

THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE ... CINCINNATI
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION ... NEW YORK

40 W. SIXTY-EIGHTH STREET · NEW YORK 23, N. Y.
TRAFALGAR 3-0200

May, 1953

Report on "The Jewish Choral Movement in America" by

Harold Krantzler

Mr. Harold Krantzler, in his thesis, "The Jewish Choral Movement in America" deals with the cultural, social and economic background which contributed towards the development of the Jewish Choral movement in America. He has traced the early cultural history of the Jewish people in the United States and its first manifestations of choral singing in the early Jewish congregations, to the organization of choral societies as such, with the great waves of immigration of Jews from East Europe during the latter part of the 19th century.

Mr. Krantzler's work is a pioneer work. For, while this thesis represents a good deal of research on the part of the writer, he also utilized a questionnaire which he sent out to innumerable Jewish choral conductors in this country, and interviewed many veterans in the field for information which he has put down for the first time which would have been lost otherwise. It is the first time that anyone has tried to assemble scattered material on this subject, and to put it together, for others to develop. Mr. Krantzler has done a real service to this phase of the history of Jewish music in America and to this aspect of the development of Jewish culture on this side of the Atlantic. The thesis receives the mark of B plus.

A.W. Binder

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CLIFTON AVENUE · CINCINNATI 20, OHIO

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This is basically a study of the facts of Jewish choir-singing. Wherever the author deals with facts, he is solid, lucid, succinct, although a little partial toward the Yiddish-speaking group. Wherever he attempts an interpretation of a historical situation, however, he is amazingly naive, and a few examples may clarify this observation:

- p. 18 Smetana was not the founder of the national school of Czech music, although its greatest champion.
- p. 22 Modena was not the first to create an artistic choir; there have been such choirs before in Spain before 1492, as we can see from the 3 part Kedusha Motet in the Colombina Chansonnier in the Paris National Library.
- p. 26 The epithets of the author: "superfluous", "classical", "playful" are, to say the least, naive.
- p. 34 et passim: The author is too easily inclined to call this man or that the "father" of a movement. As a matter of fact, this coreferee doubts seriously, whether the activities of Jewish choruses merit the term "movement".
- p. 42 The author has completely overlooked the very important influence of the "Bethlehem Choral Society", which, at the end of the 18th century until today has had considerable influence upon the musical taste of American audiences.
- p. 51 A: Had the author availed himself of the thesis of Emmet Frank, HUC-JIR 1952 on the Development of Synagogue Music in the American Reform Movement, he would have been able to give many more examples, since the thesis was the result of long studies in the Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

p.78,94, 119: The composition by Schubert (not Shubert!) is entitled "Miriam's Siegesgesang" (Text by Grillparzer.) The author varies between "Songs of Miriam", "Miriam's Triumph" etc. This being a classical work, he should quote correctly. A discussion of the average Jewish choirs' repertory and its standards is badly missing in the thesis; such a discussion might have established a criterion whether there is a genuine "movement", or the choruses represent - historically seen - no more than extensions of "Landsmannschaften" or "Political Glee-clubs" with Jewish flavor, as which they appear to me. The influence of the Yiddish Theatre also should have been investigated.

In general, the thesis is a fair attempt to "open up a well in the desert". Mr. K. has done his level best, but he lacks historical perspective and is, at least in his approach, far from refined .

Nonetheless, the gathering of the pertinent facts is meritorious, esp. cha. 3 & 5, and for their merit I recommend the acceptance of the thesis. - It is not customary in Cincinnati to give a grade to any thesis.

Respectfully

Eric Wauer.

The Jewish Choral Movement in the United States

by

Harold I. Krantzler

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Rabbi and Master of Hebrew Letters
at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of
Religion, New York City.

New York School

January 1953

Introduction

This thesis will deal with the cultural, social, and economic background which contributed towards the creation and development of the Jewish Choral Movement in the United States.

I have tried to delineate the cultural roots of Jewish choral singing as they first manifested themselves in Europe -- mainly in Russia and in Poland at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th.

I have traced the early cultural history of Jews in the United States, and the manifestations of choral singing, albeit Jewish choral activity in this country did not come to any appreciable flowering until after the great waves of immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe in the last decades of the 19th Century.

This study has emphasized the cultural needs which group singing filled in the lives of the Jews

in the lower economic strata: the working class and the small entrepreneurs.

I have limited my study to choral groups consisting of amateurs, usually of very little formal musical background, who devote themselves to the singing of Jewish secular and sacred music -- not for liturgical purposes. I have not dealt primarily with synagogue choirs, whether amateur or professional, whose prime function it is to sing sacred music for synagogue services.

Basing myself upon personal interviews with some of the outstanding figures in the Jewish choral movement in this country, and upon 40 questionnaires sent to various choral groups in different parts of the country, I have tried to sketch a general outline of the types of choruses, character of repertoire, conductors and their musical backgrounds, impact of the choruses on both Jewish and general culture of the American community --- and the trend of the Jewish Choral Movement for the future.

I should like to express my gratitude for the counsel and cooperation of Professor A. W. Binder, the sponsor of this study, to Rabbi Kiev of our HUC-JIR Library and his staff for their gracious assistance. My thanks are due for the kind cooperation of the many outstanding men in the Jewish choral field who granted me the interviews necessary for this study.

Attached to chapter 5 is a copy of the questionnaire I used for the purposes of this study.

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Chapter I

The period during which Jewish choral activity began its development in Eastern Europe, in Russia particularly, was one of the national awakening of the Jews.

The halcyon days of the Enlightenment, under the partially benevolent reign of Czar Alexander II, were over. He had accomplished many social, economic and political reforms, which applied not only to the Russians but also to the Jews. The conditions of the soldiers, who had been virtual slaves under Nicholas I was greatly improved; in 1861 Alexander II liberated nearly twenty-two million peasants, giving them full freedom.

Other innovations of great significance were brought forth. Capital punishment was abolished entirely; the number of offences calling for corporal punishment was gradually reduced, and finally corporal punishment was altogether abolished. The wheels of justice, which had been notoriously slow

and decrepit, were made efficient and swift. There was increasing intellectual development of the people. Railway communication, telegraph service, the establishment of new elementary schools, and the introduction of compulsory school attendance -- all were harbingers of the liberation of the human spirit. New life and new hope for mankind throbbed in the hearts of the Russian people. (1)

The Jews, too, benefited greatly from this new era of Enlightenment. The Cantonist system was abolished forever. High schools and universities were opened to Jews without discrimination albeit in an attempt to encourage assimilation. Governments lying outside the Pale were made accessible to Jewish scholars, professional men, manufacturers, wholesale merchants, and skilled laborers. (2)

Under the beneficent eye of Nikolai Ivanovich Pirogov, the superintendent of the Odessa and Kiev school districts, an attempt was made to reorganize the Jewish schools. He saw to it that Jewish

principals were put in charge instead of Christians; the curricula were improved, as were the text books; teachers salaries were raised. The lower schools were made to correspond to our elementary schools, while the higher schools were set up to prepare pupils for the gymnasium.

The Jews had been allowed to follow all their religious customs in an unhampered manner. Maskilim had been encouraged at every turn to broaden their intellectual and cultural horizons; the Haskalah took root among the Jewish youth.

The Rabbinical Assembly, organized in 1848 by Czar Nicholas, which had rarely been allowed to convene was called together to St. Petersburg in 1857 and 1861 to deliberate on means of improving the intellectual and material status of the Jews. The learned Jew, Moses Berlin, was invited to become an adviser in the Department of Public Worship to be consulted concerning the Jewish religion whenever the occasion required. Permission was granted to

publish Jewish periodicals in Russian, Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish, and in 1862, the statutes which had limited Jewish publishing houses and printing-presses to Vilna and Zhitomir were abolished.

Little wonder then, that the Maskilim were convinced of the noble intentions of Alexander, and really believed that he would soon remove all the disabilities of the Jewish people. The Haskalah lent a glow of optimism to the Jewish soul. In a popular song, written by Eliakum Zunser, the well-known poet, Alexander II is likened to an angel of God who finds the flower of Judah soiled by dirt and trampled in the dust. He rescues it, revives it with living water, and plants it in his garden, where it flourishes once more.
(3)

Russification, then, was the motto of the Haskalah. The Society for the Promotion of Haskalah Among the Jews of Russia was established in 1863. Its object was to "spread the knowledge of the Russian language among the Jews, to publish and assist others in publishing, in Russian as well as in Hebrew, useful

works and journals, to aid in carrying out the purposes of the Society, and further, to assist the young in devoting themselves to the pursuit of science and knowledge." In 1880 it endowed an agricultural college for Jewish boys.

When medical schools for women were opened in the same year, the Society set aside a sum for student support.

Sabbath Schools and Evening Schools were opened in Berdichev, Zhitomir, Poltava, and other cities; libraries were founded; Hebrew books on scientific subjects were published. Thus, the Society attempted to prevent Jews from drifting away from Jewish learning, while, at the same time, it popularized science and secular learning in general among those Jews who could not read Russian or other languages. (4)

The Jews in the large cities, particularly in Odessa, St. Petersburg, and Moscow, were fast taking on Russian and West European culture. They became extremely active in such professional fields as

journalism, medicine, law. Traditional Jewish ritual practices were attacked in the light of new scientific knowledge. The Yeshivot, particularly the Tree of Life College, in Volozhin, became a center of Haskalah thought. Students advocated the school's change from a Yeshiva to a rabbinical seminary like the Berlin Hochschule.⁽⁵⁾

The general cultural tone of the Jewish community was greatly enhanced by the work of the Society. It opened elementary schools and published useful scholarly books. The branch in Odessa secured a total of 986 members. It organized a bureau of information on pedagogic subjects, and instituted prizes for original works in Russian or Hebrew.

Trade schools were opened by the Committee for the Promotion of a Knowledge of Trade and Agriculture Among the Jews of Russia in Minsk, Vilna, and Vitebsk; fifteen manual training schools for boys, and twenty for girls. Trade unions, workingmen associations, artisans' clubs began to appear. Their purpose was

not only the improvement of their material lot, but also to "raise their moral and intellectual status, and foster efforts of self-help".⁽⁶⁾

The percentage of handicraftsmen among the Jewish population was great: 52% in Odessa, as high as 90% in Byelostok. Their cultural needs were great, as manifested in their founding of night schools and private instruction arrangements.

However, the honeymoon was soon over. Czar Alexander II, who had hoped that by his giving the Jews educational opportunities he would hasten their assimilation, realized that the vast majority of the Jews were not touched by the educational system. The Maskilim themselves, for the most part, did not flee their faith. To encourage assimilation, the Czar renewed the decree of Nicholas I, which limited appointments of rabbis and teachers to those who had been trained in the State Rabbinical Seminaries, or in some other higher grade institution.

Strict supervision was exercised by government

inspectors over the hederim and their teachers; Jews were to send their children either to the general schools, or to those established for them by the government. Soon the government abandoned its faith in the assimilatory powers of its special schools, and, in 1873, closed them all, together with the Rabbinical Seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir.

An anti-liberal measure was introduced to encourage Russification: it forbade the use of Hebrew and Yiddish in business correspondence, contracts, wills, and similar documents.⁽⁷⁾

Most of the reforms of Alexander II proved to be failures, for the reason that the corrupt bureaucracy entrusted with carrying them out did all in its power to thwart them.

All hopes of improvement of the Jewish position were shattered with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. His son, and successor, Alexander III was strongly opposed to any thought of progress. His cruel solution to the Jewish problem was quoted far

and wide: "one-third to be absorbed into the Orthodox Church, one-third to emigrate, and the remaining third to perish".

In 1871, in fact, the first of many bloody pogroms broke out in Odessa. ⁽⁸⁾ Over 200 pogroms were organized and accomplished their bloody design within the following twenty-five years.

It is true that the terrible disillusionment which came over the Maskilim when it became clear that all their striving for Russification and equality helped not at all towards real equality for the Jew, was a heavy blow for Haskalah. The poet, Judah Leib Gordon, who had, at first, hailed the growth of enlightenment, bewailed the tendency towards assimilation; he felt that he was the last bard of Israel, that there would soon be no-one to listen to him. The persecutions had united the Hasidim and Mitnagdim against the Haskalah and its resultant assimilationist tendencies among the youth.

There were two answers to the Jewish situation:

one was Socialism, the other, Zionism. Many young intellectuals had joined either the Social Democrats, or the Bund, the latter a purely Jewish Socialist organization which was founded in Vilna in 1897.⁽⁹⁾ Others were attracted to the new Zionist thinking which, under the direction of Perez Smolenskin, was fast showing itself to be the only answer for the persecuted Jews.

It was these two movements, the Zionist and the Socialist, which set the stage for the evolvement of Jewish folk music and Jewish choral activity.

Jewish choral activity did not arise in a cultural vacuum. Russian musical activity at the end of the 19th century was undergoing a period of ranaissance.

Russian Music is unique, in that it begins with the 19th century and is the fruit of nationalism. The first composer to use Russian fairy tales and national subjects was Catterino Cavos (1776-1840), a venetian who adopted Russia before the turn of

the century. Several native Russians followed his example. Michael Ivanovitch Glinka (1803-1857), whom Liszt called the prophet - patriarch of Russian music, brought the movement into being with his composition of two operas: "A Life for the Tsar" and "Russian and Ludmilla". The latter was based on a poem by Pushkin, and had native folk music as its basis.

Russian Church music, too, was close to the folk-music of the peasants; it was not an art product as in the Western Church.

With the Napoleonic invasion, Russian nationalism was awakened; others took on Glinka's ideas and developed them to a high point: Balakireff, Cesar Cui, Alexander Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Modeste Moussorgsky. With these composers, the national folk-song took on a high art form.

Balakireff had founded a Free School of Music in which he inculcated principles of individual liberty which emphasized that a composer should

express himself, his national character.

The Russian Imperial Musical Society, of which Nicholas Rubinstein was one of the principal originators, was founded at St. Petersburg in 1859, and within a period of thirty years there were twenty-one affiliated branches in Moscow and various provincial centers. By 1906 the number had risen to thirty branches. On the occasion of any great national festival, or for the production of some big modern work requiring mass performers, different branches were amalgamated.

Chamber, choral, and symphonic works were performed, their choice being made on the basis of the musical abilities of the particular branch. Many Imperial Conservatoires of Music were set up in various parts of Russia. In Petersburg alone there were, in addition to the Conservatoires, twenty-eight smaller musical organizations.

In 1895, a society called the Amateurs of Vocal and Orchestral Music was founded in Moscow. Nearly

every Russian town followed suit, and soon, there were flourishing local singing societies or horovode all over the Russian Empire. These societies were formed for the purpose of the "cultivation and preservation of the horovode, a species of national chorus peculiar to Russia. Each province had its own variants and there were appropriate horovode for each season and circumstance of life.

Large collections of Russian folksong material were initiated beginning about 1875. In the decades following, this work was carried on by the Imperial (10) Ethnographical and Geographical Society of Russia.

Intense nationalism became characteristic of all European music. The national style of Norway was established by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907). He thrilled in the folk melody of his native land. Together with some Danish co-workers, he founded a society for the exploitation of Scandinavian music.

2 Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884) was the founder of the national school of Czech music. He used Bohemian

folk tunes as the basis for his works. As exemplified in "The Bartered Bride", they reflect a high order of artistic perfection. Anton Dvorak, junior to Smetana, brought Bohemian music to its finest flowering. He devoted himself wholly to the development of a nationalist movement in music.

Finland found its great national composer in Jan Sibelius, while Rumania has its Georges Enesco, and Hungary its Bela Bartok, and Zoltan Kodaly. Spain's folkmusic was thoroughly utilized by Barbieri, Pedrell, Isaak Albeniz, and Enrique Granados. Polish music, apart from Chopin, is characterized by Ignace Paderewski, Xavier and Philip Schwarwenka, and others who have used national songs and dances advantageously.

English nationalism in music is found in Ralph Vaughan Williams; much of his work is based on
(11)
British folk dance and music.

Nineteenth century musical life created an institution of musical significance, the music festival.

The concerts of the Vienna Friends of Music for instance, employed from 700 to 1000 instrumentalists and choristers in the presentation of Hayden's "Creation".

The middle class social music making of the romantic era created the Mannerchorvereine, or German glee clubs. The clubs were made up of serious middle class professional men.

By 1834, the Swiss choral societies numbered twenty thousand organized members; their number in Germany was tenfold.

An important feature of the German male choral societies, during 1848-49, was their political role. Political desires and ideals were expressed in music. The stirring tunes of Weber opened the long line of political songs. There was a veritable pan-Germanic movement among the singers; thousands of men sang of German glories of the past and future; their songs reached and stimulated millions of their compatriots.

Under these circumstances the great song festivals acquired important political significance because they brought together thousands of Germans from the various unfederated and, at times, hostile states. The Cultural mission of both the great choral societies and the smaller glee clubs far outshone the quality of the musical literature engendered by them. (12)

Early Jewish Musical Life

In Italy in the 16th Century, Rabbi Leon De Modena, a trained musician, founded the first artistic choir in synagogal history. He called it: B'zochreynu es Tzion. Concerts attracted the local Venetian nobility.

Solomone Rossi was persuaded by Rabbi Leon De Modena to write four to eight part polyphonic choruses a capella in late Palestrina style, for the (13) synagogue.

As early as 1700 choirs had been established in Amsterdam and in Hamburg. In Frankfort, about 1714, the institution of a choir was considered a long standing one. In Prague every synagogue had its choral society of volunteers aside from the employed singers.

Even in small communities, the people were enthusiastic over having a choir. One such example is Prosnitz, Moravia, which became a center for Jewish

singers and song in the first half of the eighteenth century, and from which prominent Jewish composers arose.

Even in Eastern Europe, in Poland, and Galicia, the institution of choristers was established at the time of Israel Bal Shem- Tob, (circa 1750).

As early as 1843, Hirsch Goldberg, Cantor of the Brunswick Synagogue in Germany, together with Julius Freudenthal, a duka musician, modernized the synagogue song and published a collection for solo and small choir in two parts. Many of the melodies had typically German melodic lines.

In 1849, Gerson Rosenstein, first Jewish organist at the Reform Temple in Seesen, published a collection of 106 "chorales" in the genuine German chorale style.

The German "Hamburg Hymnal" appeared in 1845. In 1846 I.E. Kley published the melodies to the "Israelish Songbook" containing 99 tunes to German texts. On special occasions a mixed choir of

volunteers would sing German music in four parts.

A whole series of songsters and Hymnals appeared in Germany -- which utilized almost throughout, non-Jewish music to the Hebrew texts; actual melodies of Protestant chorales were employed. (14)

19th and 20th Century Jewish Music

In 19th century Jewish musical life, confined for the most part to the music of the synagogue, a new day had come as well. The Enlightenment had given Jews the opportunity of hearing fine music and learning to appreciate it. The liturgical music of the synagogue no longer fully satisfied them; the musical taste and performing ability of the old-time cantors could not compete with the high professional standards of the non-Jews. The breaking-away from ghetto existence wrought many changes in the culture, dress, tastes, and habits of the Jews. With the influence of the Reform Movement in Germany and later in Poland and Russia, the synagogues witnessed many changes.

In Germany, in many cases, the cantor was entirely eliminated. It was Solomon Sultzer, in Vienna, who began to reshape the art of the cantor. He injected new life into the cantorial art which

enabled it to grow with the times and to survive. He dispensed with the superfluous melodic elaborations of the East-European cantor. He did away with the superfluous repetitions of words and phrases. He ⁽¹⁵⁾ did much to perfect the choral singing of the synagogue choir. Sulzer's influence spread all over the Jewish world becoming accepted even in the Orthodox synagogue. He was the first to base the Synagogue on classical harmony and style. No lyrical melodies of a playful style occur; his melodic line is always serious and dignified. He introduced regular four-part singing by boys (sopranos and altos) and men (tenors and bass).

In this latter respect, he was actually preceded by Israel Lovy who introduced four part singing in the Temple in Paris in 1822. Until that time the synagogue choir (M'shorrim) consisted of a soprano, or an alto, and a bass, who, together with the cantor, made a trio.

Sulzer's artistry and compositions made him the "rage" of the Jewish world. He taught chazzonim,

hundreds of them, from 1835 to 1876. Practically every modern synagogue in Eastern Europe reorganized its music according to Sulzer's service.

Sulzer actually created a love for choral singing, per se, in the hearts of the people. Thus, he paved the way towards the singing of artistic choral music outside the synagogue.

Jews had already become sensitized to opera in Germany. In fact, one newspaper bemoaned the fact that German Jews were singing the Psalms to the tune of the Minuet from "Don Giovanni".

Synagogue choirs, as early as the first half of the 19th century, in Germany, had begun to perform in concert halls. Thus, it was natural that they arranged their programs accordingly. Biblical oratorios, which could not be sung in the synagogue, because of their complexity and length, were now sung in concert by these choirs.

Their music was, however, limited to either

liturgy or music on Biblical themes, this representing the "Jewishness", since the language employed was usually German, rarely Hebrew. (16)

Sulzer, Maier Kohn, Naumbourg, Weintraub, and Lewandowski were the real pathfinders in modern synagogue music.

While in Central Europe the fight between Reform and Orthodoxy was in progress in the beginning of the 19th century menacing the very existence of traditional synagogue music, in Eastern Europe Jewish song unfolded a remarkable creative power both in the synagogue and in folk song.

Inspired chazzanim and talented singers and composers arose in Galicia, Poland and Lithuania.

Some of these were Dovidl Brod Strelisker, Bezalel Shulsinger, (Bezalel Odesser), Sender Minsker, Joseph Altshul, Yoel Dovid Levinsohn (Wilner Baalhabessil), Boruch Karliner, Yerochom Blindman (Hakoton),

Nisson Spivak (Nissi Belzer).

The latter organized splendid choirs. He was the greatest musical genius of synagogue music in Eastern Europe.

Chor-Chazzonim (cantors who sang with choirs) were resented by Eastern European Jews.

Other famous chor-chazzanim: Nisson Blumenthal (Odessa) sang with a four-part choir. David Nowakowsky was the most Europeanized synagogue composer in the East. He directed the choir of the new chor-shul of Berdichev.

Boruch Shorr, a famous chazzan of Galicia, was also affected by European culture; he composed an operetta: "Samson"⁽¹⁷⁾.

With this background of the cultural situation of the Jews, we can see that the founding of the first choral group, the Hazomir Society in Lodz was a realistic outgrowth of their general cultural hunger.

Nationalistic feeling, particularly, called for the composition and singing of distinctive folk songs expressive of the nationalistic yearning.

The city of Lodz was called "Little Paris" of Poland. Surrounded by weaving textile mills and markets, Lodz served as a commercial center for many traders from other parts of Poland and from Russia. The languages employed were Russian, German, Polish and Yiddish. The Jewish population was divided into two classes: the assimilated Polish Jews and the Hasidic Polish group. There was much hostility between them.

It was the Zionistically inclined young students and professional men, who had previously associated themselves with Polish and German choral groups -- groups which had been in existence as long as fifty years -- who soon sought to form their own organization for the purpose of singing Jewish music.

The first problem was that the Russian government,

fearing the disturbing effects of public meetings of the Bundists, the Anarchists, the Zionists, and other groups, had forbidden public assemblies without special permission. Thus -- says Joseph (18) Rumshinsky -- any group which desired to meet, would sit a young man and young woman at the front of the room; in case of a police raid, all pretended to have come to an engagement party.

Through the good offices of one of the members of the newly formed National Gesang-Verein in Lodz, the government was persuaded to allow the Jews to meet for their choral activity, on the grounds that spending their time in song would keep them from becoming involved in such "nonsense" as the rising revolutionary movement. One of the character members, Hartenstein, a baritone of Lodz Temple, engaged Joseph Rumshinsky, then a young man of 18, to direct the chorus in 1898. The prime movers of the group were a lawyer, N. Shapiro, and a Miss. Fisher, later to become the wife of the well known Jewish composer

(19)
and chorus director, Zavel Zilberts.

The chorus met with much criticism and scoffing both from the assimilationist Jews who laughed at this "silly" group of "Zhids" who met to sing Jewish song, and from the "kosher" Jews, both Zionist and non-Zionist who felt there was something not quite respectable about young Jewish men and women meeting three times a week merely to sing.

The group enlisted the enthusiastic support of a well known physician and excellent pianist, Dr. Philip Falk of Lodz, who finally became the permanent accompanist for the chorus; he added much to the prestige of the ferein, which finally called itself the "Hazomir" (1899).

The membership of 102 consisted of students, doctors, bookkeepers, lawyers, teachers -- all amateurs. After their first concert in Lodz, and especially after they had been invited by the local Polish government to give a benefit concert for the

victims of a terrible fire in Brest-Litovsk, the Hazomir took its recognized place as an important factor in the Jewish cultural life of the city. (20)

The repertoire consisted of some Hebrew nationalistic songs (Al Mishmar Hayarden by Behrman, a Bialistok musical director, selections in German of Mendelssohn's Elijah, Russian, and Polish folk songs, Schumann's "Gypsy Melody" in Hebrew, and the like.)

The Polish Singing Society, under the direction of Heinrich Meltzer, expressed great appreciation of the work of Hazomir. In fact, many of the Jewish and even non-Jewish members left to join Hazomir.

Rumshinsky remained in Lodz for three years, until 1902, then fled to England to escape military service.

The Lodz Hazomir, was the first successful manifestation of formal Jewish secular choral activity in Jewish life.

The group was invited in 1901 by Judah Leib Peretz and Nahmann Sokolov, the latter the famous early Zionist leader, to participate in the annual Students Ball given by the Jewish students of the Warsaw University. The concert was an overwhelming success, even the non-Jewish music critics giving the Lodz ⁽²¹⁾ Hazomir great acclaim.

Under the subsequent leadership of Zavel Zilberts, the Lodz Hazomir, which had become the largest, and the prototype of Jewish choruses, expanded its repertoire and produced such works as: "Requiem" by Mozart, "Judas Maccabeas" by Handel, the "Seasons" of Hayden, and works by Mendelssohn.

Zilberts left Lodz and undertook the position of director of the choir at the great Moscow "Chor-schule". There he took a great interest in the revival of the Jewish folksong. He organized a chorus in Moscow under the sponsorship of such eminent personalities as Joel Engel, the father of the modern Jewish Music movement. For seven years, Zilberts led

the Jewish Musical Society and made possible many
(22)
performances of Jewish folk songs.

Direction of the Lodz Hazomir was taken over by Mattityahu Bensman, who later organized the Warsaw Hazomir in 1905-06(?). When the Warsaw Hazomir was taken over by Leo Low in 1908, the group concentrated on folkmusic, under the Honorary-Presidency of Judah Leib Peretz. There was much opposition to folkmusic on the part of the assimilation-minded Jews who objected to including folkmusic with classical works, and on the part of the Zionistically inclined ultra-Hebraists, who opposed Yiddish. Leo Low brought the
(23)
folksong to a high peak of artistic success.

In 1902, Leo Low, who was then choir director for Cantor Sirota in the Great Synagogue of Vilna, was asked by the Russian government to give a benefit choral concert for the Institute for the Blind. The concert was to consist of Hebrew liturgical music, but -- according to a personal interview with Mr. Low -- he managed to insert some folksongs. This is the

first time that Yiddish folksongs were heard in public at a formal concert in Europe.

Interest in Eastern Europe in the folk song, both among the Russians and among the Jews brought forth the formation of the Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music, established in 1908 in St. Petersburg.

The Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music was established as a result of the attempt of two young Jewish historians, Saul Ginsburg and Pesach Marek, both university trained and utterly devoted to the study of Jewish history. They decided to make a thorough study of the history of Russian Jewry. Having no entre to the historical archives and collections of the government, they investigated many private sources of historical data: old documents, letters, wills, and the like. In 1898, they published an appeal in the Yiddish and Hebrew press, asking all interested Jews to record and send them the texts of the Jewish folksongs sung in their particular districts. The response was great; not only texts of the folksongs

were submitted, but also the music was often noted down.

By 1901, they had published a collection of the texts of the folksongs, without music. It is interesting that the initial impulse for the study of Jewish folksongs was a literary, not musical. (24) According to Saul Ginzburg, the music of the songs were handed on to Joel Engel, then one of the outstanding musicologists and critics in Russia, who, in 1909, began to study and "purify" the melodies.

The Petersburg Society was actually founded by a group of young Jewish composers, students of Rimsky-Korsakoff at the Petersburg Conservatoire: Ephraim Sklar, Michael Gneissen, Solomon Rosovsky, Zhitomirsky, Lazare Saminsky, J. Achron. They were very much encouraged by Rimsky-Korsakoff, who felt that the Jewish people had a rich musical treasure which should be collected systematically; this music was just waiting for the coming of a Jewish musical genius to transform (25) it to produce great art.

In 1911, the Society published a "Collection of Songs for School and Home". The songster includes 62 Jewish songs for solo and three-part chorus, with piano accompaniment, and 23 songs selected from German, Russian, and classical music. The Society published other songs for voice with piano accompaniment and some for choir or instruments by M. Gnessin, M. Milner, S. Kisselgof, P. Lwow, J. Achron, L. Saminsky, E. Sklar, I. Kaplan, H. Kopit. (26)

The Petersburg Society existed for ten years, until World War I during which time it organized musical expeditions to collect and investigate Jewish folkmusic throughout the Pale of Settlement and beyond. The work was financed by Baran Hirsch Gunzburg. He made possible the organization of the Jewish Ethnological Expedition, which between 1913 and 1916, gathered over two thousand folksongs, religious and secular. (27)

The Petersburg Society, with its research and publishing of Jewish music for instruments and for

voice, was a prime mover in the establishment of a Jewish repertoire which served as a basis for further musical activity. As such, it contributed greatly to the growth of Jewish choral activity. (28)

In addition to the Lodz and the Warsaw Hazomir groups, many local Jewish singing societies were formed in various Russian cities: Vilna, Moscow, and others.

The Jewish mass migrations to the United States soon transferred Jewish choral activity to that country.

Chapter IIEarly American Manifestation of Choral Music --
Jewish Choral Activity

What kind of general American musical milieu provided the background in which Jewish choral activity was established?

American music was at first planted in very sterile soil. Both Pilgrims and Puritans were opposed to the development of the musical art, yet, by an irony of fate, their psalm-singing became the cradle which cherished the music of America. For music was tolerated only for worship purposes. (29)

The Pilgrims, in their utter religious narrowness would have probably abolished any kind of singing in their churches were it not known that the ancient Hebrews had undoubtedly employed psalm-singing in their religious services. While, therefore, rejecting hymns and other sacred music, they allowed Psalms to be sung during the devotions.

Choral singing began to take the place of crude congregational psalm-singing as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a natural consequence of the singing schools that some of the congregation should be much more advanced in music than others, and it was equally a matter of course that the musical members should gather together as much as possible in order to obtain the best vocal results. It was an easy transition from this informal gathering of musical forces to an assignment of special seats to those most active in church singing. (30)

After 1720 there was a steadily growing number of musicians who sought their fortunes in the Colonies. There was an increasing desire for organs, flutes, guitars, violins, harpsichords, the establishment of the singing schools, signs of a budding music trade from ruled music paper to sonatas and concertos, the advent of music engravers, publishers and manufacturers of instruments, the tentative efforts to give English opera a home in America, the introduction of public

concerts. This was the formative period in American musical history, running from 1720 until 1800. (31)

In 1774, William Billings founded a singing school in Stoughton, Massachusetts to study and perform psalms, tunes, and oratorios. In 1786 this became the Stoughton Musical Society, the first choral group in America and were it not that the St. Cecilia Society of Charleston was formed in 1740, it would have been the first musical organization in the Colonies. (32)

Elie Siegmeister states that Boston had secret singing clubs organized by Governor Samuel Adams "to stir up enthusiasm for independence". (33)

The following decades saw the rise of many choral organizations. In 1815, the Handel and Haydn Society was formed in Boston, with the purpose of "cultivating and improving a correct taste in the performance of sacred music". Beethoven was actually asked by the society to compose for them. (34)

In 1823, the Choral Society was formed in N. Y; it included fifty voices and devoted itself almost entirely to sacred music. The New York Sacred Music Society, an off-shoot of the Zion Church Musical Organization, strictly a religious choir, was organized in 1824; it devoted itself to sacred music but also to English anthems. This group numbered 60 voices.

In 1831, the New York Sacred Music Society first began the study of an entire oratorio. They performed the "Messiah" with 74 voices and 38 instruments.

In 1844, a new musical society, the Musical Institute was formed in New York, but by 1849, the total choral scene in New York was so bleak, that at a large meeting a combination of the choral groups was formed into one: the New York Harmonic Society.

Heir to these attempts at choral work was the New York Oratoria Society founded by Dr. Leopold Damrosch in 1873.
(35)

Other parts of the country, too, had their choral

organizations. In Philadelphia, the Mendelssohn Club was organized in 1874, first as a male chorus, then became mixed in 1879. Over a period of 60 years, the Club sang music of over 300 composers of twenty different nationalities. The Philadelphia Choral Society was formed in 1897. It is not limited to standard or classical works. The Choral Art Society made its first appearance in 1922.

A 1917 report of the Chamber of Commerce records that there were over 250 permanent choral and
(36)
operatic organizations in Philadelphia.

In the west, Cincinnati became a choral center, since many German immigrants had settled in that part of the country after having left their native land either because of the 1848 Revolutions and somewhat prior to that time or in order to better themselves economically. Gold had been discovered in California. Thus by 1849, Cincinnati was the scene of the first American Sangerfest, in emulation of the tremendous German choral activity and choral festivals.

In St. Louis the Choral Symphony Society was formed as early as 1870. Both Baltimore and Washington, D. C. boasted large choral groups, the Oratorio Society and the Choral Society respectively.

Jewish Immigration to U. S.

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1775, Jewish communities were to be found in the colonies of Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia, with small units in some of the other colonies. By extraction the majority were Portuguese Jews, who came from Holland and Dutch Brazil in the 17th Century, or from England in the eighteenth; as early as the beginning of the Eighteenth century, they were joined by Jews from Germany and Poland. The Portuguese Jews left their impress upon the communal organization; the Sephardic rite obtained in the congregations, though Ashkenazic Jews had a place in the administration. (37)

The number of Jews in the United States by 1800 was about 2,500, in a total population of about 7½ millions. The largest number lived in Philadelphia and New York, where they had established themselves in business. They did not suffer from discrimination. The real Jewish problem of the day -- religiously and

culturally speaking -- was not the exclusion of the Jews from the general society and culture. The basic difficulty was that the Jewish population was so small and so widely scattered that no system of Jewish education or group cultural life could be founded.

The limited amount of intra-Jewish contact made it very difficult to establish any kind of substantial
(38)
Jewish cultural unison.

During the decade from 1840-50 the number of immigrants of all faiths grew to 100,00 annually. In the years between 1841 and 1881 about ten million persons entered the United States. Among those who heeded President John Tyler's call to come to the new country were Jews from all parts of Central Europe who were oppressed in their homeland and had no opportunity for advancement. This is the so-called German immigration.

The immigrants spread out to Boston, St. Louis and Galveston, and west to Cincinnati, Chicago,

San Francisco. They shared the growing pains of these new cities, and assisted their rapid rise by promoting trade and industry. By 1858, there were an estimated 200,000 Jews in the United States.

With the coming of the pogroms in Russia and Poland in the 1880's, Jewish immigration to the United States increased apace. About 200,000 Jews
(39)
immigrated between 1880-1890.

Jewish choral activity per se had not yet really begun to manifest itself in the modern, secular sense. However, there can be little doubt that Jews took the opportunity of joining and participating in general American choral singing. Unfortunately there are no records which can indicate the amount of participation of Jews in the various singing societies.

We do know that Jews participated in Polish and Russian singing societies in Europe in the last decades of the 19th century. In Germany of that time, Jews were outstanding in musical life, not only as

musicians but also as patrons of music. In fact, such was the influence Jews had upon music in Germany and in Leipzig, particularly, that Richard Wagner, no great friend of the Jews, grumbled: "Leipzig is a Jewish metropolis"⁽⁴⁰⁾.

It would seem most probable that the German-Jewish immigrants -- who had been active in general musical life for decades in Europe would become active in American choral life.

During the first decade of the century, amateur Jewish singers who had been active in the Hazomir groups in Lodz and Warsaw, and other East European cities sought similar expression in the United States. There were no appropriate choral societies for them to join. Several abortive attempts to form such groups were made, but failed. As a result, many Jews joined non-sectarian groups in this country.

Finally, in 1910, in answer to this need, the Halevi Singing Society was formed in New York City. It held its meetings at the Educational Alliance in

downtown New York. The membership was limited to Jews. They sang only the classics of choral literature in the original language, mainly in German. There was no Yiddish sung. Leon Kramer was the conductor of the group. In 1915 the Halevi Singing Society merged with the Arbeiter Ring and became Branch 530 (41) of the Workman's Circle.

The Educational Alliance, set up specifically to help Americanize the immigrants, was a cultural center in all its phases: fine arts, music, literature, theatre, education.

Early Manifestations of Jewish Choral Singing

Before the 19th Century however, there is no record of Jewish choral singing in America than in the synagogue. Only Congregation Beth Elohim, Charleston, South Carolina, which was founded in 1750, is said to have had its own paid choir. No accurate date is given for the founding of the choir, but it is implied that it was formed not long after the founding of the congregation. Incidentally, Penina Moise, the Jewish poetess, later wrote hymns for (42) this congregation, which utilized the Reform style.

The first choirs to be used in New York City Synagogues were temporary groups organized for important occasions such as consecrations. When the choir, which was formed for the purpose of singing at the Shearith Israel consecration in 1818, sought permission to organize on a permanent basis and to sing every Sabbath, the synagogue authorities objected on the ground that such a choir would be an innovation in Jewish religious practice.

Only toward the middle of the 19th century did New York Jewry witness the rise of synagogue choirs. Temple Emanu-El inaugurated the new movement.

The first regular choir was organized at Emanu-El in 1845 when the congregation was formed: first volunteers, then paid. They used the composition of the Hamburg synagogue and the music of the temple of Munich.

The second choir in New York was formed in 1849 by Anshe Chesed. They used Sulzer's "Shir Zion". In 1852, Naumbourg's collection of Jewish musical compositions was added to choir's library. These were both mixed choirs.

The third regular synagogue choir in New York was established in Temple B'nai Jeshurun in 1850.
(43)
Here too, in 1856, Naumbourg's music was utilized.

It is interesting to note, that at the first anniversary of the dedication of the Elm Street Synagogue of Temple B'nai Jeshurun in 1828: "The

oration was delivered by Mordecai M. Noah, Phineas R. Hart, the Hazan of the congregation officiated at the musical service. The Hebrew Choral Society, consisting of female as well as male voices, participated".

This Society, about which there are no further details, met in the basement of the synagogue for
(44)
rehearsals.

There is a fascinating record of early Ohio Jewry in "The Jews in Ohio", by Joseph Jonas, writing to Isaac Leiser. Speaking of the congregational singing of the Kal Kodesh Beneh Israel which was founded in 1830 in Cincinnati, Jonas writes:

"The original founders of our congregation were principally from Great Britain and consequently their mode of worship was after the Polish and the German Jews; but being all young people they were not so prejudiced in favor of old customs as more elderly people might have been and especially as several of their wives had been brought up in the Portuguese congregations. We therefore introduced considerable

chorus singing into our worship, in which we were joined by the sweet voices of the daughters of Zion..."

On the occasion of the consecration of the new Synagogue in 1836 there were "singers and a band of music... the choir consisted of about twenty of the ladies and gentlemen of the Congregation... the whole was concluded by one of the ladies leading in the splendid solo and chorus of the 'Yigdal'."⁽⁴⁵⁾

In 1858, George Jacobs became the Hazan of the Beth Shalome Congregation, Richmond, Va. He was requested by a committee to "form a choir under his management". This he did in 1868.

In Beth Ahavah Congregation, founded in Richmond in 1841, we find that the first choir was organized in 1856 but was disbanded two years later "because of the marriage of the soprano, Miss Katherine Angle. In 1866, at the suggestion of Rev. M. J. Michelbacher, a volunteer choir was organized under the guidance of M. L. Straus," the efficiency value of which are

a tradition. He was succeeded by Gustavus Millhiser. During his direction a change was gradually made by the substitution of paid voices in place of volunteers. Millhiser's services as choir director were recognized by the congregation in his election as an honorary member.

Charles Hutzler succeeded Millhiser as director of choir and maintained its great efficiency. In 1893 he resigned to be succeeded by Isaac Held. Since then Isaac Thalheimer, Solomon L. Bloomberg, and Moses May have successfully directed the choir. (46)
The organ was introduced into the synagogue in 1873.

In Philadelphia in 1847, the Reverend Mr. Herman Kahn became Hazan, teacher, and preacher. He submitted a plan to establish a choir of young men. In June 1847 his was the first choir to engage a music teacher and raise money to defray the choir's expenses. The effort resulted in a fourteen piece mixed choir. *See E. Frank!*

At the consecration ceremony in 1870, a

Consecration Hymn in German was participated in by
(47)
a male chorus, a female chorus and a children's chorus.

In 1880, Shaaray Tefila Synagogue agitated for reform. A committee suggested the introduction of the organ and the creation of exclusively Jewish choir of male and female voices. An "enlarged choir was engaged under the direction of the cantor (48)
(mixed choir) ".

Chapter III

It will be necessary to speak briefly of the rise of the Zionist movement, Yiddish culture, and the Jewish labor movement in order to show the cultural background from which the Jewish choral movement evolved in the United States.

The Jewish choral movement became but one manifestation of American Jewish cultural life.

Beginning with the year 1905 up until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, about 750,000 Jews immigrated to the United States.

Immigration changed the structure of American Jewry. The preponderant majority of the Jewish population now consisted of wage earners. Many forged ahead to economic independence becoming employers. However, the masses of the Jews belonged to the proletariat. These workers were exploited mercilessly; wages were pitifully low; working

conditions were shocking; slum housing conditions prevailed. They concentrated themselves in the needle trades, and soon became involved in socialism and trade unionism.

There were two movements in Europe which had provided the social and political readiness for the rise of Jewish labor and cultural activity in the first decades of the present century in America.

The General Jewish Workers' Union (the Bund), and Zionism, augmented by its labor division, were the two ideologies that changed Jewish mentality in Eastern Europe and caused a spiritual revolution in millions of men and women. Poles apart ideologically, the Bund and Zionism shared one common feature. They instilled in the Jewish masses a sense of pride in their destiny.

The socialist Bund had appealed to the lowest strata and popularized for them the class struggle theory of Marx and Engels. Through illegal literature and underground meetings the Bund taught the young

tailors, seamstresses, shoemakers, weavers, carpenters, tannery and leather workers that labor creates the basic necessities of life, that labor is honorable, and that it is predestined in the course of events to transform mankind into a free, classless society. The worker youth reacted enthusiastically. Organizations of the Bund had been formed; they participated (49) in the movement to overthrow the Czarist regime.

The Bund believed that socialism would be a sure cure for all social wrongs, including anti-Semitism. The program for social liberation was interlaced with the advance of modern Jewish secularism: Yiddish culture and art.

Zionism, on the other hand, had sprung out of the total negation of the diaspora as the future for Jewish safety and continuity as a people. Only Palestine as a Jewish state would provide a solution for the physical and national survival of the Jewish people.

The Bund and Zionism, warring for the minds of the people, complemented each other by dissipating the political passivity characteristic of the ghetto mentality. Each ideology spiritually enriched a section of the Jewish population. Each moved its adherents to immediate political and cultural activity.

Zionism branched off into a labor division, divided into the Poale Zion and the Socialist Territorialists -- and although not comparable in size to the Bund -- did influence many young workers, being a synthesis of social and national emancipation. (50)

Zionist Groups

Actually, in 1900 and 1901, Zionist labor Poale Zion, were found in Minsk and Ekatorinoslav (founded by B. Barochov and Simon Dobin). During the same period, Zionist Socialist groups were founded in Galicia and set up by Russian-Jewish students in Vienna and Berlin.

By 1902-03, Zionist Socialist groups had been so strongly organized in numerous cities in the Pale, that the fifth convention of the Bund, in 1903, called on its adherents to combat the rising influence of Zionism.

In 1904-06, Poale Zion groups were established in Galicia, the United States, in Palestine, and in some large centers of Western Europe. (51)

As part of the general cultural and educational program of the Poale Zion, the Poale Zion Singing Society (Gezangferin) was formed in New York in 1911 under the direction of Platon Brounoff, one of the

early workers in the field of Jewish music in this country. After two years, he was succeeded by Henry Lefkowitz. The Society lasted until the first World War in 1917. Many members joined the Jewish Legion. (52)

The Poale Zion Society devoted itself to Jewish folksongs. They did not utilize liturgical music, nor was there any political predilection evident in their music. Rehearsals took place once a week. The singers were amateurs, for the most part entirely without any formal musical training. The Society was organized in the form of a dues-paying group, with its own elected officers, executive committee, and the like. (53)

Another Zionist group to show comparatively early choral activity was the Hadassah. Founded in 1916 by A. W. Binder, the Hadassah Choral Union was the first choral group to sing Hebrew folk songs exclusively, and did much to popularize these songs during the four years of its duration.

At the initiative of Mrs. Minnie Sobel, co-founder, with Henrietta Szold, of Hadassah, the all-female singing group of about 40 women ranging in age from 18 to 50 and including many nurses, was formed. They sang a capella and aroused great enthusiasm with their rousing Zionist marching songs.

Meetings were held weekly at a Public School, at 112th Street and Lenox Avenue; the first concert, held at the Wadleigh High School was a great success.

At the time of the Balfour declaration in 1917 and at other occasions, the Hadassah Choral Union held concerts.

With the departure of the first Hadassah medical unit sent to Palestine in 1917, about half of the chorus left, and the group began to disintegrate.

A. W. Binder's connection with the group, as conductor began through Dr. Nellie Strauss, also a founder of Hadassah.

Binder had arranged for three-part chorus,

several songs composed by Dr. Strauss. In addition, he composed ten or twelve songs at the time, including "B'machrati" and "Ben N'har Prat", and a cantata: (54)
"Ahl N'harot Bavel".

At the present time, it is impossible to ascertain the exact number of choral groups sponsored by Hadassah chapters all over the country. Virtually every group engages in choral singing as part of the educational program of the movement. The National Program Department of Hadassah provides sources of music, and all pertinent information for choral activity for their constituent chapters, but does not carry on any concerted choral program.

Most of the local chapters have sporadic choral groups, usually led by amateurs from within their ranks, who prepare for specific occasions, rather than for sustained choral activity.

These choral groups are not individual organized bodies in themselves; they are informal adjuncts to

the chapters. The level of musical standards is not high generally speaking. Their repertoire is mostly Hebrew folksongs, Palestinian songs in Hebrew and English, with some limited amount of Yiddish in the older groups.
(55)

Actually, the influence of Zionism on Jewish choral singing lies, not so much in the formation of singing groups per se, but rather in the area of repertoire, for all Jewish singing organizations. This will be discussed later in this paper.

It was from the Jewish labor movement and from the Socialist, the so-called "Radical" organizations, the Yiddish secularist elements, that the preponderance of Jewish choral organizations sprang. Music was considered one of the major educational instruments for sensitizing the Jewish worker not only to socialist ideals and philosophies, but also to his specifically Jewish interests, in the Diaspora. For the Socialist and labor organizations operated on the premise that the Jewish workers are merely part of the general

working class of the country, and that their future even as Jews lies in America, not in Palestine, or in Zionist activity.

Socialist and Labor Groups

In the early nineties younger people from large cities, Wilno, Minsk, Kovno, Warsaw and Lodz had begun arriving. In the new country they formed educational societies and clubs, through which they sought to enter into American culture.

The Yiddish press, originally all of a radical nature, dedicated to socialism and trade unionism, catered to both the younger people who had already shed their old folk-ways in Europe, and to the older immigrants, men with families to bring over or to support.

The younger element, for the most part socially conscious and enthusiastic, embraced the new radical beliefs with the same passion as their fathers had the Torah. They formed the advanced guard of socialism and anarchism. They filled the lecture halls and the propaganda meetings, and were the core of numerous educational societies, clubs and dramatic groups.

The labor press combined the functions of educator and organizer with that of arbiter of morals and teacher of good manners. One of the prime objectives of the Yiddish press was to cultivate among the mass of people the habit of regularly reading a newspaper -- there had been nothing comparable in Europe.

The Yiddish press -- the weekly Arbeiter Zeitung, the Freie Arbeiter Shtimme, the daily Abendblatt, the Forward and the weekly Arbeiter were the bearers of a new social faith. At the same time, they widened the cultural horizon of their readers by acquainting them with the great works of literature. On the pages of his weekly or daily, the new immigrant could read a novel by Zola, Hugo, or Tolstoi, short stories by the younger writers, immigrants themselves, poems by labor poets and articles on social and natural sciences.

The Yiddish press, because of the nature of its public, was more of a feature magazine than a newspaper. It combined the functions of a journal of opinion, a literary magazine and a people's college.

For many years the Forward carried in its Sunday
Supplement a department called: The People's College.
(56)

Jews very quickly became integrated into the industrial life of the United States. The immigrants were, for the most part, skilled workers who could make almost immediate contributions to American industrial activity. Actually, the figures show that between the years of 1900 to 1925, one-fourth of all immigrant, skilled industrial labor was brought by Jews. For two crafts, tailoring and watchmaking, Jews brought almost half the immigrant craftsmen. Jews constituted less than one-fourth of immigrant
(57)
merchants and shopkeepers.

It was to this mass of Jews particularly -- skilled workmen and to the culturally hungry -- that the rising Yiddish literature of the new land appealed.

Yiddish creative writing in America was not transplanted from Europe. It grew out of the American soil. The pioneers of Yiddish literature were labor poets. Perforce they had to cultivate

the Yiddish medium if they were to appeal to the masses of newcomers.

Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923) was the most profound of the labor poets. He portrayed from first-hand experience the dull, desperate, hopeless life of the slave of the sweatshops, as well as the Jewish national dream of redemption. The socialist Morris Vintshefski, the anarchist David Edelstadt, and Joseph Bovshover were among others the outstanding Yiddish labor poets.

Some of the more important Yiddish prose writers in America were Leon Kobrin, Bernard Gorin, Abraham Cahan, Tashrack (Israel Joseph Zevin), David Pinski.

In addition to this socially-aware writing, such as that of Morris Rosenfeld, there were the popularly oriented songs of Joseph Jaffe, the tender, idyllic poesy of Jacob Adler.

The Yiddish theatre developed rapidly in America. The theatre which had been subject to a repertoire

of cheap, melodramas and pseudo-nationalistic plays, was immeasurably uplifted by Jacob Gordin, whose plays were literate, well written and frankly aimed at educating the people by posing problems familiar to them. He often took his ideas from well known dramas and adapted the situations and characters to the Jewish environment. Actor of great ability flourished: David Kessler, Jacob Adler, Mogulescu, Annie Liptzin, Bertha Kalish, Bina Abramaovitch,
(58)
Boris Thomashevsky.

A number of prominent writers: Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, Abraham Raisin, a true poet of the people, Perez Hirshbein and H. D. Numberg, came for a visit or to settle in the United States. They and American poets like Liessen and Yehoash (Blumgarten) each in his own manner, enriched the literary field, raising the dignity of Yiddish letters.

A cultural renaissance was ushered in that reached its peak in the late twenties. Clubs and educational societies were formed; more books were

published and more people attended lectures and concerts. The theatre was discovering a new and more intelligent public; younger actors, headed by Maurice Schwartz began to feel their way to a better repertory. (59)

In addition to the Socialist parties and the labor unions, there have always been workers' organizations in this country which, although not directly political, have contributed much to the social and educational progress of the Jewish labor masses.

The outstanding among these are the "fraternal orders". The idea of a fraternal organization was conceived and carried out solely by people from the ranks of labor. It was the rank and file who daily felt the keen necessity for mutual aid in sickness and death, for social contact and self-education. The intelligentsia had no part whatever in the first stages of this movement.

The oldest and strongest of these orders is the Arbeiter Ring (the Workmen's Circle), founded in New York in 1892. At that time, other Jewish fraternal

societies were already in existence, but were usually dominated by businessmen and middleclass people, most of them of German origin. The influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe brought large numbers of Russian, Galician, and Romanian Jews to the United States, who found it difficult to fit into the existing organizations. It was this element which created the Workmen's Circle.

The chief purpose of the new organization was, on the one hand, to serve as a club where people of common background might meet, and on the other, to provide mutual aid especially in cases of sickness
(60)
or death.

Part and parcel of the Arbeiter Ring's program was the encouragement of the labor movement in every way possible. Each member was encouraged to belong to a labor union and to support the labor movement. Strike-breakers were barred from membership.

Education of the membership was considered so vital that an article of the first constitution of

the Ring stipulated that as long as nine members desired educational activity, the society would be bound to comply with their request.

In 1917, the Arbeiter Ring entered into a period of extensive educational activities. An educational department, with a sizable budget at its disposal, was established, and a library of popular works, comprising 22 volumes, on political economy, history and natural sciences, were published between 1913 and 1919; 200,000 copies were sold. Noted lecturers were sent out annually to most branches. Yiddish schools for children became a reality in 1918, in order to give the young people an understanding of both Jewishness and Socialism. Women's branches and young peoples' English-speaking branches were formed. An attempt was made to bridge the ever-widening estrangement between European-born parents and their
(61)
American-born children.

In various cities and towns of the United States and Canada, the Workmen's Circle in 1948 had 713

branches with a total membership of some 70,000 men
(62)
and women.

As a natural consequence of the cultural and educational program of the organization, the Arbeiter Ring Chorus was organized officially in 1915, after preliminary steps had been taken during the previous year. The Educational Committee issued an invitation to all members of the Arbeiter Ring to join the chorus.

Nicholas Zaslavsky, who was at that time very popular among the Jewish masses, was the first director, assisted by Michal Gelbart. The very first song that was rehearsed was Warshavsky's "Der Parom" (The Pram).

In 1915, when the Halevi Singing Society became Branch 530 of the Arbeiter Ring, the former's director, Leon Kramer, became director, assisted by Jacob Hyman. Kramer undertook to teach the members how to read music at sight. He also began to rehearse the English and German hymns which had made up the repertoire of the Halevi Society. However, the

immigrant workers rebelled against this repertoire, rather desiring to sing Yiddish revolutionary songs or folksongs. Kramer was forced to resign.

His successor was I. Pirozchnikoff, well known Russian musician and concertina artist, whose recitals had been widely acclaimed. His "Worker's Song Number One" for two voices and a solo was the first song he rehearsed.

The Chorus set forth several principles:

- 1) The chorus must sing in Yiddish
- 2) It must sing revolutionary and workers' songs, folk songs, and classical music
- 3) Rehearsals every Friday evening

The chorus met in Public School 62, at Hester and Essex Streets, in New York. Pirozchnikoff had taught the chorus "The Workmen's Circle Hymn", which he had written himself; a soldier's song, and "Danse Macabre" a famous Russian song by Studinsky, which he had translated into Yiddish. He continued to teach the members to read music.

In 1916 and 1917, several very successful concerts were given: at the 16th convention of the Workmen's Circle in Brownsville Labor Lyceum; at Madison Square Garden, in honor of the visit of the Russian Ambassador, Bachmetiev, of the Kerensky regime. For the latter occasion, the chorus was enlarged to 500 members.

Soon, the chorus felt ready for four-part singing; they requested Pirozhnikoff to conduct with a baton, instead of accompanying them on the concertina as he had done up until that point. He refused and was then asked to resign in 1919.

Meyer Posner was the director for the next eleven years, during which time he reorganized the chorus, added to the scanty repertoire of Yiddish folk songs of a labor or revolutionary type, or of ^{v.} classical nature, by creating original music to texts by the Yiddish social poets. He also arranged large numbers of folk songs for chorus.

At the time of his death in 1931 the chorus was

rehearsing Mendelsohn's "Elijah" which he had translated from the German into Yiddish.

In that year, Lazar Weiner took over the direction of the group, stressing not only a very high musical standard but also a uniform, precise, literary pronunciation of Yiddish. His work has met with great success, having been acclaimed critically in both the Yiddish and English press.

In 1935, in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Arbeiter Ring Chorus, the group undertook a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York where they sang: // "Song of Miriam", an oratorio by Franz Schubert (Yiddish text by David Pinski), and a cantata on a social theme, with music by Lazar Weiner and words by I. Goichberg, entitled: "Once Upon a Time". The chorus was assisted by a symphonic orchestra and
(63)
vocal soloist.

At the present time, the Workmen's Circle Chorus in New York, under Weiner's direction, has about 80 members, men and women, who meet once a week. They

are amateurs, with little, if any, musical background; do not read music for the most part; are rehearsed section by section. The overwhelming percentage of their repertoire is in Yiddish, with a limited amount of Hebrew and English. They do sing some classics with Yiddish texts.

They pay nominal dues; have own officers. About 10 to 15% are young people, about 30 years of age. They usually perform with piano, sometimes organ, occasionally with orchestra. From four to nine appearances are made yearly. The group is a quasi-political one, which is reflected in worker's songs, revolutionary songs, folk songs. However, class lines are now quite relaxed, the membership not being at all limited to workers. The main interest at present is purely cultural.

Weiner's work with the chorus inspired Jewish music by Vladimir Heifetz, Samuel Bugatch, and Reuvin Kosakoff. Weiner himself composed music for the Biblical poetry of Yitzchok Manger: "Chumosh Leider".

Lazar Weiner is the general musical director of the network of Workmen's Circle Choruses in various communities in the country. At present, there are (64) 19 such choruses affiliated with the Workmen's Circle.

Chicago boasts an Arbeiter Ring Chorus of 100 male voices in addition to a large children's choral (65) society.

Paterson, New Jersey had a 50 voice mixed Arbeiter Ring Chorus, under the direction of Vladimir Heifetz. This organization has been in existence since 1934.

The Arbeiter Ring Chorus of Newark, N. J. was established in 1921; is now conducted by Samuel Bugatch. The same conductor now directs the Arbeiter Ring Chorus of Philadelphia, a 40 voice mixed group. This chorus, established in 1934, had as its former directors: Haber, Leo Low, Barkin, Lazar Weiner, The Newark group was formerly directed by Abramowitz, Michal Gelbart, Zavel Zilberts, Meyer Posner, Lazar Weiner, Leo Low.

Bugatch now is the director of the Trenton Arbeiter Ring Chorus, a group of 45 young men and women, and of the Lakewood, N.J. Arbeiter Ring Chorus, a mixed group of about 25, in existence only about three years.

All the Arbeiter Ring Choruses are dues-paying groups, organized on the model of the New York chorus. The groups often meet and assist each other in their various concerts.

At a Convention of the Workmen's Circle at Madison Square Garden in 1950, the combined choruses of Philadelphia, Trenton, New York, Paterson, and Newark -- over 300 singers -- participated. Conducting were Lazar Weiner, Vladimir Heifetz, and Samuel (66) Bugatch.

In charge of the musical program for the children aged 7-17 of the Arbeiter Ring schools is Michal Gelbart, who conducts a picked children's chorus of 250 boys and girls in New York. Three music teachers serve the New York Arbeiter Ring schools. In all,

there are 34 children's choruses in different parts of the country: Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. They sing two-part songs, which are published for that purpose by the Arbeiter Ring.

As far back as 1914, Leo Low was the first to start work with the children's choruses of the Arbeiter Ring.

Gelbart is presently in charge of arranging a music curriculum for the Arbeiter Ring children's groups.

In New York approximately 1200 children engage in choral singing; approximately 3000 sing in these groups in the country. They sing mostly Yiddish, in some cases the Hebrew texts being translated to Yiddish for the purpose. The National Office of the Arbeiter Ring provides the music which is sent out to various parts of the country. (67)

As the Workmen's Circle had gradually become a rallying point mainly for Socialist of the Bundist

trend, the Zionists were not excluded but they often felt handicapped in the Arbeiter Ring. Looking for an organization of their own which would serve their specific political aims just as the Workmen's Circle served mainly the Bundist cause, they formed the Jewish National Workers' Alliance (Yiddish Natsionaler Arbeter Farband.) in 1910 in New York City.

The aim was to provide mutual help for its members, to give them and their children a "national" education, to support all efforts of national liberation, and rebirth of the Jewish people. Newly-admitted members had to pledge allegiance to the ideal of a Jewish Palestine. Efforts were made to merge with the Arbeiter Ring, but were unsuccessful. By 1944, over 22,000 members were affiliated with the Farband.

Their educational techniques were similar to those of the Arbeiter Ring: special schools for the national education of the members' children, English-speaking branches for the youth. Basic to all this, is the promotion of Zionism, and particularly the Jewish labor movement in Palestine. In 1923-24 it

organized the National Labor Committee for Palestine, a committee of Jewish trade unions in this country devoted to raising funds for Histadrut, the main trade union group in Palestine. In 1931, they (68) organized the League for the Working Palestine.

Here too, as an expression of the cultural program of the Farband, the Farband Chorus was organized in New York in 1921 by Leo Low. Consisting of about 60 men and women, the group is organized on the same organizational basis as are the Arbeiter Ring singing groups. Participants are amateurs, without musical knowledge, who meet weekly and sing labor songs, Palestinian folk songs, Yiddish folk (69) songs.

In addition to the New York group, the Farband sponsors five choruses in: Chicago, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Stamford, Conn, and Waterbury, Conn. Leo Low directs the last two named in addition to the New York group.

A young people's chorus from Camp Kindervelt,

the Farband summer camp, meets sporadically during the winter, and sings at several occasions yearly. This group consists of the campers, counselors, and staff of the camp. It is conducted by Sarah Rubinstein.

The Farband maintains over 60 schools in the United States and Canada, including about six to seven thousand children. Several of these schools are all-day institutions. In New York City, there are 17 schools which are served by two full-time professional music teachers who give each class two hours of music instruction per week.

The repertoire of the adult choruses is in the main devoted to Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs; no English is sung.

The central, national office of the Farband supplies music and programming advice to its constituent choruses. It arranges music curricula for the schools.
(70)

Among the most active in Jewish choral work are

the "left-wing" radical Jewish people's singing groups. Originally made of Jewish Communists, the musical organizations were united in the Jewish Music Alliance in 1925.

The guiding spirit of the Alliance from the time of its inception was Jacob Schaeffer, who was active in labor and radical music as early as 1914, when he was director of the first Jewish Socialist Gezang-ferrein in Chicago, a group of approximately 50 working men and women.

Schaeffer drew heavily from the classics and Jewish folk music. Particularly, he created suitable labor and revolutionary songs, utilizing the poetry of some of the outstanding labor and folk poets of his day: I. L. Peretz, Abraham Raisin, Morris Vintshevski, David Edelstady, and Joseph Bovshover, Y. A. Runtch, M. L. Halpern, and others. Schaeffer composed many oratorios and cantatas of this nature. (71)

The purpose of the Jewish Music Alliance is to organize new choral groups and orchestras, publish

music, train and develop conductors and generally stimulate the promotion and distribution of Jewish folk and labor music in the United States.

One of the most important functions of the Alliance is to make Jewish music available for performance. This is accomplished by publishing old and new compositions which are used not only by its own choruses and orchestras but also by other choral groups in the United States, Latin America, Israel and other countries. In addition to choral works, the Alliance publishes and distributes Jewish songs for vocal soloists and for general mass singing. Music is supplied to Argentina, Brazil, England, Australia, South Africa, France.

The orchestras and choruses of the Alliance are conducted and trained by professional musicians; membership is open to men and women between the ages of 18 and 60. No formal musical background is required; there are special youth choruses for young people between the ages of 18 and 25. Although the

choruses sing Yiddish songs mainly, their repertoires include songs in Hebrew and in English. The youth choruses, however, sing a greater number of songs in English. The groups do not confine themselves to works published by the Alliance, but utilize all available material.

Each group appears several times during the year at celebrations of various people's and labor organizations and institutions. They also arrange their own semi-annual concerts in the leading concert halls in their communities.

At the present time, there are 32 adult and youth choruses affiliated with the Alliance in 18 cities in this country. They are: 3 in the Bronx, 2 in Manhattan, 3 in Brooklyn, one in Queens, Newark, N. J., Patterson, N.J.; Philadelphia, Pa., Washington, D.C., Bridgeport, Conn., New Haven, Conn., Springfield, Mass., Boston, Mass., Cleveland, Ohio, Miami, Fla., San Francisco, Calif., Petluma, Calif., 2 in Farmingdale, N.J., 2 in Detroit, Mich., 2 in Chicago, Ill., 5 in Los Angeles, Calif. Three mandolin orchestras

function in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn.

In New York City two of the choruses are Youth
(72)
groups; in Los Angeles, two are Youth groups.

Upwards of 1500 people participate in the
musical activities of the groups affiliated with
the Jewish Music Alliance.

The Jewish Philharmonic People's Chorus, of
New York consisting of a mixed group of approximately
one hundred, ranging from 30 to 60 years of age, is was
conducted by Leo Kopf. The chorus, now about 30
years old, consists mostly of older people; there
is a great need for an influx of younger members if
the organization is to continue at its present level
(73)
of efficiency.

Mr. Kopf also conducts the Newark and Patterson
choruses. All the choruses meet weekly and rehearse
in sections, since very few participants can read
musical notation.

The Detroit group is directed by Henry Goldberg.

The Jewish People's Chorus of Los Angeles and the Jewish People's Chorus of the Bay Cities are under the direction of Eugene Malik, who is the composer of the Jewish oratorio: "My Glorious Brothers". In Miami, the chorus is conducted by Ben Yamin. Maurice Rauch is the leader of the Coney Island Jewish People's Chorus, Brooklyn, N.Y., of the Farmer's Chorus of Lakewood, N.J., and the Bronx Jewish People's Chorus.

In Boston, the chorus is directed by A. Abramowitz while in Chicago, the leader is Bernard Brindel. Leon Leibowitz guides the Jewish People's Chorus of Hartford, Conn.

All musical activity is coordinated at the National Office in New York, now under the direction of the National Secretary Chaim Suller. Former National Secretary of the Alliance was Korenman.

All the choruses utilize professional soloists
(74)
and orchestras on occasion.

Another choral group not dedicated to any political or fraternal movement is the Kultur

Gezelschaft Chor (Culture Society Choir). It was founded in 1929, when a group of dissident singers from a politically oriented chorus, The Jewish National Workers' Alliance, The Farband, split off from the group and joined with the Yiddisher Kultur Gezelshaft, a literary and cultural organization, in forming the singing society. The parent organization has long since disappeared. (75)

Lazar Weiner was appointed conductor. Twenty men and women were accepted into the chorus. A body of officers, and an administrative set-up was created. By the end of 1930, there was a membership of 55.

In that same year, two other sections or branches of the chorus were created, one in East Bronx, and the other in the Sholem Aleichem Cooperative Housing Project. However, a short time later the sections were consolidated into one group which numbered 125.

The first concert was held in 1931. The difficulty was that since the group's principle was to avoid songs which showed any strong political

penchant, the repertoire of Yiddish was meager. Thus, a considerable part of the program was devoted to translated classics: the "Tartar's Song from Prince Igor", "Spring Song" by Mendelsohn. The vocal soloist, Minna Isayevo and the violinist, Sioma Garter, both rendered classical selections.

In 1934, the directorship was taken over by Vladimir Heifetz. With his arrival, the chorus began to sing more folk music. He arranged many of the well known folksongs for choral use. The first song he arranged was: "Ot Azoi Neit a Schneider".

At the present time, the repertoire consists of 130 smaller songs and cantatas. Some of the longer works are "The Stone Island" by N.B. Mikov, music by Rubenstein-Gaines; "The Moonlight Sonata" by Beethoven, Yiddish text by G. Lutzker; "The Jewish Legend", translated from Bialik by J. J. Schwartz, with music by Vladimir Heifetz; "I Am A Jew", words by A. Pfeffer, music by Heifetz.

There are monthly "Kunzt-ovementen" (Art evenings),

at which not only the chorus and its own soloists participate, but also other fine artists are invited to join. These evenings are distinguished for their high level of artistry.⁽⁷⁶⁾

The Kultur Gezelshaft Chor (or Yiddish Culture Chorus) now consists of a 70 piece mixed group, aged 18 and over. Many have been with the group for a long time, and have learned to read music well during their stay with the chorus. Meetings are held once a week.

This group is one of a very few Jewish choruses of any substantial size and importance which are entirely independent of any parent or sponsoring organization. It is entirely maintained by the membership by dues and benefit concerts.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Another outstanding independent group is the Zilberts Choral Society, founded in 1924, by Zavel Zilberts, a teacher of singing and liturgical music. The original 20 members were students of Zilberts in New York. They now number 60 mixed voices.

Half of the music sung were the compositions of Zilberts. The repertoire of the group consists of about 50% liturgical music in Hebrew, 30% Hebrew, Yiddish, and English folk songs, the remainder, classical choral compositions; Mozart's "Requiem" with Hebrew text, Schubert's "Miriam's Triumph", // selections from Mendelsohn's "Elijah", and the like.

One main concert is presented each year, which helps support the chorus; the dues are nominal. There are officers elected by the group, the present President being Mr. Hyman Fleigle.

The group has cooperated in the celebration of Jewish Music Month. They meet weekly; are amateurs' with some knowledge of reading music.

Most of the music is sung with piano accompaniment, some with organ; occasionally with orchestra. Their soloists are usually professional, among them one of Zilberts' students: Richard Tucker.

Zilberts composed literally hundreds of songs and arranged scores for chorus. He wrote cantatas

and oratorios. Much of his music is sung by the Cleveland Jewish Choral Society, the Buffalo Jewish Choral Society, and the choral groups in Chicago.

After Zilberts' death in 1948, the direction of the chorus was assumed by Sholom Secunda for one year, and by Seymour Silbermintz since. (78)

One of the oldest of the independent choral groups is the Cleveland Jewish Singing Society, founded in 1904, consisting of 65-85 amateurs and semi-professionals aged 20 to 65. Their repertoire is similar to that of the Zilbermintz group. Their financial backing is obtained by nominal dues and by benefit concerts. The conductor is Maurice Goldman. Here again, 95% of the singers are of American birth. (79)
They are workers, professionals and businessmen.

Some of the significant independent choral groups are: The Shirah, Baltimore, Md., an outgrowth of the Meyerbeer Singing Society which was originally an all male chorus founded in 1905. The Shirah is directed by Hugo Weisgall.

The Buffalo Jewish Choral Society, directed by
(80)
Samuel Luskin was organized in 1929

In 1929, Samuel Bugatch founded the Zimrah Choral Society in Baltimore. This consisted of 25 students and workers. They gave weekly concerts which attracted much enthusiasm.

The Maccabean Glee Club directed by Samuel Wolkovsky, was established in Baltimore in 1930, a
(81)
mixed amateur adult group.

It is significant to note that most of the choruses of the various political and fraternal organizations, as well as the Yiddish Culture Chorus are on the closest possible terms with each other, the fact being that their respective choral directors have, for the most part, been associated with several of the organizations at various times.

In 1950, the Congress for Jewish Culture, through its music division, arranged a music festival at Hunter College in New York City on March 26, 1950, at which occasion, a prize musical setting for mixed

chorus of J. L. Peretz's poem: "Treist Mein Folk" was presented. The competition had been won by Cantor Leo Rosenbluth, of Sweden.

The following Yiddish choruses participated: The Workmen's Circle Choruses of Philadelphia, Trenton, and Newark, under the direction of Samuel Bugatch; the Workmen's Circle Chorus of Patterson and the Yiddish Culture Chorus of New York under Vladimir Heifetz; the Workmen's Circle Chorus of New York, directed by Lazar Weiner; the Farband - Labor Zionist Order Chorus of New York and the Hazomir of Waterbury, under Leo Low.

Each unit performed separately; at the end of the program all combined for a joint performance (500 voices) of Rosenbluth's prize-winning work, under the direction of Lazar Weiner.

In 1940, the famous Jewish composer, Jacob Weinberg, arranged the first of a series of annual "Festivals of Jewish Art", in which he presented
(82)
many works of great interest and value.

The majority of present-day Jewish amateur choruses, other than those already discussed, may be placed under three headings:

1. Synagogue-sponsored groups
2. Jewish Boards of Education
3. YMHA's and Jewish Community Centers

Within the purview of this paper, it was impossible to attempt to investigate any appreciable number of choruses in these categories, since there are, literally, hundreds of them, and there is no central agency or organization through which they can be reached.

Synagogue Sponsored Choruses

Synagogue-sponsored amateur choruses, as distinguished from their regular professional choirs, have achieved no high musical distinction that I have been able to ascertain. Their leadership is usually carried on by either the Cantor or a local person. There is no liason between the various Synagogue-sponsored choruses, no centralized musical program. Most devote themselves strictly to liturgical music which they render during religious services, particularly during the High Holy Day season.

Characteristic is the Beth Israel Anshe Emet Choir of Brooklyn, N. Y. This is an amateur group; (83)
meets weekly; sings only liturgical music.

Choruses Sponsored by Jewish Boards of Education

The Jewish Boards of Education, now spread in many parts of the country, are doing much work in bringing Jewish music, Hebrew, Yiddish, and English to the children under their supervision. In addition to providing music curricula and program suggestions, the Bureaus themselves sponsor choral societies. In fact, the Jewish musical training which the children receive often shows itself in their subsequent participation in Jewish musical life, whether as choral singers, instrumentalists, or audiences.

One of the leading singing societies sponsored by an Education Bureau is the Halevi Choral Society of Chicago, under the aegis of the Chicago Board of Education, (72 East 11th Street, Chicago 5, ILL.). Founded in 1927, the group consists of approximately 80 members, aged 16 to 50. Harry Coopersmith, then Music Director of the Board of Jewish Education, and Mr. Hyman Reznick, present director of the

Society, formed the group. Reznick assumed direction in 1930, when Coopersmith left Chicago.

In 1933, Halevi was invited to serve as the chorus in "The Romance of a People", at the World's Fair in 1933. In 1936, Halevi sponsored an "Institute of Jewish Music", a lecture series.

In addition to spreading the enjoyment of Jewish music in Chicago, the Society has contributed to music scholarships at the Jerusalem Conservatory of Music, an affiliate of the Hebrew University. Halevi has also helped popularize many of the songs of the Chalutzim, the Haganah, and other aspects of Israeli life.

Four distinguished Jewish composers have written and dedicated special numbers to the Halevi Choral Society which were sung at its Silver Jubilee Concert. They are: Marc Lavry, Shlomo Hofman from Israel, and Leon Stein and Max Janowski from Chicago.

The members are largely untrained musically;

they sing English, Yiddish, Hebrew. They are working people, housewives, professionals, businessmen, students. The emphasis is on Hebrew songs. They perform about six times per year, usually with organ or piano. Types of music sung include: Yiddish folk music, oratorios, cantatas, classical choral works, Israeli folk music. American born singers predominate: (85) about 75%.

As a fair indication of the type of choruses sponsored by Jewish Boards of Education, I shall note the following:

The Bureau Choral Society, directed by Rubin S. Phillips, Associate Director: Herman Hersh. Organized 1934. Size: 45. Sponsored by the Cincinnati Bureau of Jewish Education.

Bureau of Jewish Education Choral Society of Roxbury, Mass. Director: Evelyn Borofsky-Roskin. Organized 1947. Membership: 40. Ages: 18 and up. Three to four performances annually. Sponsored by the Bureau of Jewish Education of Boston. Same type repertoire

as the Halevi Choral Society. Weekly meetings. (86)

The Jewish Chorus of New York. Director: Harry Coopersmith. Sponsored by the Jewish Education Committee of New York. Their repertoire consists of folk music, classical choral works, Israeli folk songs. 95% American born singers. (87)

These few I have listed show the common characteristics of all: the accent on Hebrew, the overwhelming percentage of American-born participants, repertoire. They all participate in the celebration of National Jewish Music Month. All occasionally use paid professional soloists. All are supported by the Jewish community. The rate of personnel turnover is fairly slow, but is much faster than that of the long-established fraternal and political choruses discussed earlier in this chapter. The trend of membership varies from static to increasing. The weakening of Yiddish has no appreciable effect upon their activities. They usually cooperate with other Jewish or non-Jewish musical organizations in

the community. Their conductors find it necessary to arrange much of the music themselves, usually about one-third.

Choruses Sponsored

by

YMHA's And Jewish Community Centers

YMHA's and Jewish Community Centers in many parts of the country are now sponsoring choral societies.

During the 1860's and 1870's there was a development of these organizations. In the emphasis they placed on libraries, lectures, dramatics, and other cultural and intellectual activities, these organizations were similar to their forerunners, the literary societies. They fostered Jewish educational activities and it was only natural that Jewish music should become an integral and important part of their programs.

(88)

One of the best known Jewish choruses is the Jewish Choral Society of the 92nd Street YMHA of New York. Founded in 1917, the Society was first under the direction of Leon Kramer, who had been the director of the Halevi Singing Society of New York.

In 1917, A. W. Binder founded the Jewish Choral Society at the 92nd Street YMHA where he directs a music school, a symphony orchestra in addition to the Society. As a result of a tour of Palestine in 1925, Binder brought back a collection of melodies sung by the Chalutzim, in addition to many Yemenite, (89) Arabic, and liturgical melodies.

The Jewish Choral Society of the 92nd Street Y was one of the first organizations to encourage American young men and women to sing Jewish music. It started with twenty-five members, and reached its peak with a 95 voice mixed chorus at the New York World's Fair. The age range is 18 to 50, over 75% being American born. Their Jewish backgrounds are not exceptionally complete. Few are expert music readers.

Gradually, through the years, the musical requirements have been raised for participation in the group. Soloists are always paid professionals, who render their services for a relatively low fee.

On important occasions, the chorus is supplemented by professional choral singers to lead the various sections, and by orchestra.

The personnel turnover of the Chorus is about one-third yearly. There are two regular concerts a year; in addition, the group sings for special occasions. They participate in Jewish Music Month programs.

The repertoire ranges from Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs to classical choral works and cantatas. Several classical oratorios have been sung by Mendelsohn, Handel, Bach. Binder has provided several longer choral works: the "Requiem Yizkor", "Amos on Times Square", "Israel Reborn". The group has sung the fine music of Bloch, Harris, and Copeland.

Officers elected by the group lead the administrative aspects of the chorus. There are nominal dues (90) in addition to the small Y dues required.

I shall mention but a few of the choruses sponsored by Jewish Community Centers and "Y's" in

order to show their general characteristics.

The Halevi Chorus of Los Angeles, founded in 1946, consists of about 75 men and women ranging in age from 20 to 50. Characteristically, they have no formal musical training. They use paid soloists from time to time, and sing a wide range of music from folk music in Yiddish and Hebrew to classical cantatas and oratorios. The group is organized with its own officers, dues: about 10% are American born singers. Average attendance at rehearsals is about 85% each week. They concentrate on Hebrew and Yiddish music, doing very little English. The director is Ben Pollack, who also directs the children's chorus of the Workmen's Circle in Los Angeles. (91)

The YH-YWHA Choristers of Mount Vernon, New York, directed by Janet Kesselman Goldberg, is a mixed adult group of 45 men and women ranging in age from 22 to 55. The group was founded in 1937. Half of the music sung is Jewish; the other half, general. 90% of the membership is American born, the preponderance

being professionals, housewives: Upper middle classes. (92)

The Brooklyn Jewish Center Chorus, under the direction of Sholom Secunda, was founded in 1949. It consists of 75 mixed voices ranging from 18 to 50. 75% of the singers are American born. Their repertoire is broad: folk music, liturgical, classical --- in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English. (93)

There are also youth choruses sponsored by "Y's". The 92nd Street Y sponsors the "Y" Youth Chorus, with mixed voices ranging from 16 to 35. 90% are American born. There is a growing taste for singing Jewish music, which now forms about two-thirds of the repertoire. Director is Arthur Sherman. (94)

Suffice it to say, that choral activity is ever widening its scope in the educational and cultural programs of the Y's and Centers. With the popularization of Jewish Music Month, which is sponsored by the National Jewish Welfare Board through its National Jewish Music Council, many Centers are devoting increasing attention to Jewish music in

general and to Jewish choral singing in particular.

Chapter IVa) Conductors and their influence.

In interviewing the leading Jewish choral conductors, I found they have a vast amount of enthusiasm for their work.

Almost without exception, Jewish amateur chorus conductors cannot devote their full time to the work because of the very limited financial emoluments involved. The outstanding Jewish choral conductors in New York, and in other large cities, are employed as choir masters in the larger synagogues, where they usually direct a professional liturgical choir.

Every first-rank Jewish choral conductor:
Leo Low, A. W. Binder, Vladimir Heifetz, Samuel Bugatch, Leo Kopf, Lazar Weiner, Michal Gelbart, the late Zavel Zilverts and others mentioned in this paper have had a thorough musical training in some recognized academy of higher musical education. In addition, they are all people thoroughly versed in

Jewish lore and tradition. They all believe strongly in Jewish culture and its possibilities for the enrichment of Jewish life.

In view of the fact that these men are synagogue musicians, they are intimately connected with Jewish life. The influence of synagogue music makes itself felt very strongly in the choice of repertoire for the amateur chorus.

The paucity of Jewish choral music by Jewish composers at the beginning of the century, made it necessary for the choral conductors to compose and arrange much of the material themselves. Actually, at least one-third of the music sung by any substantial chorus is arranged or composed by its director. This I found in every interview and in virtually every questionnaire which was returned.

The personalities of these men is extremely important, as they handle volunteer singers who are, as a rule, almost illiterate musically. Their singers are people whose main aim it is to enjoy

themselves. Thus, in order to reach and maintain a high musical standard of performance, the conductor must exert enough moral power over the group to demand real application and attendance, without them feeling unduly pressured.

The conductors all have thoroughgoing classical musical backgrounds, with a knowledge of the classical choral literature. This influence too, bears heavily on the chorus; it is very common indeed that some of the larger choruses sing the larger works of Mendelsohn, Bach, Handel.

Actually, the total of Jewish choral conductors is a very limited one, since each usually conducts at least two or three choruses, in addition to his synagogue work.

In my interviews with them, I inquired as to why there was no central professional association or organization of Jewish choral conductors. The answer seems to be that first, they are a small, limited group; second, the clash of personalities

is very marked.

Several of the men felt that there should be a united choral federation of some kind. Previous attempts to accomplish this are described in the next chapter.

Leo Low is considered by all the "father" of Jewish choral music in America.

By their constant emphasis upon good music, by their continual stressing of proper diction and phrasing, by their arrangements and compositions for chorus, the conductors have made a genuine art form out of Jewish folk songs. In addition, they have introduced to music-loving men and women the great classics of the masters, whether they be in cantata or oratorio form.

With the influence of Zionism and the creation of the State of Israel, and the great sympathy which most of the conductors have for Israel, they have done much to arrange and perform Israeli workers and

folk songs. They have used to a great extent the native compositions of Israel.

b) Composers and Repertoire

The earlier Jewish choral societies in America, such as the Halevi Singing Society in New York and the Meyerbeer Singing Society in Baltimore, following the paths of the non-Jewish choral groups both in this country and in Europe, limited their repertoire mainly to the presentation of the choral works of the great masters.

In addition they sang hymns in German or English in imitation of the Protestant church music.

With the rise of the choral groups of the fraternal orders, the socialists, and the Zionists, the repertoire turned to the music of the people, the folk songs, both Yiddish and Hebrew. However, virtually every fair-sized chorus has sung at least selections from Mendelsohn's "Elijah", cantatas of Bach (sometimes translated into Yiddish), Mozart, Shubert, and the like.

Since most of the conductors were engaged in

liturgical Jewish music as well, the choruses have often utilized synagogue music, often entire religious services.

On the program of every concert there are usually at least several of the compositions or arrangements of the director.

Most often sung among the Yiddish folk songs are the works of composers like: Meyer Posner, Jacob Shaefer, Zavel Zilberts, Michal Gelbart, Vladimir Heifetz, Lazar Weiner, Max Janowski, Samuel Bagatch, Reuben Kosakoff.

The Hebrew repertoire is arranged and composed mainly by A. W. Binder, Joseph Achron, J. Chajes. *"Shofar"*
Israeli composers who have created music for the Jewish choral groups are: Marc Lavry, Zaira, Nardi, Pugatchov.

Liturgical music which is often sung has been created by such composers as A. W. Binder, Max Helfman, Lazare Saminsky.

The repertoire, of course, reflects the particular period of any choral group's existence. When the Arbeiter Ring choruses were first founded, when the Farband choruses, and the Jewish Music Alliance groups began to function, the repertoire was overwhelmingly devoted to "propaganda" songs, songs of labor and of the class war.

However, by the 1930's, the membership of the choruses was no longer limited strictly to workers, or to wholehearted devotees of the socialist or labor cause. New members came from the ranks of housewives, students, small businessmen, professional people, men and women who wished to partake of Jewish cultural pursuits.

With the influx of new members of this type, and with the rise in the musical taste and standards of the members, the repertoire grew richer, and broader, not limiting itself to the "propaganda" music or just Yiddish folk songs. An effort was made to utilize the classics, either in the original tongues or in Yiddish translation.

Some of the outstanding music which was sung was: Schubert's Oratorio: "Miriam's Triumph"; Mozart's "Requiem", translated into Hebrew. 1

Now, the choruses sponsored particularly by the "Y's" and the Bureaus of Jewish Education have put their accent on Hebrew rather than on Yiddish songs, in cognizance of the rise of Zionism and the new State of Israel. The Bureaus of course, are devoted to teaching Hebrew, and so would emphasize Hebrew music. The fraternal - sponsored choruses, too, although not to as great an extent, has been singing more and more Hebrew folk songs.

c) Nature of Chorus Make-up

Today, the Jewish amateur choral societies are made up of men and women -- ranging in age from about 18 to 60, who have had little, if any, formal musical training. All that is required for membership, as a rule, is a fair voice, a receptive ear, and the love of Jewish music.

The fact is that, generally, the devotion of the singers to the chorus, their loyalty and willingness to work hard are very marked. In most of the older groups, it is not at all unusual for members to have belonged as much as twenty or thirty years. Their attendance at rehearsals is remarkably good.

Most of the groups are organized as regular societies or clubs, with elected officers, executive committee, librarian, and various committees. The members of the chorus take it upon themselves to help sell the tickets for their performances.

The rehearsals are looked forward to not only for the musical satisfaction derived, but also because of the social aspects of the gathering. Choruses will often hold parties, all kinds of social affairs, outings, picnics, and the like.

Efforts are being made constantly to recruit younger members, in order to perpetuate the organizations.

It is a common practice to obtain professional singers on occasion to lead the various sections at special events. Professional soloists, whether instrumental or vocal, are usually included on the programs.

Since the dues are nominal, usually not even enough to pay for the services of the conductor, most of the independent groups rely upon benefit concerts once or twice during the year in order to subsist.

Rehearsals are held weekly normally, Very often the groups are rehearsed section by section, because of their inability to read musical notation to any

real extent.

The percentage of American-born singers is rather small among the fraternal-sponsored choruses (except in their Youth choruses) but in the groups sponsored by the Y's and the Bureaus of Education, the percentage is about 75% native Americans.

d) Influence of the Jewish Choral Movement on
American Jewish Cultural Pattern

It is, of course, difficult to appraise the influence of the Jewish Choral Movement on American Jewish cultural life. However, I think it fair to say that only a relatively limited number of Jews have ever had the opportunity of hearing performances by Jewish choruses much less of joining them.

During the time that immigration was relatively open to Jews into the United States, the Yiddish speaking audiences were not wanting. The first generation of Jews born in America still were brought up in Yiddish-speaking homes, and still enjoy and appreciate, to some extent, Jewish folk music. Their parents and grandparents' influence and the old-home traditions are still strong enough to lay a basis for appreciation of Jewish folk music.

With the second generation of American-born Jews, however, where Yiddish, and the European Jewish customs have lost their influence to a great extent,

the potential audiences for Jewish choruses is small. The same holds true of the Jewish theater, which is dying, not only because of the low level of its productions, but also because of the lack of properly oriented audiences.

Thus, the influence of the Choral Movement has been very limited, as such. They cannot compete in competence with the outstanding non-Jewish choral groups such as the Oratorio Society or the Schola Cantorum, simply because the musical abilities of the latter are so much higher, and the reservoir of singers from which they can choose is so much vaster.

With the coming of the television, and mass education, Jewish culture generally has been found too limited in the eyes of the young people. For that matter, the culture of any minority group in this country is invariably relegated to a subsidiary position in the lives of its members.

In the larger cities, like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, where there is a relatively large settlement

of Jews, there is little doubt that the Jewish Choral Movement has had its strong effect. Young people who are joining the choruses, particularly those associated with the educational agencies and the Community Centers and Y's, are very much interested in singing Hebrew and Yiddish songs. Furthermore, the Hebrew schools of the newer type emphasize Hebrew folk songs and dances. The young people have had the opportunity of singing Hebrew as part of their religious and cultural training.

Youth Zionist organizations, such as the Hadassah Youth, the Habonim, the Hashomer Hazair, the Poale Zion, and the Hapoel Hamizrachi have, at all times, encouraged and utilized Israeli singing, and have built an audience which can appreciate and love Jewish choral music.

For Jews away from the Jewish centers of life, however, the choral movement has done very little, except for an occasional Haddash singing group, or the like.

The non-Jewish choral activity in this country has had a considerable effect upon Jewish choral work. The high musical standards which obtain in the better general singing societies have inspired Jewish conductors and through them, the Jewish singers, to strive for the attainment of a higher musical standard of appreciation and performance. There is much Jewish participation in the general choral groups, as in orchestral musical activity.

Chapter VOutlook for the Future

One of the prime weaknesses of the Jewish choral movement in America is that it is so decentralized. There is no main, central organization or agency which ties the groups together for the advantage of the movement. There is no clearing house for publishing and making available to choruses the finest in Jewish choral music. There is no agency to encourage Jewish composers to create for the Jewish choral medium. Nor is there much meeting of the minds on the part of the leaders of the movement.

The obvious remedy, in great part, for the troubles besetting the Jewish choral movement is the creation of a federation of choruses, under a single cultural and musical direction.

Actually, following the tendency of the non-Jewish singing societies to form federations (i.e. the Bund of the ^eLiedertafel Societies in Germany and others) the Jewish groups undertook, in 1921, to

form the "United Jewish Choral Societies of America and Canada". This was done at the initiative of the Paterson Singing Society, then directed by Jacob Beimel.

Their aim was to improve existing choral societies and establish new ones, to publish choral compositions in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English, (the latter to have a Jewish textual content).

In 1922, Leo Low was elected president. In 1923, the organization reached its climax with a great, 600 voice chorus, consisting of nine choral groups performing at the Hippodrome.

However, due to internal jealousy and friction among the members of the Executive of the Federation, the activity grew ever weaker, and finally the Federation dissolved entirely.

The one sure way to build up the Jewish choral activity on its highest possible level is to reestablish a United Federation of Jewish Choral Societies.

One of the main drawbacks to Jewish composers is the small probability that their creations will be utilized by choruses, or even published. Actually, the choruses are constantly seeking the best possible musical material, and are hard put to find suitable music. The publishers, too, would be ready to produce Jewish choral music --- if only they could be assured that a reasonable number of copies could be sold to cover their expenses. The creation of a United Choral Federation would certainly add much towards the solution of this problem.

This centralized agency could interchange compositions among the various conductors and composers, commission good Jewish music, do research into the various fields of Jewish music, and so forth.

The outlook for the future of Jewish cultural activity seems to lie in the societies connected with the Y's and the Bureaus of Jewish Education. It is in these organizations that the younger element of American born singers participate. They sing a considerable amount of English texts in their Jewish music.

Certainly, the influence of the rise of the new State of Israel will be a great in the encouragement of Hebrew folk singing. The new songs of the Israeli life, the Haganah, the songs of the concentration camps and of the ghettos, the labor songs, -- all of these have combined to enrich the Hebrew repertoire.

The cultural leaders of the Yiddish-speaking people, namely the Arbeiter Ring, the Farband, the Jewish Music Alliance, the Kultur Gezelshaft Chor -- consisting mainly of older, European born singers, are not too hopeful for the future. The weakening of Yiddish as a force in Jewish life is striking hard at the very roots of these organizations. Thus, many are trying, increasingly, to sing more English, and to encourage younger people to participate. To this end, they have organized special youth choruses, which allow for more singing in English.

The choruses of the Y's and the Bureaus are relatively untouched by the decline of Yiddish, their prime emphasis being upon Hebrew.

Perhaps the one greatest factor in determining the future of the Jewish choral movement is the quality of its leadership. There is the necessity for highly trained conductors, people who are not merely interested in Jewish music, but who have a profound knowledge of music in general.

Outside of the large Jewish areas like New York, the general training of Jewish choral conductors is relatively weak. What the Jewish community must do is provide schools to train Jewish conductors, as cantors and teachers are being trained by the Hebrew Union School of Sacred Music.

Any particular political connotation to chorus ? Which ?

Chorus organized as club ? Officers ? Dues ?
President's name and address —

Do you use professional soloists on occasion ? Paid how much ?

Repertoire - Types of music sung: folk music, oratorios, cantatas,
classical choral works, Israeli folk music, other ?

(Please use back of questionnaire for further information)

What proportion of Jewish to general music ?

What languages sung ? Hebrew, Yiddish, English, others ?

What language do the singer prefer ?

What percentage of American born singers ?

General economic status of singers ? Workers , professionals ?

Are you participants in the celebration of National Jewish Music Month ?

What ~~is~~ size and type of audience ?

Does the Jewish community support you financially or morally ?

Rate of turn-over in members of the chorus —

Average attendance at rehearsals —

Trend of membership — up — down — static —

What is the outlook for future of the chorus in next few years ?

Does the decline of Yiddish have any effect on the vitality of chorus ?

Chorus cooperate artistically with other Jewish or non-Jewish musical
organizations in the community ? Please indicate which —

The Conductor:

Musical training and background --

Length of time with chorus --

Pertinent biographical data (sources for biographical information)

(Please use back of questionnaire for further information)

Do you find it necessary to arrange much of the music yourself ?
How much ?

How do you rehearse ? Section by section ?

Please indicate names and addresses of other choirs or choruses which
you direct.

Do you know any other choruses in your locality or elsewhere which
should be interviewed ? Please list name of conductor or president --

Do you have any first-hand knowledge of early development of Jewish
choral activity either in America or in Europe ? Do you
know of any sources for gathering that data ?

Note: I shall be most grateful for any further information or comment
you care to add. I am trying to make this study of the choral move-
ment as definitive as possible. Thank you for your cooperation.

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