leader he should record his singing, especially after all of the outrage about his singing of non cantorial music. He didn't want to cause anymore controversy; until he realized the success that recording would bring him.

Isserlin replied that in his considered opinion it was not only perfectly proper and fitting for a religious functionary to use the newly-invented device and to lend his talents to the recording of psalms and prayers, but that it was even most desirable for him to take advantage of the opportunity to do so. By recording these chants he would do a great service to his people. The persecuted and misery-ridden Jewish masses, who were living under hostile anti-Semitic regimes in the various lands, would find some solace and relief in listening to the beautiful inspirational changes that would

⁹⁰ Bilgora, 4.

bring into their beclouded lives a ray of hope and confidence in the eventual dawn of a better and brighter tomorrow.⁹¹

Soon after speaking to Isserlin, a representative from the phonograph company made a visit to Sirota and painted a wonderful picture for the cantor that virtually made it impossible for him to refuse the offer.

“Just imagine! Your voice will be heard simultaneously in all corners of the big wide world...in the salon of the noble count and in the hut of the poor tailor-The working girl eating her spare one course meal, will have it enhanced and supplemented with the pleasure which your singing will give her-In all corners of the globe where human beings live and struggle and where lonely people are longing and craving for some encouraging sound, some inspiring world to bring some light and warmth into their drab existence and worry-filled life, your voice will provide it. ...You will be means of your recorded voice recruit new friends for the Jewish people and Jewish musical art, and you will become immortal.”⁹²

When he heard Isserlin’s reasoning on why he should record, Sirota thought recording would be a great boost to his career, and a boost to the morale of the Jewish people. Sirota stated:

“No matter what the self-righteous stone-throwers, they themselves supposedly without blemish or sin, may say, I never felt and still do not feel, that by my recording of liturgical chants I have committed any unseemly, unethical, or improper act, or that I have thereby in any way demeaned the dignity of my sacred calling, or offended the religious feelings of anybody.”⁹³

At another occasion, when Sirota was asked what he had to say about the protests and attacks directed against his recordings, he replied in a more sarcastic tone: “What do I know? They are paying me for it, so I do blow into a tube.”⁹⁴

Sirota was soon courted by every major and minor label in Europe. A letter sent between Gramophone executives states:

⁹¹ Vigoda, 51.

⁹² Ibid., 516.

⁹³ Ibid., 517.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 514.

Riga, November 9, 1911: As you know this artiste is of the utmost importance to us, and we are anxious to see that the competition do not get any of his (Sirota's) records... This you know is most important, especially at this moment when we are threatened with the competition getting on the inside.⁹⁵

By 1913, Sirota had already successfully recorded 12 albums. These recordings opened the door in both Poland and abroad to numerous invitations to sing at many events but they also had a negative affect on his credibility as a cantor.

Among more traditionally minded Jews, questions were asked about the religious ramifications of recording. A recording of a religious prayer could be played out of context in a profane environment, and the playing be considered a sacrilege. And though it was now possible to play a recording of *Kol Nidre* on *Yom Kippur*, its proper ritual occasion, was it permissible? And if not, why not?⁹⁶

Many cantors decided to not mention God's name on a recording, for they believed that repeating God's name outside of personal prayer would be blasphemous. They would replace God's name *Adonai* with *Adoshem* (meaning "the name"). There were even those who felt that the mere utterance of God's name meant that the 78's themselves had become holy objects. Like prayer books or Torah scrolls, which when they were no longer usable, could only be disposed of in a prescribed ritual manner.⁹⁷

People wanted to hear the great and powerful voices of the *hazzan*, to experience their passion for the text and music.

Few would assume, of course, that a person who purchased a cantorial 78 was doing so with the intention of praying along with it. Instead, for most, it was an emotional experience which was sought, not a ritual one. With recordings, more so than in the synagogue, artistic performance for its own sake became as important a benchmark as religious fervor in evaluating the success of the *shliakh tsibur*, the messenger of the people.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Gramophone company Riga office to Fred Gaisberg, EMI archives, London.

⁹⁶ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry, 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3

⁹⁸ Ibid., 6

Due to the outrage of some of Poland's rabbis and other cantors, his synagogue put some restrictions on him, because of his recordings and performing outside of the synagogue. The outcome was a declaration that they could not order Sirota to stop giving concerts, but his cantorial garments must always remain in the Synagogue building and he would not be allowed to use them at concert appearances.⁹⁹

Ironically, gramophone recordings were the method that Sirota first auditioned for the Tlomatska synagogue. Met with the combination of his presentation and the stellar quality of his golden tenor, the opposition presented no contest.¹⁰⁰

We are truly fortunate that *chazzanut* enthusiasts treasured their recordings of Sirota. These recordings, along with the manuscripts of printed music have saved this art form from disappearing altogether and allowed a whole new generation of listeners to hear his astonishing vocal trills and coloratura.

⁹⁹ Vigoda., 514.

¹⁰⁰ Bilgora, 4.

Hazzan Pinye Minkowsky's Verbal Tirade of Sirota

Especially vehement charges were hurled against Sirota by Hazzan Pinchas Minkowsky¹⁰¹, who kept after him with bitter attacks and poisonous arrows of reproach.¹⁰² He believed making recordings of sacred music was a sin and also did not believe that a *hazzan* should sing non-cantorial music at any time while employed as a *hazzan*.

Minkowsky once stated:

The “Gronom” of Warsaw (referring to Sirota), whose only asset is in his throat (Gronom) struts up to the stage dressed in his priestly garments and belts out a few cantorial prayers. Then he takes off and throws away the synagogue gown and the cantorial yarmulke, puts on a full dress suit and goes forth to sing a love song to the maiden „Aida“.

In this statement lies some truth. It was well known that he made money from these recordings, and some thought it was a moral dilemma, including Sirota, at first.

Hazzan Minkowsky also heard from a soldier that Sirota's music was played “for their amusement” in a house with a red lamp, a brothel. That was the final straw, according to Minkowsky and his crusade against Sirota was further strengthened.

Minkowsky visited Sirota's synagogue to hear him officiate at a *Shavuot* service, and afterwards the topic of recording was brought up.

(Sirota) showed him letters, which he (Sirota) had received from the war-front during the Russo-Japanese war in which the Jewish soldiers thanked him for the pleasure and joy which he brought to them by his recordings when, lying in the dirty trenches of Manchuria on the night of the “seyder”, they were homesick for their families. In their loneliness, the writers attested, his voice was a great comfort and an invaluable morale builder to the boys on the battlefield. It was like a greeting from home.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ see Pinchas Minkowsky-Encyclopedia Judaica for his biography

¹⁰² Vigoda, 512.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 576.

Sirota tried to convince Minkowsky that his attacks on him were unjustified. It is not known if Minkowsky ever changed his opinion on recorded *chazzanut*.

There was, however another school of thought. These skeptics were not so sure about Pinye's real motives...They thought it more likely that envy and jealousy was lurking behind the pretense of fighting a holy war, that the real reason for his furious attacks on his colleagues was that he could not tolerate and take with equanimity the sight of Sirota's...shameful sudden climb and rise to universal fame on the wings of the wizardry of the mechanically reproduced musical sounds. They surmised that he was jealous of his (Sirota's) success in the new medium, and disappointed at having been bypassed and left out of this new development.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of Minkowsky's opinion of Sirota's choice to record and perform non-cantorial repertoire, Sirota had a fantastic recording and concert career, and was admired and accepted worldwide.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 517

The Cantorial Recitative

The transcription of the cantorial recitative began in the middle of the 18th century and was influenced by the melodies of the cantillation of the bible, festivals and other holidays, as well as by non-Jewish music that surrounded each community.

The recitative, unlike our *nusach hat'filah* which preserved its refreshing simplicity, went through a process of change and development... However, in many instances the melodic flow and improvisational freedom of the recitative indicate the inspirational source of the *nusach hat'filah*, which was influenced by and based upon the tiny fragments of the *tame mikra*.¹⁰⁵

After the beginning of the 19th century, we are fortunate to have documentation of the vocal style of Eastern European *hazzanut*.

This is due to the following factors: one, we begin to find detailed contemporary accounts of the *hazzanim*; two, many transcriptions of their compositions have survived; three, a few of these *hazzanim* actually made recordings of their art in the beginning of the 20th century; four, many of their direct successors left substantial audio documentations of their own performances.¹⁰⁶

Through the art of the cantorial recitative, the *hazzan* is capable of taking a piece of music and allowing their musical improvisations to shine with the enhancement of ornamentation. The *hazzan* is the voice of our trials and tribulations, as well as our happiness and exultations. They are capable of this because of their vocal beauty and craftsmanship. Through the prayers and their voice, we have learned that we can triumph over all that is set before us. Rabbis wrote that the source of song is the nearest to the source of holiness. According to the *Kabbalah*, there are gates in heaven which can be opened only by song.¹⁰⁷

Like poetry, a sacred prayer text can develop in a whole new way, how one text can take on a new life depending on who sets it to music.

¹⁰⁵ Ephros, Gershon. The Hazzanic Recitative: A Unique Contribution to our music heritage. 23

¹⁰⁶ Jaffe, Kenneth. Eastern European Hazzanut: An Inquiry into Its Vocal Style, Coloratura and Ornamentation. Thesis. 1997. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Beigel, Jacob "Divinity and Music: A Jewish Conception." *Jewish Music Journal*. Vol 1 no. 1 1934;114

In cantorial practice, the sacred prayer texts were essentially common to regionally diverse Jewish communities. It was the melodies, ornamentations and pronunciations used by the *khazonim* that were the primary markers of unique regional nuance and personal style-paramount at that time.¹⁰⁸

Although a composer will give the singer a melodic line to sing, improvisation will make a piece the singer's own. Improvisation, by definition is intended to be spontaneous, however, only a trained singer can make it seem that way to the listener. In cantorial recitative, it is planned and may be structured according to its mode. The text will dictate how much, or how little improvisational ornamentation is appropriate.

After having been initiated into the essentials of the composer's task...despite the termination of the purely compositional procedure, the musical work itself, in a very substantial sense, is not yet fully completed. The reason for this apparent paradox is that, in his prepared musical score, the composer has given us no more than rigid graphic symbols of his creation.¹⁰⁹

This does not mean that a composition is not a finished piece of work without its performance. It merely means that an artist completes the composers' vision through their execution, and turns the "graphic symbols" into something tangible. Each time a cantorial recitative is sung, new life is brought into the music.

The liturgy itself takes on a new form, based on how the composer chooses to compose their piece.

Since the musical elements of the recitative consist of a limited number of motifs and their variations (in the various prayer modes) it is in their selection, combination and emphasis that the individuality of the composer appears...A close study of the existing repertoire will reveal that while generally adhering to the same formula, significant variations exist between the great pioneers in this area of creativity...Thus in the words of (Pinye) Minkowsky: "Yeruchom pleaded with God, Nisi Belzer shouted to him, Shestapol hoped to him, while Abras screamed at him".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Weiss, Sam and Sapoznik, Henry, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Heskes, Irene and Yasser, Dr. Joseph. "The Philosophy of Improvisation" *The Cantorial Art*. 39.

¹¹⁰ Ephros, 83.

This chapter will look at two different recordings of P. Abras's¹¹¹ *Kadosh Atah*. As stated in the previous chapter, Sirota was known to record the same piece many times, adding different ornamentations to the text, depending on how he wanted to emphasize each word at that particular moment.

In general, Sirota's style of singing is more of the late baroque style than the late 19th century style. Composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederic Handel, and Henry Purcell wrote music that enabled the singer's expertise in ornamentation to shine through. Their scores, much like most of the original cantorial manuscripts that Sirota sang from, contained little information about elements like articulation and ornamentation. Their choice of coloratura and ornamentation was what distinguished one cantor's performance from another's. During the late 19th century and into the early 20th century, opera and art song composers like Johannes Brahms and Robert Schumann wrote music with a long, fluid vocal line.

Sirota's voice was elastic in quality, capable of moving up and down the scale with incredible ease. Unlike the traditional trill marking, which would start from the lower note, his trills begin on the higher note.

¹¹¹ P. Abras (1820-1896), no biographical information

P. Abras: “Kadosh Atah”

Kadosh Atah, is the conclusion of the extended third blessing of the High Holidays Amidah. Its translation is as follows: Holy are you, and awesome is your name, and there is no God beside you, as it is written “And Adonai of hosts is exalted through justice and the Almighty, the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness.” Blessed are you Adonai, the King, the Holy One.¹¹²

Although the text is not long, Abras composed a piece that brings authority to the text. One feels like God is a holy king after hearing it. Although a text from the High Holidays, the traditional motifs and nusach is missing in its composition.

In this piece, Abras provides the cantor with the opportunity to ornament the vocal line for as long as one wishes by not writing a choral part below him. In the two following transcriptions, there are measures that were written for choir that Sirota omitted so he can continue on with the phrase.

Although both recordings were recorded with an organ accompaniment, this piece was originally written for unaccompanied cantor and choir, which when the piece was written, consisted of only males. Boys used to sing the soprano and alto choral parts because of the prohibition of *kol isha*, or hearing the voice of a woman. This prohibition comes from Song of Songs 2:14 which states “Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful”. To some, a women’s voice is considered to be seductive, and therefore, it is improper for a woman to sing in the company of men. Today, if the piece was performed in a congregation where men and women could worship side by side, the piece would be performed with a choir consisting of both men and women.

¹¹²Please see the *machzor* for the Hebrew text.
Davis, Rabbi Avraham. *Metsudah Interlinear Machzor Yom Kippur*. 395-6.

The unchanged male voice has a different quality than a female's voice, even though they are singing in the same register. The *timbre*, or tone quality is different. Abras kept the soprano part in the choral section towards the higher part of his register, since a boy soprano's voice is much brighter at the top of his range than at the bottom.

The original manuscript, as well as the two recordings begin in d minor with the choir singing "*kadosh ata v'nora schmecha, ve en eloah mebaladecha*" for the first eleven measures before the cantor begins. There is no rhythmic diversion between the parts and they start in unison and end on a tonic chord. The organ doubles the soprano I line. The cantor repeats the phrase *Kadosh atah* twice in measures 11-15, the second time embellishing the line with a fast ascension of the scale, followed by a triplet, while the choir is singing *Kadosh atah* underneath him. The cantor then reiterates *ve nora shemecha*, after the choir sings the text at a *pianissimo* dynamic. This text is repeated twice by both the cantor and the choir. The choir continues with the line *ve en eloah mebaladecha* at a *pianissimo* dynamic again, which is followed by the cantor singing 1 ½ octave cadenza starting at D4, moving in a downward stepwise motion to C#3, and back up the scale to D4 on the words *ve en*. This cadenza and the following vocal line accentuate the text stating that there is "no other God besides you". The choir repeats this line with dynamic accent and continues to say "as it is written, which is followed by the cantor and choir singing "Adonai of Hosts is exalted through justice". The choir line is singing the same basic rhythmic pattern, with their syllables synchronized with the cantor. The choir and cantor go back and forth repeating the lyrics from measures 31-39. The *chatimah* begins in measure 35, and the cantor's vocal line begins is provided with more ornamentation, with triplets and sixteenth note melismas. The choir responds with the response to the *chatimah*, *baruch hu uvaruch shemo*. The cantor

sings a short cadenza on *ha melech* and the choir follows with the same lyric at an *adagio* tempo in 6/8 time. The cantor ends the piece singing his praises for the holy king.

There are two known recordings of Sirota singing *Kodosh Atah*. The first recording is found on the compilation CD, *Sirota 1874-1943 Symposium 1147*. The CD book states that the piece was recorded in London on the Decca Label on November 31, 1919 or 1920. The second recording, found on the record *Great Odessa Cantors* has an unknown recording date, but the back of the record cover states that the piece was conducted by Samuel Altman, who Sirota worked with during the late 1920's and early 1930's. Although the recording on the *Great Odessa Cantors* must have been recorded later than 1919 or 1920, the quality is superior and the vocals are clearer on the older recording. Perhaps this is because it was re-mastered when recorded onto a CD.

The original manuscript and transcriptions can be found in Appendixes A-D. By looking at the transcriptions, one can see the stylistic differences between the original manuscript and what Sirota recorded.

Conclusion

Chazzan Yitzchock Gershon Sirota, the son of a village cantor grew up to become one of the most famous cantors of Eastern Europe. He led an exciting life that was cut short by the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. He died protecting his family and worshipping with the community that he loved.

People would travel for miles to hear Sirota sing a service. Some have said he had a generous disposition, and would officiate at the wedding of a poor family for no remuneration. He also took pleasure in opening his home to members of the community who surrounded him at all hours to learn from him, and to hear him sing. His vocal trills moved people to a higher spiritual place, the ultimate goal of a cantor.

His recordings enabled people to remember the old country, and the people who listened to them were able to share these sounds with the generation that could not witness Sirota's vocal intensity in person. . Even when a person was thousands of miles away from their families, the familiar chants sung by Sirota would bring them back home, to a place that they loved and missed.

Sirota succeeded in linking the old and new ways of life. He recorded the liturgical pieces of his audience's youth, yet dressed like a member of Warsaw's elite, traveling the world, sharing his amazing vocal gifts to thousands of adoring fans.

His immense following and the respect from other hazzanim and singers tells us that not only was Sirota a man of great talent, he was a man that was admired.

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קדוש אתה

KODOSH ATAH

P. ABRAS

159
№ 29

Religioso.

Cantor

Sopr. ^{I^{mo}}
II^{do}

Tenore

Basso

First system of the musical score. It features four staves: Cantor (bass clef), Soprano (treble clef), Tenor (treble clef), and Bass (bass clef). The music is in 3/4 time. The lyrics are: *Ko - dosch a - tah Ko doscha - tah*. The Soprano and Tenor parts have triplets in the second measure.

Second system of the musical score. It continues the four-part setting. The lyrics are: *Ko - dosch a tah ve no - ra sche me - cha ve*. The Soprano and Tenor parts have triplets in the second measure.

Third system of the musical score. It continues the four-part setting. The lyrics are: *en e loah mi bal a de cha ve en e loah mi bal a de cha*. The Soprano and Tenor parts have triplets in the second measure.

mi ba² a de cha mi bal a de cha

mi ba² a de cha mi bal a de cha

No doscha - -

tah Ro - dosch - a tah ve

Ro doscha tah ve no rasche me cha

Ro doscha tah ve no rasche me cha

No doscha tah ve no rasche me cha

no rasche me cha ve no ra - sche me cha

ve no ra sche mecha ve

ve no ra sche me-cha ve

ve no ra sche mecha ve

en e lo ah mi bal a de - cha

en e lo ah mi bal a de - cha

en e lo ah mi bal a de - cha

en e lo ah mi

mi bal a de cha

mi bal a de cha

ve en mi bal a de cha

mi bal a de cha

mi bal a de - cha Ra Ra tu v

mi bal a de - cha Ra Ra tu v

mi bal a de - cha Ra Ra tu v

yig ba a do noy ze va ot ba-misch pot ve

vayg ba adonay z'vaot bamisch pat ve ha el ha k' d'sch

vayg ba adonay z'vaot bamisch pat ve ha el ha k' d'sch

vayg ba adonay z'vaot bamisch pat ve ha el ha k' d'sch

ha el ha k' d'sch nik' d'sch biz'da kah ba-

nik' d'sch biz'da kah bize da kah

nik' d'sch biz'da kah bize da kah

nik' d'sch biz'da kah bize da kah

ruch a a tah a do-noy

ba-ruch a tah ba-

ba-ruch a tah ba-

ba-ruch a. tah ba-

ha — me lech
 ruch hu u va ruch sche-mö
 ruch hu u va ruch sche-mö
 ruch hu u va ruch sche-mö

Adagio

ha - me - lech ha - me - lech ha me - lech ha
 ha - me - lech ha - me - lech ha me - lech ha

ha me - - lech ha Ko dosch
 me - lech ha Ko dosch a - men
 me - lech ha Ko dosch a - men
 me - lech ha Ko dosch a - men.

Fine

Kodosh Atah

Cantor's part from manuscript

P. Abras

Religioso

10

Ko - dosch a - tah

Ko - - -

14

dosch_____ a - tah

ve - no - ra sche-me - cha

ve-

19

19

no - ra _____ sche - me - cha

ve -

23

23

A musical score for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The melody begins with a half note B-flat, followed by a series of eighth notes ascending stepwise from A to G-sharp. This is followed by a quarter rest, then a half note F-sharp, another quarter rest, and finally a half note E. The piece concludes with a final whole note D.

en _____

e - lo - ah

mi ba-la-de - cha

27

27

27

va - yig - ba a-do-noy ze-va-ot ba - misch-pat

ve -

32

32

Musical notation for measure 32. The staff contains a sequence of notes: eighth notes G4, A4, B4, C#5; a quarter rest; eighth notes D5, E5, F#5; a quarter rest; and a triplet of eighth notes G5, A5, B5. There are slurs over the first four notes and the last three notes.

ha - el ha-ko-dosch

nik - dasch biz'-da-kah

ba - - - - - ruch

Kodosh Atah

As performed on Great Odessa Cantors recording

P. Abras

Religioso

Cantor

1 10 11 12 13

Ko - dosch a - tah Ko - 6 - -

14 15 16 17 18

dosch a - tah ve - no - ra sche-me - cha ve-

19 20 21 22 23

no - ra sche-me - cha ve - en-

24 27 * 28 29

e - lo-ah mi-ba-la de - cha va - yig - ba a-do-noy ze-va-ot-

30 31 32 33

ba - misch - pot ve - ha - el haka - dosch

senza misura

34 35 36 37

nik'-dasch bi-z' da-ka ba - - - - - ruch a-tah-

* Bars 25 & 26 omitted.

** Bar 35 omitted.

8 38 a-do - shem 40* 41 42 ha 5 -

8 43 me-lech 44 **Adagio** 48 49 *mf* *senza misura* *ff* 3 ha - ha - a me-lech ha -

Tempo I 50 ka - - - - dosch 52 53 54

Detailed description: The musical score is written for a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first system (measures 38-42) is in 2/4 time, featuring a series of eighth notes and a half note. The second system (measures 43-49) begins with a 4/4 time signature, marked 'Adagio', and includes a 'senza misura' section with a crescendo from mezzo-forte (mf) to fortissimo (ff). The third system (measures 50-54) is marked 'Tempo I' and returns to 2/4 time, consisting of a few long notes. The lyrics are in Hebrew: 'a-do - shem', 'me-lech', 'ha - ha - a me-lech', and 'ka - - - - dosch'.

* Bar 39 omitted.

Kodosh Atah

As performed on Symposium 1147

P. Abras

Religioso

Cantor

8 ¹ **10** ¹¹ ¹² ¹³

Ko - dosch a - tah ko ⁶

¹⁴ ¹⁵ ¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁸

dosch ³ a - tah ve - no - ra sche-me - cha ve-

senza misura *a tempo*

¹⁹ ²⁰ ²¹ ²²

no - - - - ra sche- me - - cha ve -

²³ ²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶

en - e - lo - ah mi ba-la-de - cha

²⁸ ²⁹ ³⁰ ³¹

va - yig - ba a-donoy ze-va - ot ba - misch-pat ve -

³² ³⁴ ³⁵ ³⁶

ha - el ha-ko-dosch nik-dasch bi-z'-da-- ra ba- - - - - ruch

³⁷ ^{38 *} ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ ⁴²

a-tah ⁶ a-do-shem ha -

* Bar 39 omitted from recording.

2 43 *tr* **Adagio** 44 4 48 49 *ff* 5

8 - - me-lech ha- - - - - me-lech ha- - - -

Tempo I 50 ** 51 52 53 54

8 ka - - - - - dosch.

**Manuscript has no change of tempo or meter here.

CARNEGIE HALL ARTIST PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Date	Event	Venue	Conductor / Orchestra	Role / Program
3/13/1912	Cantor Sirota with Choir	Main Hall		<p>SOLOIST:</p> <p>BACH: Toccata in F maj., BWV 540 [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>LOW: L'dor Wodor (Improvisation) [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>LOW: Weschomru [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Leo Low, Conductor; Chorus (unspecified)]</p> <p>MAXSON: Romance [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>FAULKES: Festival March [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>MASSENET: Hérodiade: Aria [Gilda Longari, Soprano; Fernando Tanara, Piano]</p> <p>SULZER: Kol Nidre [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Leo Low, Conductor; Clarence Eddy, Organ; Chorus (unspecified)]</p> <p>WAGNER: Tannhäuser: Arrival of the guests at Wartburg [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>LOW: Koruz m'chomer [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>JEWISH-ISRAELI SONG (Low, Leo): Unsone Toikef [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Leo Low, Conductor; Clarence Eddy, Organ; Chorus (unspecified)]</p> <p>BUCK: Concert Variations on The Star-Spangled Banner [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>SCARLATTI: Il Pirro e Demetrio: Le violette [Gilda Longari, Soprano; Fernando Tanara, Piano]</p> <p>PUCCINI: Madama Butterfly: Aria [Gilda Longari, Soprano; Fernando Tanara, Piano]</p> <p>BERNSTEIN: Adonoy Adonoy [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Leo Low, Conductor; Clarence Eddy, Organ; Chorus (unspecified)]</p>
2/14/1912	Cantor Sirota with Choir of Fifty	Main Hall	Leo Low Chorus (unspecified)	<p>SOLOIST:</p> <p>EDDY: Festival and Fugue [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>LEWANDOWSKI: Psalm 92 ("Tov Lehos") [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>LOW: Rachmonoh Deonei (Slichot Prayer) [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>VERDI: Rigoletto: Caro nome [Marie La Salle-Rabinoff, Soprano]</p> <p>CLERAMBAULT: Prelude [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>COUPERIN: Troisième livre de pièces de clavecin, 18e ordre: Soeur Monique [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>VERDI: Aida: Celeste Aida [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>JOHNSTON: Evensong [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>CRAWFORD: Toccata [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>LOW: Kduschah [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>SELECTIONS NOT INCLUDED: Weschomru (Improvisation) [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>SCHLOSSBERG: Reze</p> <p>BONNET: Variations de Concert in E min., Op. 1 [Clarence Eddy, Organ]</p> <p>DONIZETTI: Lucia di Lammermoor: Alfin son tua/ Spargi d'amaro pianto ("Mad Scene") [Marie La Salle-Rabinoff, Soprano]</p> <p>SULZER: Beresch Haschonoach [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>HAYDN: The Creation, H.XXI:2: Besimhon [Gershon Sirota, Tenor]</p> <p>SOLOISTS: Soloists not assigned to specific works [M. Vittorio Podesti, Piano; J. Wagner, Flute]</p>

CARNEGIE HALL ARTIST PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Date	Event	Venue	Conductor / Orchestra	Role / Program
Gershon Sirota 3/26/1921	Cantor Sirota with Choir	Main Hall		<p>SOLOIST: LEWANDOWSKI: Psalm 150 ("Hal'luyoh") [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Chorus (unspecified)] SULZER: Adon olam [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Chorus (unspecified)] SIROTA: Weshomro [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] UNKNOWN (Low, Leo): Der Fodim [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Helena Sirota, Soprano] SNEIER: Elegie [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Helena Sirota, Soprano] LOW: L'der w'dor [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] UNKNOWN (Machtenberg, ???): Avhorachmim Brody [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Chorus (unspecified)] RACHMANINOFF: Six Songs: Polyubila ya na pechal' svoyu, Op.8, No.4 ("I have Grown Fond of Sorrow") [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Helena Sirota, Soprano] LOW: Zvej Tajlelach [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Helena Sirota, Soprano] LOW: Kadisch [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] LOW: Owisich [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Helena Sirota, Soprano] SCHLOSSBERG: Retseh [Gershon Sirota, Tenor; Chorus (unspecified)] SOLOISTS: Soloists not assigned to specific works [??? Natali, Piano]</p>
3/24/1913	Jewish Philharmonic Society	Main Hall	Max Margolis Jewish Philharmonic Society	<p>SOLOIST: BRUCH: Die Loreley, Op.16: Prelude BIZET: L'arlésienne Suite No.1 LOW: Rachmonoh Deonei (Slichot Prayer) [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] UNKNOWN: Weseorov [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] SIROTA: Weshomro [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] HAMERIK: Jødisk trilogi, Op.19 BRUCH: Kol Nidrei, Op.47 [Sara Gurowitch, Cello] JEWISH-ISRAELI SONG: Elohenu [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] JEWISH-ISRAELI SONG: Kezeh [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] JEWISH-ISRAELI SONG: Haben Yakir Li [Gershon Sirota, Tenor] HAMERIK: Jødisk trilogi, Op.19: Lamento (ii) HAMERIK: Jødisk trilogi, Op.19: Sinfonia trionfale (iii) MENDELSSOHN: Ruy Blas Overture, Op.95</p>