A Polyphonic Canvas:
Jewish Music and the Art of Marc Chagall

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Summary

The thesis A Polyphonic Canvas: Jewish Music and the Art of Marc Chagall written by Katie Oringel explores the relationship between artistic mediums, specifically as it is expressed through Jewish art and Jewish music. The examination between the art of Jewish artist, Marc Chagall and different genres of music prevalent during his lifetime is unique to modern scholarship, adding a new perspective and way of understanding his art. The goals of this thesis include: demonstrating the Jewish musical influence on the art of Marc Chagall, displaying art and music as interconnected mediums that heighten the experience of the other, and encouraging cantors to consider the role art can play in the experience of music.

In order to understand Chagall's polyphonic canvas, three periods from Chagall's life: his childhood (1887-1900), his first period in Paris (1919-1914) and his tenure in Moscow, working at the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre (1920-1922) are explored in this thesis. Each chapter is comprised of four sections: 1. Historical information; 2. Explanation of a genre of music associated with the time period; 3. Analysis of a work of art; 4. A synthesis to explain how the previous three sections affect one another.

The information for this thesis was derived from first-hand accounts by the artist in autobiographies, written interviews and articles, as well as biographies, art books, journals, interviews, musical performances and museum visits.

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Introduction

The Jewish folk music of Marc Chagall's childhood dances down the streets of his paintings. This thesis explores the Jewish musical influences on the art of Marc Chagall.

On the cover of Monica Bohm-Duchen's book, Chagall, a colorful, green-faced fiddler dances off the white background to the sound of his music. While strolling the museum shop in the Boston Museum of Art, I recognized this Jewish icon but did not know much about the artist, Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Within the first few pages of her book I read the following quote from Chagall's autobiography: "I'll be a singer, a cantor...a violinist...a dancer...a poet." I was stunned to see 'cantor' on this list of possible professions.

She explores how Chagall's Hasidic upbringing is reflected in the imagery he used in his paintings. Bohm-Duchen showed another connection between Chagall's imagery and the Sholom Aleichem (1859-1916) story *The Bewitched Tailor.* It "contains precisely that almost seamless blend of the mundane and the magical that was to become the hallmark of Chagall's paintings. Cows and goats flying to the heavens...Yiddish literature is full of them."[1] It only took reading ten pages for me to realize that the art of Marc Chagall was deeply influenced by his cultural and religious, Jewish upbringing. Much like the fiddler on the cover of the book, the art of Marc Chagall sings to me. The colors whirl in a magical haze to the tunes of Jews sloshing through the mud of the shtetl. Chagall's images make us nostalgic for Jewish *shtetl* life before the Holocaust. The poverty, cold and hunger of life fade away into the vibrant colors on Chagall's canvases.

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[1] Monica Bohn-Duchen, Chagall. (London: Phaidon Press, 1998) 17.

Jewish music played a role throughout Chagall's life. As a young boy he sang in the synagogue alongside the cantor. After dinner, his mother would say, "Children, let us sing the rabbi's song (Rav's Niggun).[2] As a child, he played the violin. He painted images from popular Yiddish folksong into his canvasses. He brought to life the traditional shtetl musicians in many of his paintings. Chagall wove these melodies and musicians into his colors until his canvases sang. He painted a polyphonic canvas.

Chagall's use of music, literature, poetry and various other art forms as influences in his art is referred to as *ekphrasis. Ekphrasis* is defined as "a representation in one medium, composed in another medium."[3] The term is less common in relation to music, but has often been used to demonstrate the influence of art and poetry as well as other literary arts. A similar musical term is *program music.* "Program music narrates or paints, suggests or represents scenes or stories (and by extension events or characters) that enter the music from the composer's mind. Musical *ekphrasis*, by contrast, narrates or paints stories or scenes created by an artist *other* than the composer of the music and in another artistic medium... .Program music represents, while musical *ekphrasis* re-presents."[4]

A prime example of art forms informing and re-presenting one another is the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, formed in 1918 and discussed at length in chapter three. Chagall created a masterpiece on every wall of the theatre. He designed the canvases in whimsical, colorful ways. The actor Solomon Mikhoels studied Chagall's paintings until his movements on the stage mimicked those upon the canvases. He took Chagall's artistic

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[2] Marc Chagall, My Life (USA: Da Capo Press, 1994), 9.
[3] Siglind Bruhn, "A Concert of Paintings: 'Musical Ekphrasis' in the Twentieth Century" *Poetics Today* 22:3 (Fall 2001) 559.
[4] Bruhn, 554.

medium and re-presented it in his acting.[5] This was the over-arching goal of the theatre. It would have been easy to merely speak the words of the play, but rather the actors took singing lessons to inform their acting. They took dance lessons to inform their movement. The director of the theatre understood the importance of integrating all forms of art to heighten the experience for the audience. This was why he brought Chagall to paint the sets.

Chagall's career was an *ekphrastic* masterpiece. He drew from literature, music, folk traditions, poetry, popular song, cultural nuances, religious life and countless other art forms and human conditions while he was creating his Chagallian world. Today, Chagall's creations dance on the covers of CDs, music books, concert programs and countless other representations of Jewish music. His art sings to the viewer the Jewish music of shtetl life before the Holocaust. A sense of nostalgia pours out from each color singing '*Ay, dee, di*' and swaying back and forth. The shapes intone a Yiddish tune. The figures are ready to dance with me while the fiddler bows a *freilech* melody.

In order to understand Chagall's polyphonic canvas, three periods from Chagall's life will be explored in depth. Each section will be comprised of four sections: 1. Historical information; 2. Explanation of a genre of music associated with the time period; 3. Analysis of a work of art; 4. A synthesis to explain how the previous three sections affect one another.

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[5] Chagall, My Life, 164.

Chagall's Childhood

Marc Chagall, born Moyshe Shagal and westernized his name later in life, was born around July 7, 1887. He was the firstborn child of Feiga-Ita and Sachar Chagall in the moderate-sized city of Vitebsk, located in the Pale of Settlement between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Chagall family resided in the Jewish section of culturally diverse Vitebsk. While diversity was present, gentile dominion was apparent by viewing the city's skyline. Synagogues were only allowed to be "modest, low-lying structures," [6] while the domes of churches rose magnificently to the sky. In spite of Christian supremacy, Jewish workers brought the city to a halt on Jewish holidays.[7] Just as the city was steeped with Jewish life, so too was Chagall's upbringing.

There was an emphasis on family in Hasidic Jewish life. As was customary at the time, but quickly falling out of vogue, Chagall's parents were distant cousins and married through arrangement. Each summer, the children would visit the *shtetl* of Lyozno to spend time with their grandparents. Chagall's grandfather was a "butcher, tradesman and cantor."[8] Early in life, young Chagall was exposed to animals, first alive and eventually "hung to dry like linen."[9] He also stood behind his grandfather, the cantor, in the synagogue. "He prays, he sings, he repeats himself melodiously and begins over again. It is as though the old mill were turning in my heart! Or as though new honey, recently gathered were trickling down inside me."[10]

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[6] Bohn-Duchen, 12.
[7] Jackie Wullschlager. Chagall: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008) 11.
[8] Chagall, My Life ,17.
[9] Chagall, My Life , 12.
[10] Chagall, My Life , 14.

Chagall had a special relationship with his Uncle Neuch. The boy would ride on the cart with his uncle to deal cattle at the market. The market was a loud and busy place. Chagall was amazed by the hustle and bustle, recalling, "Brilliant colors whirled about in the sky."[11] After long days dealing with cows, Uncle Neuch played the violin, "play[ed] the rabbi's song."[12]

Chagall's parents worked hard. His father would wake early each morning to attend worship, spend the day as a manual worker for a herring wholesaler and come home very tired. Chagall's memories of his father from childhood are centered around religious observances. Feiga-Ita, seen to the left in *Mother at the Oven (1914),* was the backbone of the family and an inspiration to young Chagall. She ran not only the household, but also a grocery store and rented out nearby homes to supplement her husband's meager salary. When Chagall later reflected where he got his talent, he admitted "it lay somewhere in her, that through her everything had been passed on to me."[13]

The centrality of religion endured until Chagall became *Bar Mitzvah* at thirteen. He lived a traditional, eastern European, Hasidic childhood. The family and community were at the heart. He attended *cheder* beginning at the age of three and grew to love the Bible from Rabbi Djatkine, who taught Chagall for his *Bar Mitzvah.*

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[11] Chagall, My Life, 40.
[12] Chagall, My Life, 18.
[13] Chagall, My Life, 9.

The Jewish holidays from Chagall's childhood were rich in meaning and memorable. In his autobiography, he recalled many of their unforgettable moments and flavors. During the Days of Awe, the Jewish community would gather for *Tashlich* to throw their sins into the Dvina River running through Vitebsk. During the year he would assist the cantor, but during the holy days, he would have to get there particularly early to sing. He recalls the special chicken meal before the fast on Yom Kippur and the glow of candles honoring those who had died. Before leaving for synagogue, Chagall recalled his father reminding his mother of the choreography and mood of the service, as well as "when to listen to the cantor."[14] Shamefully, he recalled sneaking a green apple during the Yom Kippur fast.[15]

Chagall recalled *matza* and horseradish on Passover. He painted a literary picture of his vivid memories from the moment in the *seder* when he was sent to open the door and welcome Elijah to their meal.

> *My father, raising his glass, tells me to go open the door.*
> *Open the door, the outside door, at such a late hour, to let in the prophet Elijah?*
> *A cluster of white stars, silvered against the background of the blue velvet sky, force their way into my eyes and into my heart.*
> *But where is Elijah and his white chariot?*
> *Is he still lingering in the courtyard to enter the house in the guise of a sickly old man, a stooped beggar, with a sack on his back and a cane in his hand?*
> *"Here I am. Where is my glass of wine?"*[16]

These holiday rituals rooted Chagall in Judaism. As a boy, one of his aspirations was to become a cantor. "I'll be a singer, a cantor...a violinist...a dancer...a poet."[17] The thread that tied all of his vocational interests together was the arts. Feiga-Ita recognized

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[14] Chagall, My Life , 36.
[15] Chagall, My Life , 35-38.
[16] Chagall, My Life , 39.
[17] Chagall, My Life , 34-35.

that her firstborn child had interests that fell outside the realm of *cheder.* She was also influenced by culturally diverse Vitebsk. She had left *shtetl* life for something different. She understood that her children would lead different lives from hers. There was an assimilation process occurring. Jews were secretly entering secular institutions and she wanted her son to be prepared for the changing society.

With this determination, Feiga-Ita bribed a local Russian teacher in an elementary school to educate her son. Young Chagall, wanting to make his mother proud, developed a stutter under the new pressure. He was conflicted because he was not very happy at the school, nor did he enjoy the learning, with the exception of two subjects: geometry and drawing. "What I liked best was geometry. At that I was unbeatable. Lines, angles, triangles, squares carried me far away to enchanting horizons. And during those hours of drawing, I lacked a throne."[18]

The Russian school was across the river. All his life he had wandered the streets, observing life. These added walks allowed him to further hone this skill. He would hide behind trees to observe lovers and go onto roofs to gain a better vantage point. He internalized the shape of the houses, the smell of the streets. He viewed soldiers stationed in his town from the 41st infantry division and 41st artillery brigade.

Chagall's childhood provided him with a palette from which to draw on throughout his entire life. It took a revelatory moment for him to realize his life's ambition:

> *But a word as fantastic, as literary, as out of this world as the word 'artist'—yes, perhaps I had heard it, but in my town no one ever pronounced it.*
> *It was so far removed from us!*
> *On my own initiative, I'd never have dared to use that word.*

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[18] Chagall, My Life, 51.

One day after school a friend came to see me and, after looking at our bedroom and noticing my sketches on the walls he exclaimed:
'I say! You're a real artist, aren't you?'
'An artist? What's that? Who's an artist? Is it possible that...I, too...?'
He left without explaining.
I immediately remembered that somewhere in our town I had seen a large sign, rather like those signs on shops: Artist Penne's School of Painting and Design."
I thought: That does it. I've only to enter that school and I'll be an artist.[19]

Artist Penne's School of Painting and Design was Chagall's first art school. Unsurprisingly, he excelled. Marc Chagall's career as an artist was underway. At the same time, developments in Judaism and its musical traditions were occurring that would deeply affect Chagall and his artwork. The next section explores those developments.

[19] Chagall, My Life , 53.

Music: Hasidism and the Niggun

Hasidism grew out of tragedies in the seventeenth century that left the Jewish people of Eastern Europe and Russia subjugated and disheartened. Pogroms instilled fear and caused massive destruction. Sabbatai Zvi broke the hearts of ardent Jews when it became clear he was a false Messiah. The Jewish community was divided into a caste system: Torah scholars at the top and non-learned individuals at the bottom. The Jews needed new hope and joy in their lives and worship. They needed a balance with their sadness, degradation and mechanical repetition of prayers.

Reb Yisroel Baal Shem-Tov (1700-1760), often referred to by the anagram 'Besht', filled this gap in the lives of Jews. He developed a style of Judaism where "joyousness and ecstasy in prayer above scholasticism immediately raised the status of the simplest and most backwards members of the oppressed Jewish community in the Pale [of Settlement]."[20] At the center was *simcha*/joy.

The Besht removed the caste system in order to be more accessible to Jews in all states of being: the rich and the poor, learned and simple, disheartened and hopeful. "...The simple man, imbued with native faith and able to pray fervently and wholeheartedly with a sense of joy in his heart, was nearer and dearer to God than the learned but joyless formalist spending his whole life in the study of *Talmud.*"[21] Along with this, he advocated a strong, simple faith that emphasized the attainment of spiritual ecstasy, דביקות/*devekut* in Hebrew, in joyful devotions. Music was an important form of religious expression.

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[20] Ruth Rubin. Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973) 231.
[21] Ibid.

Hasidism developed music to reach this 'spiritual ecstasy,' as well as encouraged followers to allow their senses to experience union with God. With this end, Jews continued the tradition from the Middle Ages of swaying during prayer. "Such bodily movement was spontaneous and unselfconscious...body motion, among *Hasidim* was elevated to an expression of religious fervor, in reflection of biblical King David, who danced before the Holy Ark."[22]

The Besht borrowed aspects of Kabbalistic Judaism in Palestine. The power of music, specifically vocal music, similar to Kabbalah, became an essential element to Hasidic worship and life. Music was the bridge to communing with God. Some even believed it had power to remove sin. "The ecstasy of melody is the key with which Hasidism strives to unlock the gates of heaven. It is so to speak, the ladder to the throne of God."[23]

A courtly system developed, with different rabbis leading their versions of Hasidism. Courts developed their own *shuls* (synagogues), *yeshivos* (study academies), *hazzanim* (cantors) and *badkhonim* (poet-bards). Depending on the musical creativity and vocal prowess of each individual *rebbi,* composers would be hired and ensembles employed to create and share the holy music with cantors.

The music of the Hasidim is somewhat dependent upon which version of Hasidism one is interested in. Each 'court' had a unique style of music, modes, special tunes, and expressed the individuality of the 'reigning' *rebbi.* In general, wordless *niggunim* were favored over tunes with words throughout Hasidism. "Melody is the

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[22] Irene Heskes. Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions and Cultures. (New York: Tara Publications, 1994) 118.
[23] Velvel Pasternak, ed. The Hasidic Anthology (USA: Tara Publications, 2001)11.

outpouring of the soul and words merely interrupted the stream of emotions...a melody with text was limited, since with the conclusion of the words, the melody was ended; whereas a tune without words could be repeated endlessly."[24]

Niggun is the Hebrew word expressing the sound expelled from any instrument, including the voice. In the Bible it refers to the 'act of playing an instrument.' *Niggun* "was not just a melody or a succession of notes. Rather, it was an opportunity for awakening, taming and elevating the soul...it was important to work oneself up to a frenzy, repeating a melody over and over until the goal of divine unity was achieved."[25]

While each court had distinctive elements to their *niggunim,* general styles pervaded through the groups. *Niggunim* fall into three categories: 1) *rikud* (dance), 2) *tish niggun* (song sung at the *rebbi's* table), and 3) march or waltz.

The five characteristics of *Rikud,* or Dance, *niggunim* are duple meter, fast tempi, four bar phrases, a small range (an octave at most), and a few motif phrases. These tunes were common at joyous celebrations because of their happy, musical quality.

The characteristics of *Tish* or a table *niggunim* are slow tempi, metrical or free rhythm, and a widening of range and heightening of pitch through the sections. These tunes often expressed serious, meditative and even sad moods. It was around these tables that *niggunim* spread around the Pale of Settlement. Large pilgrimages would be held on the High Holy Days and Shavuot to the "courts." Special new melodies were created and sung for these occasions. After hearing the tunes at the "tables" or assemblies of some sort, *Hasidim* would return to their *shtetl* and share the new tunes.

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[24] Rubin, 231.
[25] Judah Cohen. Niggun Anthology. Ed. Joel Eglash & J. Mark Dunn (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 2004) Forward.

The third type of *niggun* is classified as a march or waltz. These Western, gentile styles of music permeated into *Hasidic niggunim.* A common explanation for this saturation is that "sacred melodies in gentile music have been...taken captive by evil forces....The 'Divine sparks' hidden in them, await redemption...and restore them to their heavenly source."[26] It was a common compositional tool to overhear a melody in the non-Jewish world and adapt it to a Hebrew text.

The typical structure for *niggunim* is A B C B, as demonstrated in the "Rav's Niggun" notated in the Vinaver collection. (See addendum p. 71) Each section represents a level of closeness to God. The "A" section begins with a small range and a lot of repetition and widens in range and variety as the section progresses. The "C" section stands out because it moves up a fourth from the tonic of the first two sections. This section, being the highest ecstasy, also employs the highest pitches in the piece. It is impossible to remain in such loftiness. Therefore, the *niggun* concludes with the "B" melody.[27]

The *Chabad Hasidim* created a ladder of elevation for the different stages and sections of the *niggun.*

1. *The outpouring of the soul and its effort to rise out of the mire of sin, out of the evil shell*
2. *Spiritual awakening*
3. *The stage in which the individual is possessed by his thoughts.*
4. *Communion with God*
5. *Flaming ecstasy*
6. *The soul completely casts away its garment of flesh and becomes a disembodied spirit*[28]

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[26] A. Hajdu. "Hasidism." *Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007) 427.
[27] As recalled from a lecture given by Professor Eliyahu Schleiffer, 2005.
[28] Pasternak, 17.

If on the fourth step, one communes with God, all the more reason why one could not maintain a melody at the fifth and even sixth levels. One must return to earth.

All of the categories of *niggunim* employ two common elements: repetition and nonsense syllables. Through repetition, the *hassid* could find the deeper meaning within himself from the energy generated by singing. This energy often caused the pitch of the tune to gradually get higher and higher. Most *niggunim* are sung without words. They employ nonsense syllables such as *Ah, Ay, Oy, Hey, Bam, Ya-ba-bam, ti-di-ram,* etc. The use of the nonsense syllable allows the *Hasid* to focus on God. There is a return to infancy with the use of nonsense syllables, "to a stammering infant language in order to express before God, feelings too delicate or too intimate for a conventional verbal statement."[29] As Psalm 65:2 says, 'Words alone cannot relate the greatness of God.'

The 'court' system of *Hasidism* brought an overabundance of fame to the *rebbes.* They served as conduits between God and the people that afforded them a prophet-like status in their communities. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this deification saw no changes in the lowly social and financial status, persecutions and oppression within the Pale of Settlement. Jews influenced by the *Haskalah*, turned away from *Hasidism.* They sought secular educations and Western ideas. Though assimilation occurred, Jews tried to cleave to the cultural heritage left by these Hasidic leaders.

Some qualities of *Hasidic* song can be heard in Zionist and Yiddish folk songs. *Niggunim* were passed down through the generations by oral tradition, unpublished and unrecorded. They were prohibited from being written down for two reasons: 1. A non-

[29] Ibid.

Jew might adapt a *niggun* for something other than serving God, and 2. Western musical notation could not adequately express the soul of these songs.

Determined to not let the music of the *Hasidim* disappear forever, composer and conductor, Chemjo Vinaver (1900-1973) transcribed and compiled the seminal Anthology of Jewish Music, including mostly *Hasidic* music and creating an archive to maintain this tradition. He compiled the tunes from his own memory as a young boy and from listening to "many men and women who came—sometimes from remote towns and villages—and sang me those old tunes"[30] across Eastern Europe and in the United States. He sought, for this anthology, "to serve as a much-needed repository of traditional Jewish music....its own authentic style, the best of what can still be a living music."[31]

This musical style was part of Chagall's childhood, and stayed with him throughout his life. The next section explores one of Chagall's paintings, with special attention given to symbolism from his childhood.

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[30] Chemjo Vinaver. Anthology of Jewish Music. (New York: Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, 1953) 6.
[31] Vinaver, 16.

Solitude

Marc Chagall created *Solitude* in 1933 while living in Paris. Chagall was forty-six years old at the time, far from his childhood. This image demonstrates the longevity his childhood experience had on his art. It was created for the newly established Tel Aviv Museum of Art. He visited Palestine for the first time from March 1 to June 4, 1931 at the invitation of Tel Aviv founder, Meir Dizengoff, to discuss the creation of the city's first art museum. Ultimately, Chagall chose to allow others to envision the museum, but was alerted, in a letter from Dizengoff on September 17, 1933, of plans "to establish a 'Chagall Room' in it, where we will gradually collect all the works of the great master."[32]

Solitude, 40 x 66 inches made with oil paint, is composed of a Jewish man dressed in black, wrapped in a white cloth. His head rests contemplatively in one hand while the other cradles a Torah scroll in a red mantle. He is sitting with his knees to his chest on the green grass next to a white cow with golden horns. Beneath its head are a violin and its bow. In the background, a village looms quietly with houses and domed

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[32] Benjamin Harshav, Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative. (California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 393.

roofs of Russian Orthodox churches. Most of the sky is in a deep grey haze, except for the pale blue area around a flying, winged angel.

Solitude stands out among Chagall's works for its clarity, simplicity and realistic approach. Many of his other works have small, almost hidden characters, or something about the image that is otherworldly, but not in this work. The main figures are rendered clearly. The brushstroke does not lend a sense of ambiguity of space as it does in other works. Because of this clarity, the expression in the face of the Jew stands out. There is a sense of reality in the choice of colors. By painting the background in darker hues, it makes the white cow and the man draped in white come even more to the foreground, almost coming off the canvas.

The central figures in *Solitude* are the Jew and the white cow. The Jew is wrapped in a white cloth, similar to a *tallit*, prayer shawl. While not the same Jew depicted in *The Praying Jew* (left) from earlier in Chagall's career, there is a strong connection between the two. It is not surprising that he would recall the religious life of his childhood and all of its longings for Jerusalem and the Holy Land after his own first trip there. It is as if he shared his experience with those childhood community members and teachers who only dreamed and prayed for it.

While not in traditional male prayer attire -- *tefillin* and *tallit* -- based on his expression and grip on the Torah, the Jew seems to be praying. There is great despair in his expression, like that of the Jewish people, still in exile and facing great anti-Semitism.

They have been displaced countless times. Chagall's experience of Palestine provided a sense of hope, implied by the white cloth around him.[33]

Grasping the Torah is a way of expressing the importance of the holy book throughout the despair and hope of the Jewish people. The Bible was a cornerstone of Chagall's early education, and remained of great importance throughout his life. His care and intrigue of the Bible are present in each of his Bible drawings. "Since childhood, it [the Bible] has filled me with a sight of the destiny of the world, and inspired me in my work."[34]

The white cow hearkens back to young Chagall spending time with his grandfather, the butcher. The cow seems to join the Jewish man to relieve his solitude, as the piece's title implies. In a quote from Hosea 4:16, "Since Israel has run wild, wild as a heifer," the white cow may represent Palestine.[35] I find something curious about the golden yellow horns. Perhaps this is an allusion to the golden calf episode in Exodus. Palestine is purified and being rebuilt, but in an effort to never forget from whence the Jews came, the horns remain golden yellow.

The violin is another symbol from Chagall's childhood. His uncle was a fiddler and he also played when he was young. Violin music can be contemplative or joyous depending on the mood. In *Solitude*, the violin bows at its own strings in a reflective tone, mimicking the Jew's emotion.

The town in this canvas is Vitebsk, as in so many of his paintings. Each looks similar with simple square houses and rounded church steeples. "I never forget the land

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[33] Shearer West, Chagall, (New York: Gallery Books, 1990) 121.
[34] Marc Chagall, Chagall's World: Reflections from the Mediterranean, ed. Andre Verdet (New York: The Dial Press, 1984) 111.
[35] Susan Compton, Chagall, (London: Royal Academy of the Arts, 1985) 213.

where I was born."[36] Intending for this image to hang on the walls of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, adding Vitebsk to this image was a way of introducing his birthplace to the Holy Land so many had only dreamed.

Solitude leaves me wondering what is going through the mind of the Jew in the painting. By this point in Chagall's life, he is a major artist in the modern, Western world. This character is not one he likely has spent much time with since his childhood. Perhaps this memory was sparked while in Palestine. Having spent time in Palestine, now Israel, I understand the impact this three-month vacation must have had on the artist and his wife and daughter. *Solitude* beautifully weaves together the aspirations of the Jewish past with the situation at the time of his visit. There is a tenderness that takes the viewer by the hand and strokes it gently, confirming it will all be all right. Chagall experiences this tenderness as he puts the finishing touches on *Solitude.*

[36] Chagall, Chagall's World: Reflections from the Mediterranean, 21.

Synthesis: Chagall's Childhood, Hasidism and their Niggunim, and *Solitude*

During Marc Chagall's ninety-eight years, the world transformed from simple, folk life to modernity. He witnessed World Wars I & II, the Russian Revolution and the Holocaust. He painted people flying high above his *shtetl* just as humans were learning to create airplanes to bring this dream to reality. He was a part a generation that began communicating via handwritten letters that could take weeks to reach their destination and ended just as computers were entering private homes. He watched the Jewish homeland of Israel move from collective hopes and prayers to the birth of the state in 1948. Through all of these world-changing events, Chagall clung to the memories of his childhood.

He painted the *shtetl,* his family and the religious and cultural icons associated with them throughout his life. It was his early experiences that he carried through every country he lived, every war, and every technological advance. "His *shtetl* setting fused everyday reality with an imaginative world."[37] In *Solitude,* an image created years after his childhood and separation from Vitebsk, the city still looms in the distance as if painted by an onlooker.

The recurring characters in Chagall's images hearken back to his childhood and his family.

[37] Wullschlager, 5.

"Their lives and acts have certainly influenced my art."[38] In *Solitude*, the violin is a reminder of his Uncle Neuch. The cow is a reminder of his grandfather. The bearded Jew sitting contemplatively could be his observant father. In this one image, three allusions are made. There are many different symbols and characters throughout the body of Chagall's work that present his childhood. It is reasonable to expect this in his early work and from other periods of time when he was painting in Vitebsk, but its continuation through to the end of his life is unexpected

Accompanying these images are memories of music from his childhood. There are visual insertions like the violin in *Solitude* that hum a soft melody to the onlooker, but understanding Chagall's musical upbringing allows the onlooker to become immersed in music as well as the color on the canvas.

In the case of *Solitude*, the contemplative and tender nature of the work lends itself to singing the intoxicating nonsense syllables of a Hasidic niggun. The Jew, sitting nostalgically, staring at nothing in particular, could be humming the *Rav's Niggun.* The wordless melody allows him to express all the emotions he is feeling, but lacking the words to express them. Often Chagall has letters, words, or stories in his paintings, perhaps to clarify meaning. Here, no words exist. It is only the 'Ay, dai, dai' of a niggun to say all the things the Jew is contemplating.

Uncle Neuch could have played the niggun on the violin or joined in with Chagall's mother as she used to sing the same niggun with her children. Perhaps both relatives learned this tune from their father, Chagall's grandfather, in his *shtetl,* around the Sabbath table.

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[38] Marc Chagall, Chagall's World: Reflections from the Mediterranean, 23.

As a cantor, Chagall's grandfather would have been well versed in the Hasidic music and proud to share it with his children and their children. Perhaps he even attended one of the 'courts.' As young Chagall stood behind his grandfather leading the community, the Jewish music and ideals saturated his soul, "as though new honey, recently gathered were trickling down inside me."[39]

Chagall grew up with a traditional, religious, Hasidic education. Through assimilation and modernity, much of this was left behind. However, certain elements were retained and re-imagined through a modern lens. The ideals of Hasidism, often through musical experience, strongly affected the paintings of Chagall and his outlook on life.

Chagall never found fulfillment in formal classroom education. Even as a young boy, he preferred wandering the streets and observing people and life to the confinement of a classroom. In spite of atrocities surrounding Chagall's life, he chose joy. In a conversation with Marc Chagall, Andre Verdet states, "Despite the crimes and massacres perpetrated by mankind all over the world, you still continue to believe in a fundamental seed of purity, a root of essential beauty, a stem of original goodness, synonymous with innocent, playful mischievousness and poetry—in other words, with love."[40]

Another example of Chagall blending the education of his childhood with the modern world he was living is found in Chemjo Vinaver's Anthology of Jewish Music Introducing his one hundred and three musical examples is a drawing by Marc Chagall. The primary figure is biblical King David strumming his lute. To his back is a fiddler in

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[39] Chagall, My Life 14.
[40] Andre Verdet, Chagall's World: Reflections from the Mediterranean, (New York: The Dial Press, 1984) 23.

typical Russian attire and a few rooftops belonging to the shtetl below. In this anthology of the music Chagall grew up hearing and singing, Chagall presents Jewish music of antiquity represented by King David in juxtaposition with the music of his childhood with the iconic fiddler. It was this juxtaposition that followed him throughout his life, his roots.

As mentioned earlier, Hasidism seeks the attainment of דביקות, *devekut,* spiritual ecstasy. Chagall learned this through his grandfather, the cantor, as well as his mother, who began singing niggunim at random. This ideal can be elaborated for a modern, assimilated Hasid like Chagall. Not just music was a form of religious expression, but the arts in general. The Hasidim used the art of dance or movement in their prayer. For Chagall, painting was a form of ecstasy that brought him to God. "Every color should encourage prayer…I can't pray myself, I just work."[41] His canvases were his prayers.

In a Hasidic niggun, *devekut* is possible within a typical ABCB form during the "C" section. Spiritually, it is the highest section as well as employing the highest pitches and widest range. It is through music that this ecstasy can be reached. According to the *Ladder of Elevation of a Niggun*, a niggun can take a Jew two rungs beyond the pinnacle of *devekut.*

In exploring this process, it is possible to associate the ecstasy of singing a niggun with other creative processes, like Marc Chagall painting a canvas. While he often had a plan or form for what he was about to paint, much like a niggun has a form, he often lost

[41] Marc Chagall, Chagall's World: Reflections from the Mediterranean, 46.

himself in his work, much like devoted Jews have the possibility of losing themselves in the singing of a niggun. The following chart compares Chagall's creative process with the different elevations of a niggun.

Ladder of Elevation of a Niggun[42]	**Parallels to Chagall's Creative Process**
The outpouring of the soul and its effort to rise out of the mire of sin, out of the evil shell	His soul was outpouring with creativity.
Spiritual awakening	The creativity was a spiritual awakening.
The stage in which the individual is possessed by his thoughts.	He was completely enchanted in his creativity.
Communion with God	It reached a spiritual plane.
Flaming ecstasy	Flaming ecstasy.
The soul completely casts away its garment of flesh and becomes a disembodied spirit	In an effort to unite with his work, he surrenders to his canvas by removing his clothes.[43]

Chagall never abandoned his birthplace in his artwork. He suspended time for ninety-eight years, allowing King David and the fiddler to exist together. His childhood mingled in every stage of his life and every style he painted. The wordless niggunim wove in and out of time and space through reds and blues and every hue Chagall blessed with his brush. Time, space, music, family, Hasidism and childhood danced from canvas to canvas all through Marc Chagall's life.

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[42] Pasternak, 17.

[43] From Chagall's first autobiography, My Own World, found in Benjamin Harshav, Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative, (California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 144.

Chagall's Life: Paris, 1910-1914

Chagall made the decision to move to Paris while living in St. Petersburg. It was timely for several reasons. Paris was exposed in May 1907 to its first Russian ballet, *Ballets Russes*, which sparked a newfound interest in Russian culture, with its exotic and old-world style of bold and bright colors. Leon Bakst designed the sets to heighten the role of scenery and costume to add to the action on-stage. This event opened the door for Chagall's own sense of color and design, and the role of his paintings on stage.

Bakst returned to St. Petersburg to teach in the Zvantseva School. Chagall, already aware of Bakst's fame, felt an immediate kinship with him upon hearing his accent, similar to his own, a Jew from the Pale of Settlement. The following exchange demonstrates their instantaneous pairing as student and teacher. Bakst was brutally honest, and Chagall accepted his praise and criticism.

> *As he turned my sketches over which, one by one, I picked up from the floor where I had piled them up, he said, drawling out the words in his lordly accent:*
> *"Ye...es...es...es! There's talent here; but you've been sp-oi-led, you're on the wrong track...sp-oi-l-ed"...*
> *Spoiled but not completely...Had anyone else spoken those words, I would have paid no attention. But Bakst's authority was too great for me to disregard his opinion."*[44]

Bakst strongly encouraged his pupils to find their own unique style in the modern art scene, a lesson Chagall internalized. Chagall was also influenced by Bakst's awareness of color and style. "Uninterested in naturalistic accuracy, he rated a painting according to the tone and texture, tensions and dialogues, among the colors; he

[44] Wullschlager, 106.

encouraged simple drawing and forbade black outlines, because they interrupted the flow between colors."[45] This description could describe many of Chagall's works.

At the end of each week, Bakst would go around and assess everyone's work. The first time he came to Chagall's work he showed dislike and unsurprised disappointment. The second time he simply said nothing. Chagall noted, "..nowhere had I been as unhappy as after that remark of Bakst's."[46]

Determined to impress his teacher, Chagall spent three weeks away from school to perfect his painting. Upon his return, Bakst did not overlook it. Bakst hung it on the wall of the classroom: a major accomplishment. This was one of many experiences that led Chagall to understand a fundamental truth about himself. "Actually, I cannot learn anything. More correctly, no one can teach me anything...I grasp things with my inner ear. ...The general methods of schools do not stick to me."[47]

The tutelage of Bakst, while non-formative in Chagall's eyes, admittedly, opened him up to the next, and arguably the most prolific stage of Chagall's career. "Bakst opened a door on Europe...Bakst changed my life. I will never forget that man." Paris, the epicenter for modern, Western art, was Chagall's new ambition.

Chagall returned from St. Petersburg to encourage his family to join him in Paris. As he prepared for his journey abroad, he realized that his provincial town of Vitebsk did not interest him anymore. Like a college student returning home for summer vacation, he found the level to which the town was cut off from the modern advancements

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Wullschlager,111.
[47] Chagall, My Own World, 135.

embarrassing. Only Paris would soothe his desire and when summer concluded, he made the long journey.

Before he left though, during the summer of 1910, Chagall met Bella Rosenfeld. Each found comfort in the other as they asserted their frustrations with Vitebsk. Their romance blossomed. She posed for him and he painted her with delicate love and care. His desire to be in Paris was now two-fold. Bella's parents were displeased with their daughter's choice for a fiancée. They saw him as a starving artist from the wrong side of town. He now had to go to Paris to earn their respect and approval. He needed to become a success.

During this time, Chagall also painted scenes of Russian life. which would serve as material for paintings later in life. He used these works as a means of trade with Maxim Vinaver. He covered Chagall's travel expenses and gave him a monthly stipend in exchange for several works. With the monetary support he needed, Chagall left Russia for the first time and arrived in Paris four days later.

"It was precisely this long, four-day journey [by train] from Paris to Russia that prevented me from returning—right away, or a week or a month later. I wanted to dream up some vacation, just to be able to visit home. All those thoughts and ideas about returning home were cut off by the Louvre."[48] Chagall had found his teacher in the halls and exhibitions of Paris' museums, especially the Louvre. He was humbled by what he saw and recognized the inferiority of Russian art and her artists compared to the paintings he saw in Paris. The paintings were "more psychological forces...forces in your blood

[48] Chagall, My Own World, 142.

that moves people toward music, or painting or literature, or dreaming."[49] Chagall recognized an entirely new style utilizing geometric shapes he had been so fond of as a boy in school and an abandonment of presenting reality. The impact of cubism, a genre of painting gathering its first audiences in Paris during the time of Chagall's arrival, on Chagall proved strong in his own art.

After a period of settling in Paris, Chagall took residence at *La Ruche*, a beehive shaped building that was home to many other artists, poets and sculptors with similar, Pale of Settlement accents. He locked himself in his penthouse apartment, paid for by monthly stipends from Vinaver. He painted furiously in the style he learned on the walls of Paris' museums. He developed a system for learning that he would employ with other new styles later in his life. He re-imagined the works he had created during his summer with Bella in Vitebsk and earlier paintings done in Russia. This time they were enriched with Parisian sensibilities of color and space.

Birth (1910)

Birth (1912)

He sat down to paint and found himself in conversation with Vitebsk. "As if in reply, the town seems to snap apart, like the strings of a violin, and all the inhabitants, leaving their usual places, begin to walk above the earth. People I know well, settle down

[49] Ibid.

on roofs and rest there. All the colors turn upside down, dissolve into wine, and my canvas gush it forth."[50] His gushing canvases were labors of great time and isolation. Months passed. Chagall rarely left his apartment. He would paint in a naked frenzy through the night, sleeping during the day and visiting the salons.

Perhaps Chagall retained Leon Bakst's words of encouragement to create one's own style. Acclaimed art critic of the day, Abraham Efros wrote the following of cubism and its impact on Chagall:

> *Cubism destroyed the value of any re-creation of objects in their normal 'everyday' aspect; the mandatory, essential 'deformation' of objects was pronounced as the basic principle of art. Thus the doors were wide open for Chagall's fantasy.*[51]

It was fantasy that captured Chagall. He criticized cubist painters of only being interested in the technical aspects of their work. Chagall wanted to express his dreams. In these dreams he found the images of his home, Vitebsk alongside bustling Paris. "He carried [Vitebsk] like a holy grail, careful not to spill a drop of precious memories."[52] This made Chagall's work unique from his fellow Eastern European artists, rejecting their *shtetls* and memories. Chagall was fusing Russian, Jewish and French traditions.

Marc Chagall's Parisian debut was in the spring of 1912, at an open exhibition in the *Salon des Independants*. The art critic, poet and friend of Chagall's, Guillaume Apollinaire, wrote the following of the artists work:

> *Those who are in a hurry would do well to begin their visit [in the room] which contains the first really significant works. The Russian Chagall is exhibiting a*

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[50] Marc Chagall, My Life , 94.
[51] Wullschlager, 137.
[52] Sidney Alexander, Marc Chagall: An Intimate Biography, (New York: Paragon House, 1978) 117.

> *golden donkey smoking opium. This canvas has outraged police. But a bit of golden paint smeared on the offending lamp made everything all right.*[53]

Apollinaire's review brought Chagall fame not only as the best artist in the show, but also gave his exhibition a sense of near unlawful proportion.

Through Apollinaire's respect for Chagall grew a friendship. Chagall was very private about his apartment. *La Ruche* housed many artists and each was trying to be the next big attraction on the Parisian art scene. He did not want to risk his ideas being stolen and appear on another's canvas. For this reason Chagall chose poets as friends over painters. On one particular occasion when Chagall invited Apollinaire to his apartment, the poet was struck by the world in Chagall's paintings. "What was astonishing in Chagall's painting was some childish inspiration, something subconscious, instinctive, something unbridled—colorful...*Surnaturel*!"[54] Chagall brought an expressive, mystic sensibility to his painting that strongly affected modern art.

Another poet of even greater importance to Chagall was neighbor Blaise Cendrars. "Their modernist idioms were very similar: Cendrars' ruptured poetic style echoes the fantastical, quicksilver rhythms and upside-down compositions of Chagall's Paris years."[55] Insight can be gained from Cendrars' observations of Chagall in his French poems from the collection "Nineteen Elastic Poems." (See addendum p.74) Chagall trusted and respected Cendrars so deeply that when he suggested new names for some of Chagall's seminal works, Chagall obliged. *Dedicated to My Fiancee, To Russia, Asses and Others* and *I and the Village* are examples of Cendrars poetics.

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[53] Wullschlager, 138.
[54] Wullschlager, 142.
[55] Wullschlager, 158.

To gain wider recognition, especially in Russia, Chagall submitted some works to St. Petersburg for the World of Art Exhibition. They were rejected. Bella used this as an opportunity to see the latest of her fiancée's work and try to find the true reason for their denial. She traveled from her university in Moscow and reported to Chagall that anti-Semitism most likely played a role. She also commented at length on his Parisian work. She called it "crude, quite boyish," and sharply reminded him of a need for modesty. She found his work arrogant and superficial, lacking connection. She blamed this on not being young and naïve.

Bella's comments served as a wake-up call. He painted *The Violinist*, his most important painting of 1913 in response, on a tablecloth she had given him four years earlier as he left Vitebsk. This was a way of incorporating her into the painting. He also realized the time had come to return to his beloved if he was to hold onto her heart. His first solo show was to be held in Berlin. It would later serve as a "heralding trumpet to his future fame."[56] This would be the final success to prove to Bella's parents that he was a worthy husband for their daughter.

In May 1914 the Russian consulate awarded him a passport valid for three months. Intending to return with his wife, he tied the door of his studio in *La Ruche* with a rope and turned down a request to sublet it. He left Paris for Vitebsk, via Berlin.

> *While in Berlin, I did not sense that a month later that bloody comedy [World War I] would begin: that comedy in which the whole earth, along with Chagall, would be turned upside down on a brand new stage where such mass acts are performed in a ballet.*
> *My premonitions did not worry me enough to keep me from traveling to Russia for three months, where I planned on the one hand to attend my sister's wedding, and on the other hand—the meet her [Bella]...*

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[56] Alexander, 152.

...Vitebsk is a different country altogether. An unusual city—an unfortunate city. A sad city. A city filled with girls, young girls I had no chance (or no sense) to even touch. A city with dozens, even hundreds of prayer houses, butcher shops, passerby...What kind of Russia is this. It is only my city, mine, a city I found myself.
...In those days I painted my Vitebsk series of 1914. I painted everything that popped into my eyes. I was satisfied with anything, fences, posts, a floor, a table....one rainy evening, I stood under the wedding canopy, in the proper way, as in my painting.
...They were waiting for me and in the meantime gossiping...It wasn't proper to admit he's a painter. On the other hand, they say he's famous and gets lots of money for his paintings...
...Then the war broke out, and Europe was closed to me.[57]

What Chagall could never have predicted was that this war would begin a long period of uncertainty in Europe, culminating in a second world war that would mark the end of Eastern European Jewry. Yiddish European culture was in its final decades. The next section explores Yiddish musical styles.

[57] Chagall, My Own World, 153.

Yiddish Folk Song

To understand a culture's folk songs is to glimpse the world during which they were written. Exploring Yiddish folk songs offers this insight into Marc Chagall's cultural heritage that influenced his art. Folk music includes "any music not prescribed by the liturgy, fixed in notation...or composed for a formal public venue."[58] *Yiddish* refers to the everyday language used by Ashkenazi Jews that fused several European languages with Hebrew. The two terms combined refer to the music of the common, Yiddish speaking Jews of Eastern Europe reflecting their aspirations, culture, beliefs and style.

The culture of Yiddish folk songs before the modern period was that of oral transmission. A tune would transform slowly until it might not even be discernable as the original tune. The text might have been altered to better reflect a particular person or a region's historical situation. The original composer or author was lost in transmission.

Even into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, authorship of most of the songs remained anonymous. The exact dating of songs was also indeterminable. Yiddish folk song moved from oral tradition to documented, notated, and preserved work when the Russian government hired two Jewish ethnologists, Saul M. Ginsberg (1866-1940) and Pesach S. Marek (1862-1920), to collect and preserve Jewish folk songs. Their publications, first in 1901, brought new interest to the study of Jewish folk song as a systematic, scholarly, and practical genre worth of performance. They documented, and therefore protected, the music of mothers singing about their hopes and dreams for their children, young lovers singing of their nightly trysts, and children singing to remind them of their daily lessons in *cheder*.

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[58] Emanuel Rubin and John H. Baron, Music in Jewish History and Culture. (Michigan: Harmonic Park Press, 2006) 118.

These represent a few genres of Yiddish folksongs. (See addendum p.76) Through the lyrics of Yiddish folksong, an understanding of aspirations, culture, beliefs and style can be drawn. A textual analysis of *Di Gilderne Pave* will demonstrate these elements:

Es is gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	It has flown, the golden peacock,
Iber ale yamen.	over all the seas.
Loz gerisn, du gilderner foygl,	Send regards, you golden bird
Mayn liber, hartsiker mamen	to my loving sincere mother.
Gefloygn, gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	Flown, flown, the golden peacock,
Ibern taykh dem glatn--	over the river, the smooth [one]--
Loz gerisn, du gilderner foygl,	Send regards, you golden bird,
Mayn libn, hartsikn tatn.	to my loving sincere father.
Gefloygn, gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	Flown, flown, the golden peacock,
Iber ale felder,	over all [the] fields,
Hot zi farloyrn dem gildernem feder,	It has lost a golden feather,
In di fremde lender.	In the foreign lands.
Nit azoy di gilderne feder,	Not so the golden feather,
Vi di pave aleyn.	as the peacock itself.
Nit azoy der fremder zun,	Not so the foreign sun,
Vi di tokhter aleyn.	as your daughter alone.
Ve es iz biter, mayn libe muter,	As it is biter, my dear mother,
A vaser on a fish,	a [body of] water without fish,
Azoy iz biter, mayn libe muter,	so much is it bitter, my dear mother,
Bay a fremdn tish.	as a stranger's table.
Vi es biter, mayn libe muter,	As it is bitter, my dear mother,
A feygele on a nest,	[to be] a bird without a nest,
Azoy iz biter, mayn libe muter,	so much is it bitter, my dear mother,
Shver un shvigers kest.	father-in-law and mother-in-law's sustenance.[59]

Di Gilderne Pave fits into various categories of Yiddish folk song. It represents a 'parting song' as well as demonstrating 'the bitterness of love.' Generally this can be understood as a secular song, like much of the repertoire, but the ideals and teachings of the synagogue find their way in. The author is far from his parents and seemingly his

[59] Arthur Graham, Singing in Yiddish (New York: Tara Publication, 1985) 32-33.

wife or lover. The poet is expressing the societal importance of family ingrained by the fifth commandment. He is showing honor to his mother and father not only by writing to tell them how much he loves and misses them, but also honoring their status by sending the majestic, golden peacock. The golden peacock appears in several Yiddish poems and songs. It "became the poetic symbol of the Yiddish folk song, carrying messages and greetings from loved ones."[60]

Songs of parting and bitterness are sub-themes in the larger genre of love songs, which comprise the largest portion of Yiddish folk songs. They were also the most popular, tuneful and poetic. Love was expressed between parents and children, family and friends. Often when singing about love, songs took on a playful and sometimes devious tone. Young lovers hid their feelings from their parents while parents employed matchmakers to help along heavenly unions.

The shedding of feathers leads me to imagine that this is not the author's first time away from home. Each destination has not only left behind his influence in a foreign land, hence the abandoned feather, but also his transformations from the experience. Where one feather falls away, a new one grows in. Through this growth, it seems the poet is unclear of his true home. He is 'without a nest.'

The wealth and breadth of songs about marriage indicate how central an institution it was in Eastern European Jewish culture. From the moment a baby was born, parents gently rocked infants to sleep with lullabies about a good marriage. Children passed down singing games about brides and grooms. It is through the extensive and

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[60] Eleanor Gordon Mlotek. Mir Trogn A Gezang! (New York: The Workman's Circle, 2000) 106.

evocative collection of Yiddish folk songs that we know the high regard with with Jews held marriage.

This music is truly a window into the world of Eastern European and Slavic Yiddish life in the modern period. How this time period, and its Yiddish musical traditions, affected Chagall will be explored in the following sections.

Art: *To Russia, Asses and Others*

Marc Chagall created the work, *To Russia, Asses and Others*, during his first period in Paris, in late 1911 and early 1912 in his penthouse at *La Ruche*. The painting was originally named, *The Aunt in the Sky*, but was retitled by poet and close friend, Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961). The work is composed of oil on canvas with stirring colors that stand out against the black night sky.

To Russia, Asses and Others was one of three paintings -- the others being

Dedicated to my Fiancée (left) and *The Drunkard* (right) -- that Chagall worked

tirelessly on through the winter to display in Paris's open exhibition at the *Salon des Independants* in the spring of 1912. This was Chagall's first exhibition with his own work in Paris. The three pieces were created to introduce the world to the new style of Chagall and hopefully bring him fame as well as to usurp the art world's assertion that Paris was the single place of artistic "uniqueness." [61] He hoped an artist from Russia could shine amid Parisians.

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[61] Chagall, My Own World, 145.

Chagall's affinity for large canvasses was indulged in the size of *To Russia, Asses and Others,* 61 3/8 x 48 inches. (*About 4 x 3 feet*) His new sense of color was also expressed on this canvas. Against the black, night sky, a red bull stands upon a rooftop, nursing a small child and a small goat, while it feeds from a red trough below its head and a woman floats above the town. Her head is detached from her body. Below her feet is a church and a town. Red light emanates behind her head, as well as splotches of green, yellow and white in organized sections within the night sky.

Through a deeper analysis of the elements of *To Russia, Asses and Others*, one can gain better understanding of Marc Chagall as a Jewish artist. Color plays an enormous role in his works. The images pop out of the black night sky with vigor, especially the warm, red hue of the bull. There are no outlines, just shadows created with the red to give the bull form. The green creatures suckling below the bull appear weak.

The bull is a representation of Mother Russia, the country of Chagall's birth "elevated above her churches."[62] While his roots in the Pale of Settlement surrounded him by iconic *shtetl* Jews, he ultimately understood the all-encompassing and damaging reality of the church being central to Russia. The suckling, green calf and child highlight the fertility of Mother Russia. The figures also serve "additional functions and allusions: The green, young calves turn into Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome." [63] Depicting Russia as Rome was common at this time in poetry as well as art. The green child on the right is perhaps Chagall being nourished by Mother Russia.

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[62] Benjamin Harshav, Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006) 88.
[63] Ibid.

Another, simpler explanation for the bull is Chagall's proximity to the Parisian slaughterhouses while we was living and painting at *La Ruche*. "Further down, they slaughter the cattle. In the slaughterhouses, cows mooed. I painted cows."[64] It is also evocative of his childhood visits to his grandfather, the butcher.

The milkmaid floating above the town is painted in contrast to the warm, vibrant hue of the bull. Her dress is typical of peasant attire, composed of cooler, muted hues, punctuated by circles of color: "The 'eyes' of a peacock tail cover her body." The feature of the woman that forces the viewer to temporarily suspend reality is her detached head. "...Her head is 'flying in the sky' (the Yiddish idiom, meaning carried away by fantasy)."[65] The element of unexpected flight appears often in Chagall's works. "If somebody tells you a lie or an unbelievable story, you may retort in Yiddish, *a ku iz gefloygn ibern dakh."* Literally, this means "a cow flew over the roof, meaning, 'Sure!' 'Get real'!"[66] This is reference to the absurdity of this scene. The combination of the two Yiddish, idiomatic images lends even more to responding to this picture by saying, 'Get real!'

Chagall accepted that his true meaning for things was meaningless to the eye of the viewer and because of this, rarely offered explanation. However, in this case, Chagall was asked about this scene. His response was, "In the case of the decapitated woman with

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[64] Chagall, My Own World, 144.
[65] Harshav, Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World, 88.
[66] Benjamin Harshav, *The Role of Language in Modern Art: On Texts and Subtexts in Chagall,* Modernism/Modernity 1.2 (1994), 51-87.

the milk pails, I was first led to separating her head from her body merely because I needed [to fill in] an empty space there."[67]

The village scene at the bottom of the image is characterized as Russian because of the architecture of the church with the blue dome. Upon the dome is a Star of David and triangles as if to represent a decomposed Star of David. This incredibly subtle detail is also on the left-hand side of the painting. The whole and broken stars represent "a little Jewish presence in big Mother Russia."[68]

The green, white and yellow triangular bursts of color could be a reference to the solar eclipse of 1912. Therefore, it is possible that this is not a night sky, but the blackness of a solar eclipse with hints of light and color shining through. The milkmaid's head might be detached to see the eclipse.

Chagall brought talent and style all his own from Russia, but he had much to learn upon arriving in Paris. "No academies or schools of any city could give me what I bit off and gnawed at the heart of French exhibits, display windows and museums."[69] Chagall mentions viewing the paintings of Veronese, Manet, Delacroix, Courbet, Millet, Pissaro, Picasso, Gleizes, and Delaunay before going to work on his own masterpieces.

Cubism was the strongest influence on Chagall at this time. The emphasis on the geometrical shapes that make up an object can be seen in the composition of the woman.

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[67] James Johnson Sweeney. "An Interview with Marc Chagall." *Partisan Review II*, no. I (Winter 1944). In Benjamin Harshav, ed. *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture 1910-19.* Paris (1997) 83.
[68] Harshav, Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World, 88.
[69] Chagall, My Own World in Harshav, 143.

On her right arm in a rectangle; her left leg a triangle. Another image that more obviously uses cubism is *Self Portrait with Seven Fingers*. This image is also significant because it shows the artist creating *To Russia, Asses and Others.* Geometric shapes are unmistakable everywhere on this canvas.

The primary cubists, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963), artists whose work Chagall would have viewed, depicted mostly still-life images of musical instruments, and items around the house. They did paint people as well, but not scenes, the way Chagall did. Also in contrast to the subject matter of cubism, Chagall painted from his memory. He never abandoned the folk quality of his images. He took cubism and made it his own unique style.

Synthesis: Chagall in Paris, Yiddish Folk Song, and *To Russia, Asses and Others*

Marc Chagall was deeply influenced by Yiddish culture. The texts of Yiddish folk songs describe folk life similar to Chagall's childhood. Many songs revolve around mothers' dreams for their infants; most often, that their child will find a good match for marriage. Mothers dreamed of worthy occupations for their little boys, such as Torah scholars and businessmen. Chagall's mother dreamed of him as a clerk or an accountant. Both were professions that would earn him a good living and allow him to buy his way out of poverty stricken *shtetl* life. Mothers wanted for their children what they were not allowed or able to afford.

Yiddish folk songs also reflected unending devotion to Judaism and Jewish culture. Perhaps the most famous Yiddish folk song, *Oyfn Pripetshik,* describes children going to *cheder* and learning the Hebrew letters. The second half of the song explains that as children grow to adults, they will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Hebrew letters. The song concludes, 'When you grow weary and burdened with exile, you will find comfort and strength within the Jewish alphabet.' Throughout Chagall's life he found comfort and strength, as this lyric instructed him, not only in the Jewish alphabet, but also Jewish culture.

Many things from Chagall's life, especially Jewish culture and the culture around him, influenced his art. The work *To Russia, Asses and Others* was influenced by the Parisian style of painting, Cubism that Chagall was newly exposed to. It also conveys the emotional state of the artist

through its use in *Self Portrait with Seven Fingers* and its depiction of the song *Iz gefloygn di goldene pave.*

In *Self Portrait with Seven Fingers*, Chagall placed himself at an easel, creating *To Russia, Asses and Others.* Above his head, in either corner is an image of Paris out his window, and Russia, perhaps Vitebsk, upon a cloud. Between the two cites are written in Yiddish: *Rosiye* and *Pariz*. Yiddish was his most comfortable language , although its use is curious. It would make sense for Russia to be written in Cyrillic and Paris to be written in French. Writing in Yiddish established a third, perhaps more important influence: Vitebsk. The depictions of Paris and Russia, with Chagall sitting between the two, convey Chagall's confusion for where he belongs, unsure of where his 'nest' is, just like in *Iz gefloygn di goldene pave.* Perhaps writing each in Yiddish established Vitebsk as his nest even while he is in Russia and Paris.

The state of longing for home is demonstrated in Chagall's use of the eye of the peacock on the milkmaid's dress in *To Russia, Asses and Others.* "A well-known nostalgic Yiddish folksong, *Iz gefloygn di goldene pave* ("When the Golden Peacock Flew"), which he couldn't have avoided hearing in his milieu or readings in the famous Ginsburg-Marek collection of Yiddish folksongs published in St. Petersburg in 1901, combines the peacock with love and longing for parents and homeland."[70] One of the functions of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music was to perform concerts of materials collected and compositions written by members. It is likely that Paris was one

[70] Harshav, The Lost Jewish World, 88.

of the locations for such a concert and Chagall attended. He often listened to music while he painted, and if this song made it to the radio, as its popularity might entitle, this song could have been playing as he was painting *To Russia, Asses and Others.* The role of the peacock was to elicit feelings of longing. The art and music work hand-in-hand to demonstrate Chagall's longing for Vitebsk and all the loved ones still residing there.

This relationship demonstrates *ekphrasis.* Chagall re-presents the peacock from the song on his canvas. Chagall was aware of the popular understanding of the peacock and knew the audience would relate the bird to a sense of longing. The interplay between music and art heightens the viewers' experience of the painting, as well as brings the listener a more visceral experience of the song by adding an image for which to imagine.

Chagall might have connected to the song *Iz gefloygn di goldene pave* for several other reasons.

Es is gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	It has flown, the golden peacock,
Iber ale yamen.	over all the seas.
Loz gerisn, du gilderner foygl,	Send regards, you golden bird
Mayn liber, hartsiker mamen	to my loving sincere mother.
Gefloygn, gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	Flown, flown, the golden peacock,
Ibern taykh dem glatn--	over the river, the smooth [one]--
Loz gerisn, du gilderner foygl,	Send regards, you golden bird,
Mayn libn, hartsikn tatn.	to my loving sincere father.

Chagall had traveled far from home, past many seas and rivers to stretch his wings like the golden peacock. His talents were caged in Russia. There were few others of his talent and potential in Vitebsk and no cutting edge style and techniques. He left behind his 'loving sincere mother…loving sincere father.'

Gefloygn, gefloygn, di gilderne pave,	Flown, flown, the golden peacock,
Iber ale felder,	over all [the] fields,
Hot zi farloyrn dem gildernem feder,	It has lost a golden feather,
In di fremde lender.	In the foreign lands.

Chagall kept the feathers of his home and childhood as close to him as he could by painting his beloved Vitebsk. Eventually, he had to create emotional space from his childhood in order to grow into a great artist. He needed to experience Paris without the intense longing he initially felt upon arriving.

Ve es iz biter, mayn libe muter,	As it is bitter, my dear mother,
A vaser on a fish,	a [body of] water without fish,
Azoy iz biter, mayn libe muter,	so much is it bitter, my dear mother,
Bay a fremdn tish.	as a stranger's table.

Vi es biter, mayn libe muter,	As it is bitter, my dear mother,
A feygele on a nest,	[to be] a bird without a nest,
Azoy iz biter, mayn libe muter,	so much is it bitter, my dear mother,
Shver un shvigers kest.	father-in-law and mother-in-law's sustenance.[71]

During those early days and weeks in Paris, Chagall desperately longed for his family and Bella, his fiancée. A piece of him was missing like 'a body of water without fish.' Chagall could identify with this song, and especially its final line, for it was a mitigating factor in Chagall leaving for Paris. Bella's parents did not approve of Chagall for their daughter. He left to gain fame and money so that upon his return, they would bless their marriage.

With so many parallels to Chagall's life, it is not surprising this popular song would resonate with Chagall. The eye of the peacock in *To Russia, Asses and Others* is a visual re-presenting of the song, *Iz gefloygn di goldene pave.*

[71] Graham, 32-33.

The images used in *To Russia, Asses and Others* also show the influence of his beloved city. "The fact that I made use of cows, milkmaids, roosters and provincial Russian architecture as my source forms is because they are a part of the environment from which I spring and which undoubtedly left the deepest impression on my visual memory of the experiences I have."[72] The faint melody of his childhood sang in his ear and danced to his paintbrush, forever being immortalized on his canvas.

[72] Sweeney, 83.

Chagall and the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre

The notion of Jewish theatre had little historical background when, in 1918, the Yiddish theatre of Moscow was formed. The *Purim-shpil* was the dramatic event of the year. Until then, this art form had been prohibited by the government. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the government eliminated the Pale of Settlement and abolished anti-Jewish restrictions. Jews left the Pale of Settlement for the once-restricted metropolises of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Jews finally had permission to create a public venue of Jewish/Yiddish culture, for which there was a great demand.

Yiddish was the primary language and culture of the newcomers to the big cities as they began assimilating into Russian culture. "Yiddish theatre is first of all a theatre in general, a temple of shining art and joyous creation—a temple where the prayer is chanted in the Yiddish language."[73] The assimilation of Jews was apparent in the status of the Yiddish theatre as the location for cultural identification. Yiddish theatre replaced synagogues.

The theatre's audience grew beyond the former Jews of the Pale. Russified Jews also found a connection to the style and genre employed. While linguistically there was a gap, "words were not needed to understand it, it was pantomime with movement into eternity."[74] Therefore, it brought the poverty stricken and wealthy together, celebrating their unique Jewish identity in the face of secularization. The Theatre was for the broad Jewish community.

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[73] Aleksey Granovsky. "Our Goals and Objectives" The Moscow Yiddish Theatre: Art on Stage in the Time of Revolution, Ed. Benjamin Harshav (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 85.
[74] Benjamin Harshav, The Moscow Yiddish Theatre (New Haven: Yale Press, 2008) 5.

Aleksey Granovsky, a Jew from Germany, was the first director and artistic leader of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre (GOSEKT). He brought the goal of melding a variety of art forms: literature, art, dance, acrobatics, music and drama to the highest standard in order to equal theatre houses in Europe. To this end, Granovsky had his actors educated in each of these genres by the best teachers in each field. In an effort to build a high-profile theatre, Granovsky took the recommendation of art critic and literary director, Abram Efros and invited Chagall to design the sets for the inaugural production, *An Evening with Sholem Aleichem: 1. Agents: A Joke in One Act, 2. Mazel Tov- A Comedy in One Act, 3. It's a Lie.*

Marc Chagall moved to Moscow with his wife Bella and infant daughter, Ida. He was not promised large sums of money to work for GOSEKT. The timing was right. Kazmir Malevich, much behind Chagall's back, supplanted his influence in Vitebsk as commissar and teacher of art. The early condition for the Chagall family was bleak. "A little room, overlooking the courtyard. Damp. In the bed even the blankets are damp...It was as though we were sleeping out of doors....all that was lacking were the clouds of Moscow, and the moon...No money. We didn't need any—there was nothing to buy."[75] In the face of this poverty, Chagall brought all of the sustenance and luxuries no one could afford and painted them.

He turned the task of creating a backdrop into a one-of-a-kind, all-encompassing, magical theatre that later received the title, "Chagall's Box." As he later wrote in his autobiography:

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[75] Chagall, My Life, 156-157.

Ah! I thought, here is an opportunity to do away with the old Jewish theatre, its psychological naturalism, it's false beards. There on their walls I shall at least be able to do as I please and be free to show everything I consider indispensable to the rebirth of the national theatre.[76]

Chagall immersed himself completely in the walls of the ninety-seat theatre. He locked himself inside, allowing only a few to see the work in process. Even his meals were left at appointed times in a crack of the door. Efros described Chagall as being completely "possessed" by this work. "Joyfully and boundlessly, he bled paintings, images and forms." The one backdrop turned into the back wall, the side wall, the spaces between the windows, the ceiling and the curtain. Chagall's Box was unlike anything else before it. "The audience came as much to be perplexed by this amazing cycle of Jewish frescoes as to see Sholem Aleichem's skits."[77]

The main actor, Solomon Mikhoels, admired Chagall's paintings. He studied them. One day he came to Chagall and announced, " You know, I studied your sketches. I understood. I changed my role entirely."[78] The topsy-turvy, Chagallian world in paint came to life on stage. The actors followed Mikhoels' lead and allowed the art to affect their acting and especially their movements. They would manipulate their hands to emulate one of Chagall's images. Without giving the actors verbal direction, Chagall was directing them. This did not please Granovsky.

Chagall possessed a keen attention to detail. There are almost hidden messages in the images within his box. One would need to go up to the painting to even notice them.

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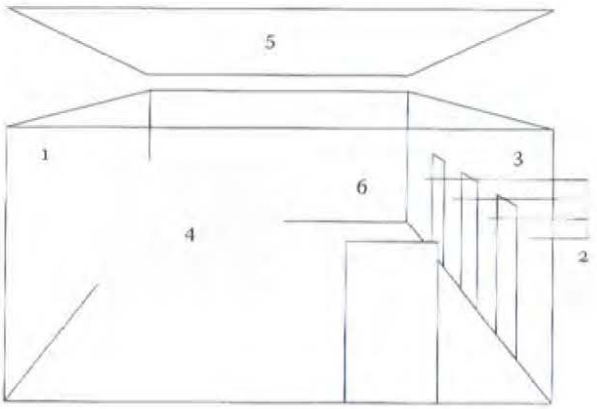
[76] Chagall, My Life 162.
[77] Abram Efros, "Chagall in Granovsky's Theatre" Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative Ed. Benjamin Harshav (California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 287-288.
[78] Marc Chagall "My Work in the Moscow Yiddish Theatre" Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative Ed. Benjamin Harshav (California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 292.

On the day of the performance, Chagall painted tiny birds and pigs too small for an opera glass to see on Mikhoels' costume and body. He was determined to have every inch be in his way. At the same opening performance, the following exchange clarifies why this was the only work Chagall did for GOSEKT.

> *Granovsky hangs up a plain, real towel! I sigh and scream.*
> *"A plain towel?!"*
> *"Who is the director here, me or you?" he answered.*[79]

Chagall's Box contained the following works on canvas. 1. *Introduction to Jewish Theatre*, an eight-meter long, pictorial timeline of the history of the theatre to that point hung on the left wall. Opposite that, filling the space between three tall windows were the four arts, 2. *Music, Dance, Drama* and *Literature*. Above the four arts, along the length of the wall was 3. *The Wedding Table* including many foods the cast and Chagall yearned for. On the wall between these, across from the stage, was 4. *Love and Stage*, a cubist couple dancing. The stage (#6) designs were different for each of the three acts, 1. *Agents: A Joke in One Act,* 2. *Mazel Tov- A Comedy in One Act,* 3. *It's a Lie.*



[79] Chagall "My Work in the Moscow Yiddish Theatre" Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative, 293.

1. Introduction to the Jewish Theatre

2. Music

Theatre

Literature

Dance

3. The Wedding Feast

4. *Love on the Stage*

While Chagall only designed for *An Evening of Sholem Aleichem* and left Russia shortly after painting these masterworks, his influence on Jewish theatre in Moscow lasted long after. He was acutely aware of the uniqueness and sustainability of his style. Upon being asked to design for the show *The Dibbuk*, the method of the director enraged Chagall. He responded, "Nevertheless, you will stage it my way, even if I am not there; there is no other way."[80] Natan Altman was hired, and it was clearly created in the Chagallian style. The spread of Yiddish and secular culture into the cities also left their mark on the Yiddish musical tradition, as will be explored in the next section.

[80] Chagall My Life, 166.

Yiddish Art Song

As discussed earlier, Yiddish folk song, the soul music of Eastern European and Slavic Jews was documented and then published for the first time in 1901 by the Jewish ethnologists Saul M. Ginsberg and Pesach S. Marek. About the same time, the Jews were becoming integrated into modern, Eastern European and Russian society. They went beyond the walls of their *shtetls* and became educated not only in *cheder*, but in Western universities. Many even earned degrees in music conservatories.

These changes led to a new style of Jewish folk song. The souls of those Jews were drenched with the sounds of the Jewish folksong, and because of this, their minds expanded to hear these tunes in new, Western ways. Notable of these Jews was Joel Engel (1868-1927). Ginsberg and Marek hired him for his musicianship, a skill neither of the historians possessed. Engel desired "to demonstrate to both the Jewish and non-Jewish intelligentsia that Jewish folk music existed and that it was worthy of performance and study."[81] His devotion earned him the title, 'Father of Jewish art music.'

Beyond the Ginsberg and Marek publications, the perpetuation of Yiddish folk song was further ensured with the formation of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in St. Petersburg, in 1908. The "stated objectives of the Society [were]:

1. *Collect and arrange Jewish folk melodies*
2. *Present lectures and performances of these materials*
3. *Establish and maintain an archive or library of Jewish music*
4. *Issue a periodical, and publish studies on Jewish music*
5. *Encourage individual creativity in Jewish music.*[82]

The hundreds of society members often sparred on the authenticity of Jewish music, with a wide range of opinions about how inclusive they should be. Ultimately, a

[81] Rubin and Baron, 181.
[82] Heskes, 28.

very broad definition of Jewish music was chosen, one that included compositions by Jewish composers, as well as by Russian, non-Jewish composers who used a Jewish theme or text, and any biblical text set to music.

The founding composers and musicians were inspired to create something new in the genre of Jewish music. Their conservatory teacher, Nicolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) charged them with the following: "The Jews possess tremendous folk treasures...Jewish music awaits its' genius."[83] With this, they sought a new style. Jascha Nemtsov shared the following story at a lecture preceding a concert honoring the 100th anniversary of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music.

> *They had a member of the society whose name was Sussman Kisselgoff. He was not a musician at all. Jewish music was a hobby for him. He was a teacher. But this Kisselgoff already had some experience in the field of Jewish traditional music because his wife came from the village Lubavitch...and he spent together with his wife's relatives in the summer months in this village. He was very much interested in the songs by the Hasidim and noted some of them. When he noticed an interest arose in young composers, he put his collection at their disposal.*

This was the process for creating a new style of Jewish music. Composers would begin with a folk melody. They would add Western accompaniment, sometimes retaining the original tone of the piece, but always reinterpreting the original folk tunes.

The society created and published eighty-one compositions in this style during its ten-year existence. These works were written for voice and piano, choir, violin and piano, and string ensemble. In 1918, after World War I and the Russian Revolution, the society disbanded. Some members sojourned in Moscow, where they composed for the newly forming Jewish theatres. The following members of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music demonstrate this phenomenon:

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[83] Eliott Kahn, "Historical Background" Celebrating the founding of The Society for Jewish Folk Music at St. Petersburg New York. 15 Nov. 2008. (Concert program)

The Golem
Premiered: March 15, 1925
Design: Ignaty Nivinsky
Music: Moses Milner (1886-1953)

God of Vengence
Premiered: 1921
Design: Isaac Rabinovich
Music: Solomon Rosowsky (1878-1962)
(Emigrated to Israel, 1925)

Uriel Acosta
Premiered: April 9, 1922
Design: Natan Altman
Music: Solomon Rosowsky
(Emigrated to America)

The Sorceress
Premiered: December 2, 1922
Design: Isaac Rabinovich
Music: Joseph Akhron (1886-1943)
(Emigrated to America, 1925)

At Night in the Old Marketplace
Premiered: February 1925
Design: Robert Falk
Music: Aleksandr Krein (1883-1951)

The Dybbuk
Premiered: January 31, 1922
Design: Natan Altman
Music: Joel Engel (1868-1927)
(Emigrated to Israel, 1924)

Some members immigrated to the United States, Germany, or stayed in Russia. They brought with them the new style of reinterpreting folk traditions to each location as they continued to compose. They also inspired the next generation of Yiddish art song composers.

In America, "more than any other composer, Lazar Weiner (1897-1982) seems to have most directly inherited the mantle of The Society for Jewish Folk Music."[84] He emigrated from a town near Kiev, arriving in New York in 1914 at the age of seventeen. Before leaving, he excelled as a pianist, singer and composer to such heights that he won a partial scholarship to the Kiev Conservatory. In America, he gained an interest in Yiddish culture and began composing Yiddish art songs but did not have anyone to provide feedback. He sent his work to the pioneer of the Society for Jewish Folk Music, Joel Engel who "encouraged him to pursue his composing—but urged him to contribute

[84] Marsha Bryan Edelman, Discovering Jewish Music (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003) 150.

to his own people by imbuing his work with a Jewish flavor."[85] To this end, he continued to write Jewish art music. One such piece is *Der Yid mitn fidl, The Jew with the fiddle,* written in 1956. (See addendum p.77)

The piano accompaniment begins like a Hasidic niggun. As the text enters, the niggun joins the singer as a canon until the niggun is passed to the singer. The text is a dialogue between a husband and wife. The husband desperately wants to play his fiddle all day long while the wife wants her husband to 'fiddle your song with needle and thread'. She wants him to earn a real living. As the wife gets more and more frustrated with his fiddling, the chords grow more dissonant. The accompaniment expresses the emotions of whoever is singing. The niggun recurs throughout the piece in different tessitura and tempos until a grand finale of the husband gloriously playing the niggun on his fiddle with no concern for its impact on anyone else concludes the piece. Music reigns supreme.

This Yiddish art song weaves together the nostalgic style of the Hasidim, the tale of a Yiddish-speaking family trying to balance financial sustainability with joy and happiness as well as the modern approach of the piano to these folk concepts. The intersection of these is the goal of all Yiddish art song. Chagall was able to capture this movement into the modern world through his art, as will be discussed in the following sections.

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[85] Edelman, 151.

Music

Marc Chagall created the work of art titled *Music* in 1920. This panel was one in a series depicting four types of art: *Music, Literature, Dance* & *Drama.* These titles were given in Russian. Chagall's Yiddish titles were "*klezmers*, a wedding jester, women dancers, and a Torah scribe."[86] Chagall's titles are much less universal than the Russian titles. He is clearly depicting the Jewish arts.

These paintings, along with several others, were created for the opening performance of *A Shalom Aleichem Evening,* at the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, also known as GOSEKT. They were made of tempura and gouache on canvas, each nearly the same size, *83 5/8 x 40 ¾ inches*. These four images correlate with the four agents in Shalom Aleichem's *Agents,* one of the three plays performed during the evening.[87] Chagall's creation became known as *Chagall's Box* because he painted every surface, as well as the set and actors. (See diagram in Chagall and the Moscow Yiddish Theatre)

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[86] Benjamin Harshav "Chagall: Postmodernism and Fictional Worlds in Painting" in Marc Chagall and the Jewish Theatre (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992) 35.
[87] Ibid.

Music presents a life-sized, green violinist. The shape of the canvas, tall and thin, was necessary to fit the tall space between the windows. The violinist has a green face and one green hand bowing the wooden-colored violin. Beneath his purple coat, the violinist is wearing a simple, white and black, fringed *tallit* (Jewish prayer shawl). His pants are geometric shapes of differing shades of grey, black and white.

Below the violinist's feet is a Russian village similar in design to the one depicted in *To Russia, Asses and Others.* In the left corner, a goat jumps into the scene. In the open window of the house on the right, a man sits with his knees up. Behind the fence of this house stands a leafless tree with a ladder leaning against it and a rooster perched on a top branch. Above the violinist's head, a man is floating in a rose-colored costume. Above the house on the right is a solid black square propped on a corner. Just to the left of the violinist's beard is a small man with his arms raised over his head. Beside the house, on the far left is a man defecating. In the middle of the canvas, left of the violinist is a man balancing a violin upside-down.

Chagall's creative process for *Music* began on paper, (*12 5/8 x 8 5/8 inches*) a significantly smaller scale than the final canvas. He used pencil and watercolor. The focal elements and color scheme were decided in this early sketch. Even with watercolor, Chagall demonstrated the shading of the final image with defined brushstroke. The darkest element, the green face translates into the only opaque feature in the final canvas as well. A few small details appear later in the process, such as the man balancing the violin, the rooster in the tree, the man in the window and the black square on its corner.

Following the sketch on paper, Chagall created a smaller version, 9 ¾ x 5 ¼ inches, on brown paper. This time he used pencil, gouache and watercolor. There is a faint grid in the background to keep the image the same, just in a smaller scale. This method was likely used to create the large image as well. This image is nearly an exact replica of the final version, except for the black square on its corner.

There is a strong sense of geometric shapes throughout *Music*. The fiddler's purple coat is a mélange of triangles, circles and rectangles. His pants seem patterned from the shapes. The clouds in the sky are an illusion from circles. The houses are combinations of triangles, squares and trapezoids. "...Cubist touches...dominate *Music*."[88]

In the final canvas, Chagall painted a black square on its corner above the house in the top-right. In 1915, Kazmir Malevich created a new style to amaze and challenge the art world. Suprematism sought "to liberate art from the ballast of the representational world. It consisted of geometrical shapes flatly painted on the pure canvas surface."[89] Chagall's black square is a quote of Malevich's work.[90] While Malevich sought to deconstruct the world around him to simple shapes with little color, Chagall was still mesmerized by color and imbued his paintings with life through shapes, color and music, spirituality and meaning.

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[88] Susan Compton, *Chagall's Auditorium: "An Identity Crisis of Tragic Dimensions"* Marc Chagall and the Jewish Theatre (New York: Guggenheim Museum 1992) 6.
[89] Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2004 http://www.reference.com/search?q=Suprematism.
[90] Compton, 8.

In Vitebsk, Malevich stole Chagall's students and began an organization to compete with Chagall's school. Eventually, Chagall left Vitebsk, not wanting to fight Malevich's organizational efforts after he staged a complete takeover. The black square in *Music* is likely a mockery of Malevich.

The various figures around the focal violinist are enchanted by the music. "The Chagall-child is hovering above the music, like a little angel" blessing the music.[91] The little man between the houses at the top of the canvas is excited by the music. The ladder resting on the tree is an allusion to the ladder in Jacob's dream, as well as a reference to Chagall's unique interest in being in lofty places.

Most of the icons are re-presented from Chagall's earlier works and would continue to be re-presented throughout his life. The green violinist plays merrily in the 1912 painting, *The Fiddler*. In *Music*, he takes on a more cubist nature. The use of green can be attributed to Chagall's affinity for the color and use in other paintings. Another interpretation of the color is found in the French idiom, '*a travers la verte*' "indicating inebriation."[92] The canvas is intoxicated with music.

The striking element of this work rests in its attentiveness to detail in spite of this work being hung behind the audience. It is necessary to get up close to notice the subtleties of the rooster in the tree or the man in the window. It was these details that Chagall was determined to present to the viewer. Up until the final moments before the

[91] Harshav, Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World 190.
[92] Susan Compton, Chagall. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1985) 180.

actors went on stage, Chagall was painting miniature images onto their skin. Audience members in the front row would be unlikely to notice them, but he insisted nonetheless.

Chagall seems to welcome the viewer into the intoxicating music of the fiddler. His green face smiles to 'tap along'. His strings sing the melodies of the shtetl past, the theatre present and everything to come. This folk image comes to life for me and invites me to join him through history. The green violinist is Chagall's grandfather, perched on the roof, Chagall's Uncle Neuch playing the violin, even Chagall, learning to play the beloved instrument. *Music* is used as an iconic image for CD covers, music history books, concert programs and much more to elicit the nostalgic music and life of the *shetl.* It is clear that this image triggers memories and stories of a world that no longer exists.

Synthesis: Chagall and the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre, Yiddish Art Song and *Music*

Unlike the previous two syntheses on Chagall's childhood and life in Paris, this synthesis does not explain how ekphrasis was used to affect the art of Marc Chagall. Instead, it explores how Chagall's art affected music and culture. Specifically, how ekphrasis was used based on Chagall's styles of art. Chagall was a unique artist who never fit into a single style of composition, but also fit into every style of composition. He was not a cubist artist, but he employed some of its techniques. He used vibrant colors, but did not conform to abstract uses of them. Chagall was an individual, as encouraged by his early teacher in St. Petersburg, Leon Bakst. This individuality inspired ekphrasis from other artists and mediums.

He was initially asked to create merely a backdrop for the inaugural production at the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre. He took this task and transformed it into an entire theatre of Chagall's world. What started as an exciting first performance turned into an entirely new style of acting to mimic the majesty of Chagall's Box. Actor Solomon Mikhoels was the first to stand in awe of Chagall's work and reinvent his characters. The following is dialogue from The Green Violin, a play written by Elise Thoron and music by Frank London about The Moscow State Yiddish theatre and its relationship with Marc Chagall:

> ***Narrator:*** *Mikhoels opens his eyes to the ceiling. Starts seeing things. His body starts moving in Chagallian shapes. Off kilter. Dreamlike. A painting come to life.*
> *(Violin eerily plays)*
> ***Chagall:*** *Make...Make your hand a square. A fist turned upside down like you are holding a copeck that everyone wants to take.*
> *(Second violin joins dissonantly)*
> *(Solomon Mikhoels is manipulating his hand as Chagall indicates)*
> ***Mikhoels:*** *Your fee for the idea.*

(Hands him nothing)
***Chagall**: (Jokingly) Thank you. This will buy all the nothing that I need...*
***Mikhoels**: It's all here Chagall; my whole character.*[93]

From then on, the actors moved themselves as the Chagallian figures in his canvasses. They were well trained in all forms of the art: literature, art, dance, acrobatics, music and drama as mandated by the director, Aleksey Granovsky. The theatre exemplified ekphrasis, re-presenting each artistic expression in the next. Chagall's presentation on canvas encouraged the actors to re-present his art in their movement.

While an innovative genius, Chagall's attitude toward painting everything, down to the right thumb of an actor and having such a strong impact on their style of acting, forced Granovsky to relieve Chagall from any further productions of the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre. His attitude was no longer welcome, but his innovative style of creation continued on. As Chagall saw it, there was no other way to design for theatre and the theatre directors agreed.

He later heard a few stories about the productions following his work in Jewish theatre in Moscow. One director had "ordered another artist to paint 'a la Chagall'...at Granovsky's, they were going beyond Chagall."[94] A German critic, Max Osborn wrote the following after a production at the Moscow State Yiddish Theatre:

> *When the news arrives about the tailor's unexpected great win of a huge sum, setting the whole town into an unusual excitement, suddenly, high above the roof of one of the buildings appears the figure of a Jew with a red beard and a green greatcoat, with a sack on his back and a staff in his hand. Instinctively I said aloud: 'Chagall!" And suddenly everything became clear: this is the world of Chagall. From him, everything emerged: the young artist...Granovsky's constructions, and the accompanying music of the composer Pulver. The latter,*

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[93] The Green Violin. By Elise Thoron. Music by Frank London.17 Nov 2008 Jewish Museum, New York.
[94] Chagall, My Life, 167.

with unusual expressiveness, embodied Oriental motifs, ancient Jewish images, and Russian songs in operatic melodies, with trumpets and kettledrums...Chagall has the stunning power of transforming the elements of an exceedingly rich and profound artistic folk culture into colorful, dreamy visions that strike our imagination.[95]

This description exemplifies Chagall's impact on theatre design after his departure from Moscow. The reference made in this excerpt to the Jew with a 'sack on his back and a staff in his hand' is a reference to a much earlier painting titled *Over Vitebsk*. The character of the eternal, wandering Jew with a sack on his back is a metaphor for all Jews. This is how Chagall described the prophet Elijah coming to visit his Passover seder when he was a young boy. "Is he [Elijah] still lingering in the courtyard to enter the house in the guise of a sickly old man, a stooped beggar, with a sack on his back and a cane in his hand?"[96]

Osborn's description also explained his influence on the music composed for the theatre. The inaugural performance that Chagall designed has no documented music or composer. In subsequent productions, Jewish composers were brought into the creative process. Their style was an extension of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music. Following its closure in 1918 after World War I and the Russian Revolution, the members of the society relocated in cities throughout Europe, Russia and the United States. While in Moscow, some composed for productions at the Jewish theatres including The Moscow State Yiddish Theatre. The importance of folk music, especially Hasidic *niggunim,* was still central in their compositions, often elaborating on them in Western styles.

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[95] Harshav, The Moscow Yiddish Theatre, 29-30.
[96] Chagall, My Life, 39.

The composers of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music, in their new positions, sought to keep alive the folk music of the previous generations. Therefore, *niggunim* were included within their compositions for the Moscow Jewish theatres. In Chemjo Viniver's second anthology, titled Anthology of Hasidic Music, edited by professor Eliyahu Schleifer, Vinaver notated the niggunim sung in these theatres after Chagall had left his stylistic imprint. Folk tradition was brought to the modern stage. "The *niggunim* were sung with the greatest earnestness...one heard a true representation of a Hasidic custom...my intention [in publishing the *niggun*] is that such a melody should not be lost."[97]

By bringing the folk traditions of the *shtetl* into modernity, composers were making it impossible to never forget the rich tradition. Marc Chagall carried the folk culture of his childhood and *shtetl* on his palette the same way composers brought folk music into Jewish theatres in Moscow. The style of the members of the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music was carried with them to every country they composed in, just as Chagall brought his nostalgic style to the many countries in which he resided.

In the case of *Music*, the fiddler serves as an automatic reminder of Jewish life in the *shtetl*. A recurring character in Chagall's work, this musician is also prominent in Yiddish art song, as heard in the example *Der Yid mitn fidl* by Lazar Weiner. Such a strong character is sung about nearly sixty years after the abolition of the Pale of Settlement. The fiddler likely accompanied life cycle events because, like a voice, a violin has the capacity to evoke many emotions.

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[97] Chemjo Vinaver, Anthology of Hasidic Music ed. Eliyahu Schleifer (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1985) 258.

From Chagall's *Dead Man* (left), the fiddler is seen accompanying death, and alternatively, in the red portion of the Paris opera house ceiling mural (right) is a wedding couple under the *chupah*, with a fiddler at their side. He retained his joyful and thoughtful essence of the Jewish people throughout time.

Chagall played a significant role in the development of expressing folk tradition in a modern way. Just as the Yiddish art song, *Der Yid mitn fidl,* incorporates a *niggun* into the melody and accompaniment, so too does Marc Chagall weave the folk traditions of his past.

Conclusion

This thesis presented three periods in the prolific life of artist Marc Chagall that demonstrate his relationship to the folk culture of his childhood and Jewish music. He was a sensitive man who painted with every bit of his soul. The music, flavors, dances and life of the *shtetl* were embedded in his magnanimous, whimsical spirit. He shared an entrance into his soul that welcomes generations of art enthusiasts and novices to experience *shtetl* life dancing from color to color and the sounds of Chagall's childhood.

The presence of music was a constant thread through Chagall's life, beginning in the synagogue and continuing through *niggunim*, folk songs, art songs, Bach, Mozart, Russian classical composers, etc. He listened to music while he painted. Just as he was inspired by music, he influenced music. One example is a cycle of songs about seven artists by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963). Included in the cycle of poems by Paul Eluard, a very great friend to Chagall,[98] is a composition about Chagall describing the different characters he commonly painted. He wrote the following in appreciation for the composition:

> *Cher Monsieur Poulenc,*
> *I am both flattered and delighted to receive your song on painters-myself included...*
> *It is true that, as I am only a lover of music by ear, I cannot read your music with my eyes; but I hope I shall have the opportunity of hearing it on the radio...*
> *I was present at the first performance of the Russian Ballet's Les Biches.*
> *Thank you again, and with a most cordial handshake.*
>
> *Marc Chagall*[99]

[98] Marc Chagall, Francis Poulenc: Selected Correspondence 1915-1963, ed. Sidney Buckland (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1991) 248-249.
[99] Ibid.

Chagall was in the habit of attending the ballet and other artistic performances. His masterpieces are still on display in some of the world-renowned theatres in which he worked. The first painting by Chagall I ever saw was on the ceiling of the old opera house in Paris, France, *Palais Garnier*. It was a mesmerizing work of art that I have returned to several times. Within the 2,367 square feet of the magnificent, circular canvas are representations of Mozart, Bizet, Wagner, Verdi, Berlioz, Rameau, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Adam, Gluck, and Moussorgsky. Dancing between the pivotal musical composers is a Jewish couple being married under a *chupah*, a klezmer band celebrating their nuptials, roosters, Vitebsk, violins, and angels blowing *shofarot*. Chagall has painted himself and his childhood into the mélange of composers. He weaves his story through these musicians.

The painters, composers, poets and others joined together in the salons of Paris. There, Chagall had relationships with his fellow artists, as well as corresponded with artists abroad whom he met during his travels. Chagall developed friendships with musicians in every place he visited. He corresponded with Solomon Rosowsky, previously mentioned for his compositional work with the St. Petersburg Society for Jewish Folk Music as well as for the Moscow State Yiddish theatre, and was a witness at

Arnold Schoenberg's conversion back into Judaism. He also worked with Joel Engel, previously mentioned 'father of Jewish art music' at a school for orphans while he was living in Moscow.[100]

When Chagall was seventy years old, he executed a commission by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City to beautify their new theatre at Lincoln Center, as well as the design for Mozart's *The Magic Flute.* Chagall revered Mozart more than any other musician, and especially this opera. "For me there is nothing on earth that approaches those two perfections, *The Magic Flute* and the Bible."[101] The lobby murals, titled *The Sources of Music* (left) and *Triumph of Music* (right), depict many of the same composers in the Palais Garnier ceiling mural, with the addition of a two-faced ancient musician, King David and Orpheus. He united his two 'perfections' on these two enormous canvases. They are likely the most viewed pieces of Chagall's art, and possibly even modern art in the world.[102]

Marc Chagall came a long way from the *shtetl* of his childhood. His work is exhibited worldwide and still draws large audiences. With fame, he could have grown narcissistic, but he never lost focus on the purpose of joining color to canvas. The essence

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[100] Chana Mlotek. Interview. YIVO. 8 Jan 2009.
[101] Emily Genauer, Chagall at the 'Met", (New York: Metropolitan Opera Association, 1971) 52.
[102] Genauer, 19.

of Marc Chagall's deep passion for his craft, love and respect for music and devotion to the world of his childhood is best demonstrated by his own words at the dedication of *The Sources of Music* and *Triumph of Music:*

> *And I ask myself wilst I work these questions: For whom do I paint? From where do I come? Towards what do I go?*
> *...I thought that only love and uncalculating devotion towards others will lead to the greatest harmony in life and in art, of which humanity has been dreaming so long. And this must, or course, be included in each utterance, in each brush stroke, and in each color. Always there returns to my mind, like the stars to the sky, an echo of the authentic cultures of art created in bygone times. They must unite with the dreams of today's culture, if they are worthy of them, and become together like one faith and one song*
> *...I wished to surround myself with color and with music, with those characters whose faces retain the smile. This smile which calms, though the soul might often be covered in a nostalgic cloud*
> *...I do not know how many will accept my utterances, my colors, and these rhythms on these paintings. I wanted to transmit this to those to whom my soul listened in this world and in the other world. Therefore, I leaned on these fantastic heroes who possessed the voice of nature like nature itself.*[103]

Marc Chagall was a sensitive artist. He would have served his childhood profession as a cantor very well. I have drawn many lessons about my own cantorate out of the life of Chagall. At his core, he was an observer and a listener. Just as he retained the world around him and re-presented it on a canvas, so too do I wish to watch, learn and listen to the world around me to be a better painter of communities. While I will not create with color and paint, I will bring my own palate to my cantorate. I can learn when to re-present the masterpiece that is their congregation before me, and when to add a whimsical new melody in the corner.

I need to trust my own past as I enter this new profession. My roots are strong with experience, joy and passion. Just as Chagall brought his Vitebsk with him

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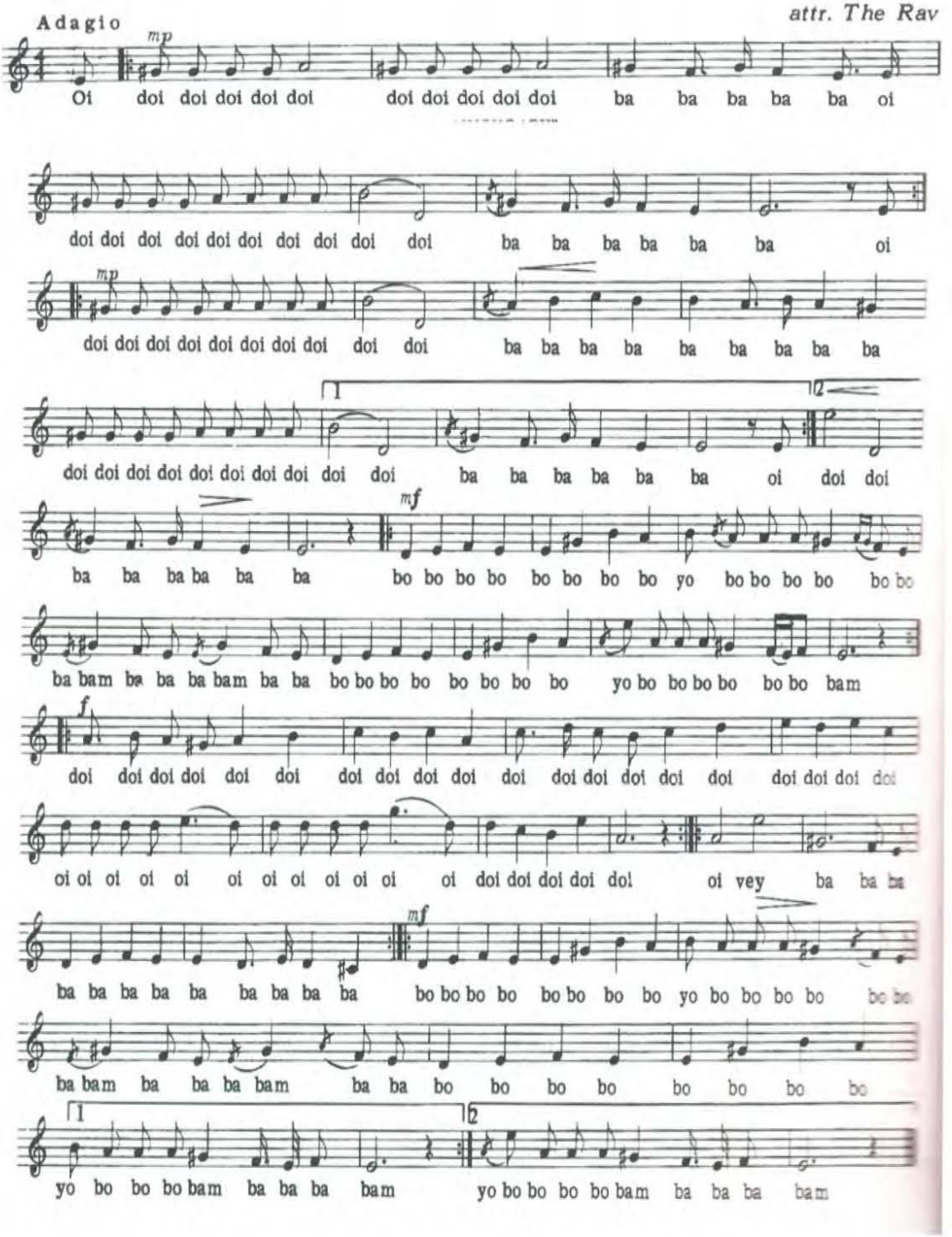
[103] Genauer, 143-146.

everywhere he went, so too will I carry the skills I have grown with to the congregations I will join.

Chagall teaches me that authenticity and individuality are cornerstones for success. He painted his soul onto blank canvases. He cared about detail almost to a fault. When things were insufferable, he moved on. He knew he was a great artist, but remained humble. All of these characteristics are exemplified in his paintings. All of them are lessons for my cantorate. I need to understand who I am and where I come from and embrace the unique gifts that I have in order to have the confidence to serve communities. I need to be connected to the work I do and try to be authentic and present. I need to remember the importance of detail: a smooth transition during services, a thank you note for someone's assistance, or an interesting handout for my students.

While Chagall did create tapestries, he is not usually thought of as a weaver. More than a weaver with cotton fibers, Marc Chagall was a weaver of nostalgic fibers. He wove Jewish music of his childhood with poetry, classical music with the Yiddish language, humor with intense sadness, longing with joy, and the list goes on. This is what I would like to be. I want to weave in and out of people's lives; share their joys at a baby naming with their sadness at the loss of a parent; share their sinful repentance with their renewed joy. I want to help bring color to the canvases of people's lives. I want my palate to be overflowing with the immense variety and vibrancy of the colors from Chagall's palate. My life as a cantor is a blank, white canvas. The music I bring to it, and the palate of life, will make it my *Polyphonic Canvas.*

Rav's Niggun
ChemjoVinaver's Anthology of Hasidic Music



Blaise Cendrars: from "Nineteen Elastic Poems"

[French] I. Portrait

He is sleeping
He is awake
Suddenly, he paints
He takes a church and paints with a church
He takes a cow and paints with a cow
With a sardine
With heads, hands, knives
He paints with a bull's pizzle
He paints with all the foul passions of a little Jewish city
With all the heightened sexuality of provincial Russia
For France
Without sensuality
He pains with his thighs
He has eyes in his ass
And all of a sudden it's your portrai
It's your reader
It's me
It's him
It's his fiancée
It's the corner grocer
The milkmaid
The midwife
There are buckets of blood
The newly born washed in them
Skies in torment
Modernistic mouths
The Tower spiraling
Hands
Christ
He's Christ
He spent his childhood on the Cross
He commits suicide every day
Suddenly, he's no longer painting
He was awake
He's asleep now
He is choking himself with his tie
Chagall is surprised he's still alive

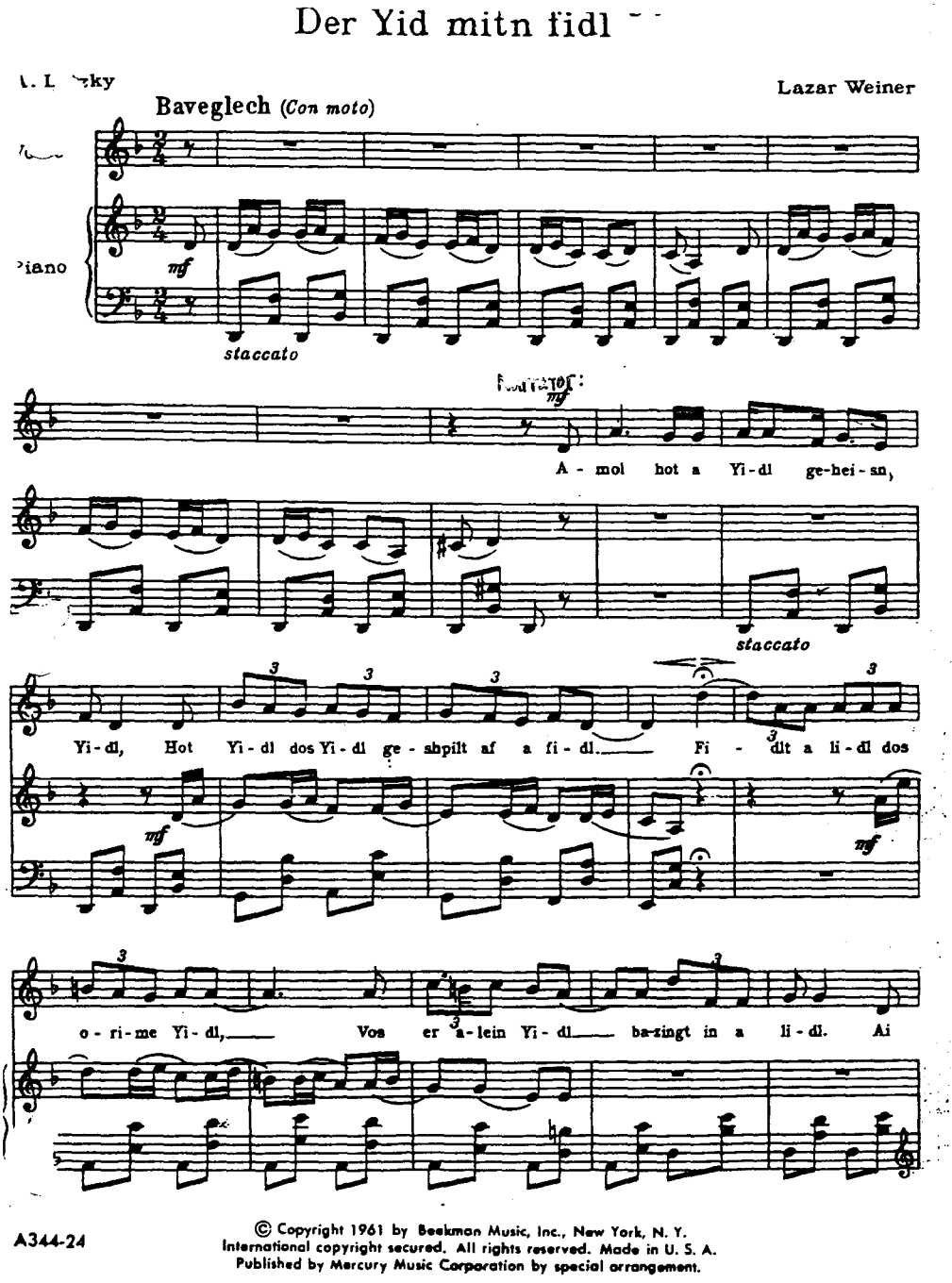
II. Studio

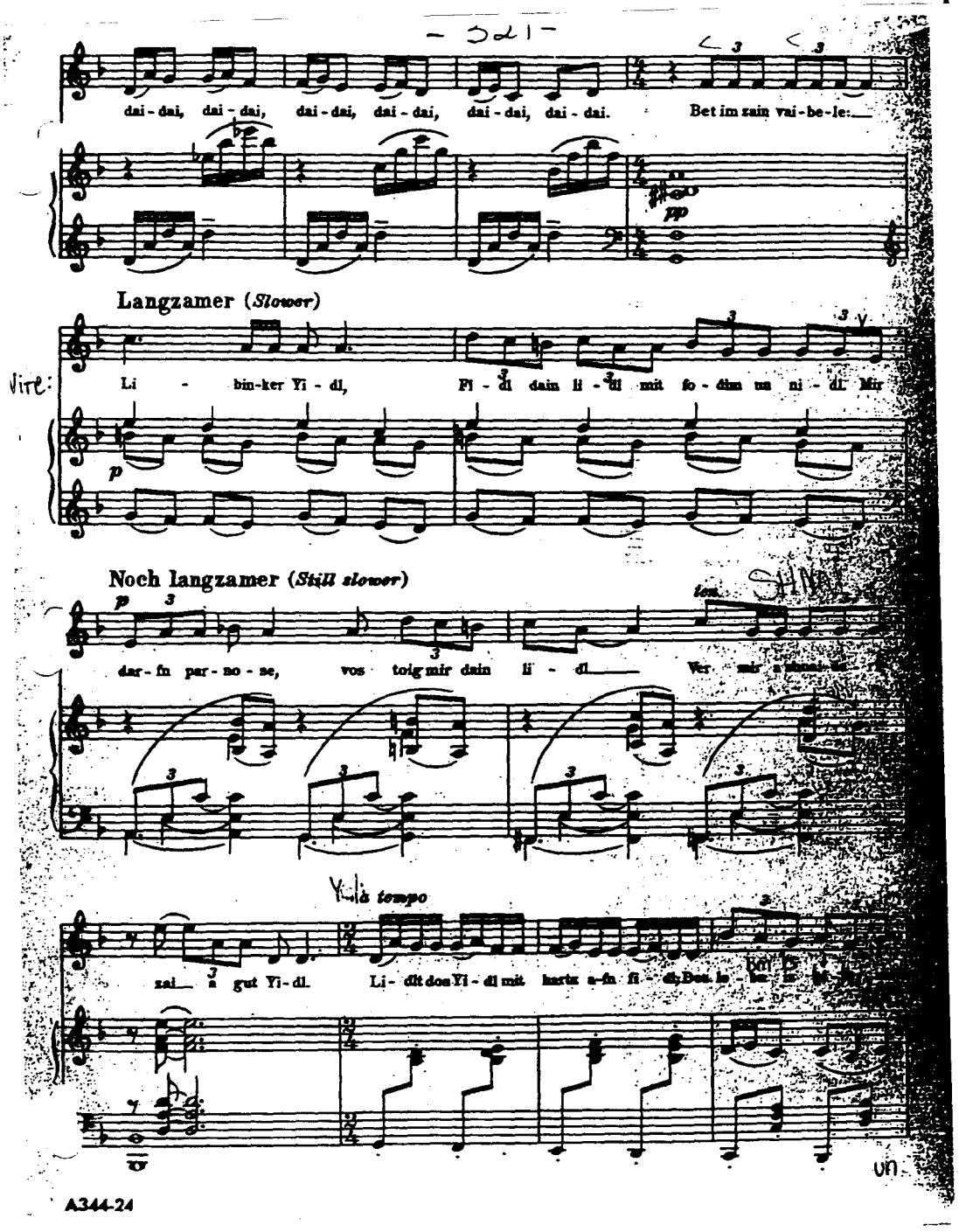
The 'ruche'
Stairs, doors, stairs
And his door opens like a newspaper
Covered with visiting cards
Then it closes.
Disorder, wild disorder
Photographs of Leger, photographs of Tobeen, which you can't see
And on the back
On the back
Frenzied drawings
And paintings...
Empty bottles
"We guarantee absolute purity of our tomato sauce"
Says one label
The window is an almanac
When the lightening like gigantic brawling empties the sky barges and tumbles out hampers of thunder
Out fall
Pell mell
Cossacks Christ a sun decomposing
Roofs
Sleepwalker goats
A werewolf
Petrus Borel
Madness winter
A genie split open like a peach
Lautreamont
Chagall
Poor kid beside my wife
Morose delight
His shoes are rent
An old pot filled with chocolate
A lamp casting its own shadow
And my drunkenness when I visit him
Empty bottles
Bottles
Zina
(We've talked a great deal about her)
Chagall
Chagall
In rungs of light

October 1913

Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong
Table of Contents
By: Ruth Rubin

Der Yid mitn fidl
Lazar Weiner




- 521 -
dai - dai, dai - dai, dai - dai, dai - dai, dai - dai, dai - dai. Bet im zain vai - be - le:
pp
Langzamer (Slower)
Vire:
Li - bin - ker Yi - dl, Fi - dl dain li - dl mit fo - dim ma ni - dl Mir
p
Noch langzamer (Still slower)
p
dar - fn par - no - se, vos toig mir dain li - dl Ver
ten.
Yiddish tempo
zai a gut Yi - dl. Li - dlt doch Yi - dl mit hartz a - fn fi - dl Dos
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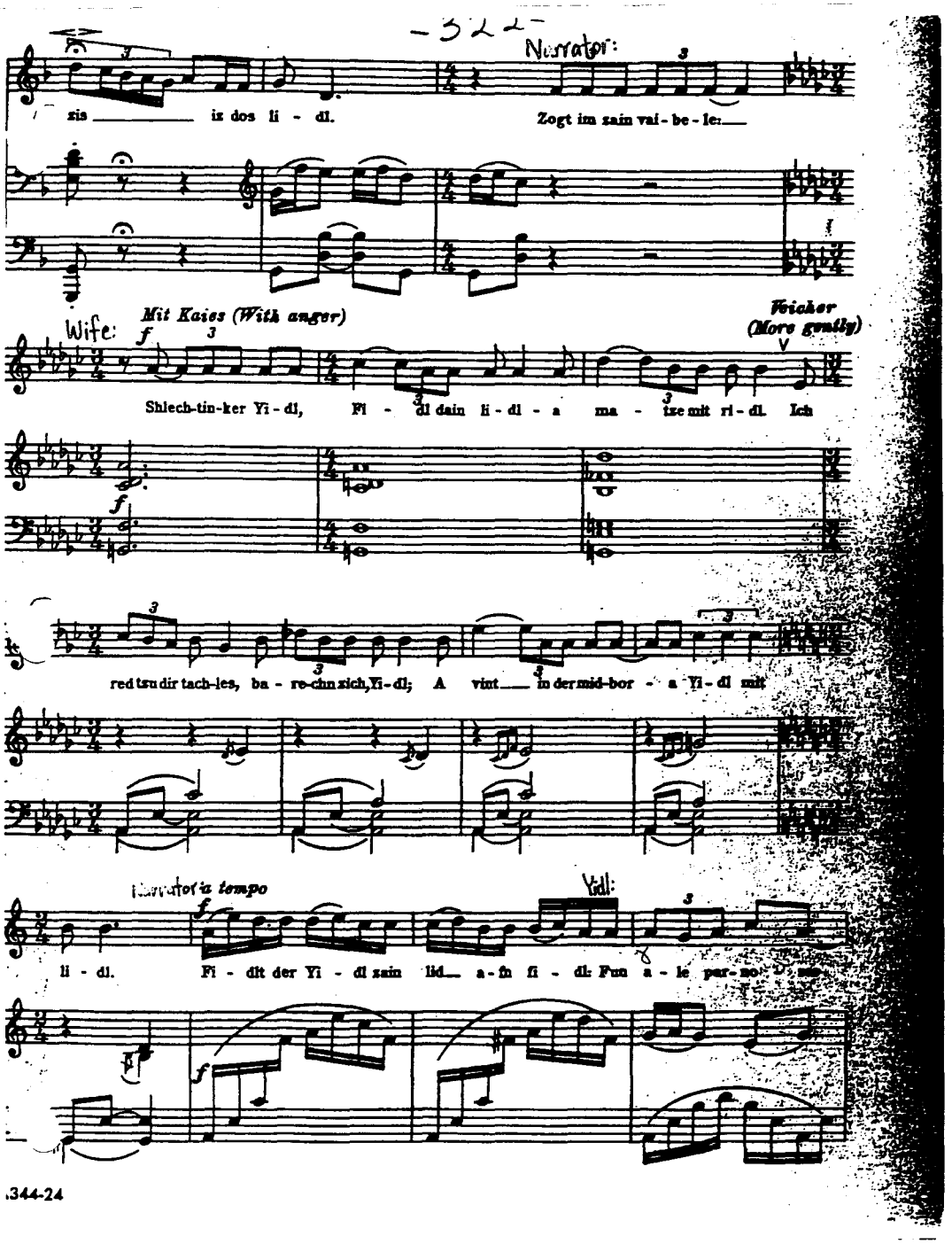
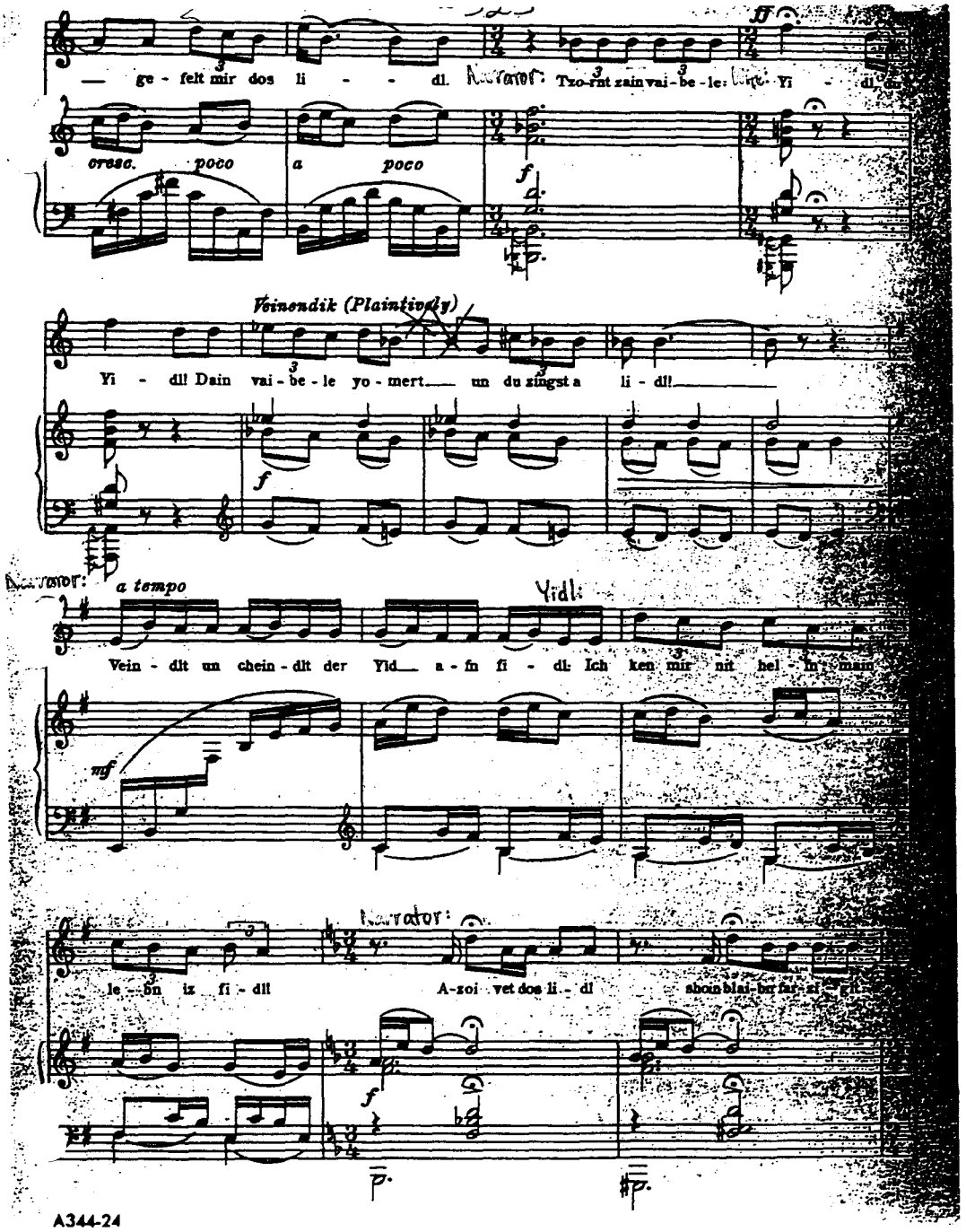
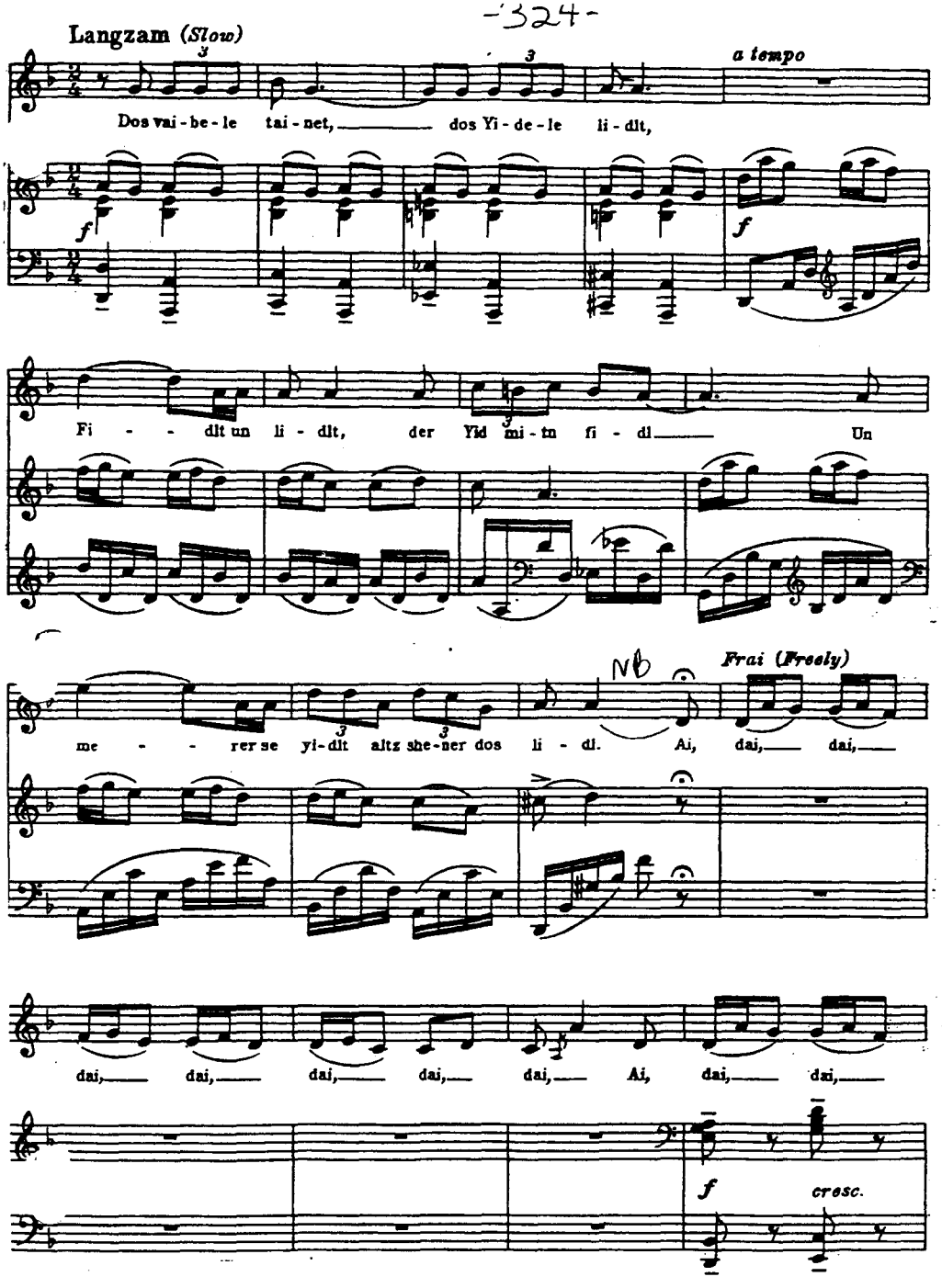
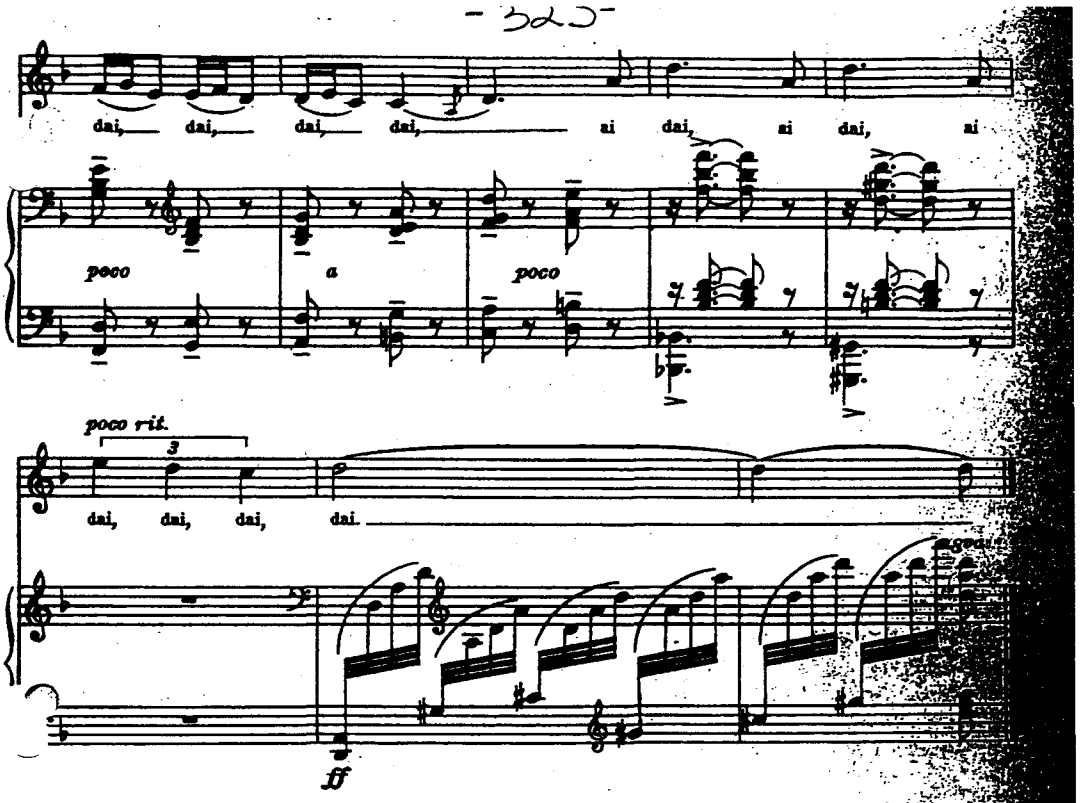

-322-
Narrator:
zis ____ iz dos li - dl.
Zogt im zain vai - be - le:____
Wife:
Mit Kaies (With anger)
Veicher (More gently)
Shlech-tin-ker Yi - dl, Fi - dl dain li - dl - a ma - tse mit ri - dl. Ich
red tsu dir tach-les, ba - re-chn zich, Yi - dl; A vint____ in der mid-bor - a Yi - dl mit
Narrator: in tempo
Vidl:
li - dl. Fi - dlt der Yi - dl zain lid____ a - fn fi - dl: Fun a - le par - ne - me
.344-24


— ge - felt mir dos li - - - dl.
Narrator: Tzo-rnt zain vai - be - le: Yi - dl,
cresc. poco a poco
Veinendik (Plaintively)
Yi - dl! Dain vai - be - le yo - mert — un du zingst a li - dl!
Narrator: a tempo
Yidl:
Vein - dlt un chein - dlt der Yid — a - fn fi - dl: Ich ken mir nit hel - fn main
mf
Narrator:
le - bn iz fi - dl A-zoi vet dos li - dl shoin blai - bn far - si - gt
f
p
A344-24


Langzam (Slow)
a tempo
Dos vai-be-le tai-net, dos Yi-de-le li-dlt,
Fi - - dlt un li-dlt, der Yid mi-tn fi-dl Un
me - - rer se yi-dlt altz she-ner dos li-dl. Ai, dai, dai,
Frai (Freely)
dai, dai, dai, dai, dai, Ai, dai, dai,
f
cresc.
A344-24



DER YID MITN FIDL

This song is in the form of a dialogue between a shiftless husband and a nagging wife. Yidl, the husband, has only one passion — to play the fiddle. This is his life-work, although it brings no material return. His wife alternately pleads and scolds — let him turn to something that will feed them, tailoring for instance. But Yidl, caught up in his musical rapture, fiddles on.

A344-24

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