Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music
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HASIDUT:

A SPIRITUAL AND MUSICAL JOURNEY

presented by

MARK J. PERMAN

accompanied by

Joyce Rosenzweig, piano

with special guest

Peninnah Schram

quartet

soprano **Jennifer Frost** *alto* **Janet Leuchter**

tenor **Kenneth Jaffe** *bass* **Eric Miller**

conductor **Andrew Bernard**

Senior recital performed in partial fulfillment of
requirements for Master of Sacred Music Degree

"The most direct means for attaching ourselves to God from this material world is through music and song."

-Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

FUN KOSEV BIZ KITEV

(Between Kosev and Kitev)

Between Kosev and Kitev there is a little bridge where the Baal Shem would stroll. Between Kosev and Kitev there is a little forest where the Baal Shem would go to meditate. Between Kosev and Kitev there are little birds from whom the Baal Shem would learn to sing God's praises.

MIZMOR L'DOVID

A psalm to David

Adonai is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.
In lush pastures You make me lie,
beside tranquil waters, You lead me.
My soul, You restore,
You direct me in path of righteousness
for the sake of Your Name.
Though I walk
in the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table for me
in the full presence of my enemies.
You anointed my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
(May) only good and kindness pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the House of Adonai
for long days.

ONO BECHO'ACH

(Please, by the Force of Your Great Right Hand)

Please, by the force of Your great right hand,
release the bound one.
Accept the prayer of Your people;
strengthen us, purify us, Awesome One!
Please, Mighty One,
those who seek Your Unity-
preserve (them) like the pupil of an eye.
Bless them, purify them, Have mercy on them;
Your benevolent righteousness
bestow upon them always
Mighty, Holy One
in Your abundant goodness,
lead Your community.
Unique One, Exalted, turn to Your people,
who are mindful of Your holiness.
Accept our prayer and hear our cry,
Knower of hidden thoughts.
Blessed (is Your) Name, Whose glorious kingdom
is forever and ever.

VIKHTIG IZ

(Important is a Holy Sabbath)

Important is a Holy Sabbath
A good week and a good month
Important is a rational argument,
a page of gemore is important
What's important and what isn't
You must not get mixed up

What's beautiful and what's ugly
What's bitter and what is sweet?
Beautiful is a boy with long peyes,
ugly is a person with wrong ideas
Bitter is a misleading argument
Sweet is a piece of moror (because of the mitsve)

Important are stories of the tsadikim
A word from the deep mysteries of the sedrah
Important is a beautiful esrog, important is a pure heart
What is important, and what isn't
You don't dare get mixed up

Pleasing is a warm Jewish song
Important is running to do someone a favor
Important things endure,
foolish is something that time renders obsolete
What is important, and what isn't
You don't dare get mixed up

"Even if you can't sing well, sing.
Sing to yourself. Sing in the privacy of
your own home. But sing."

-Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

VALD, VALD VI GROIS BIST DU!
(Forest, Forest How Vast You Are!)

Forest, forest how vast you are!
Bride, bride how far you are!
When the forest will be taken away
I shall be united with my bride.
Galût, galût (exile) how vast you are!
Šekînah, šekînah (divine presence)
how far you are!
When the *galût* will be taken away
I shall be united with the *šekînah.*

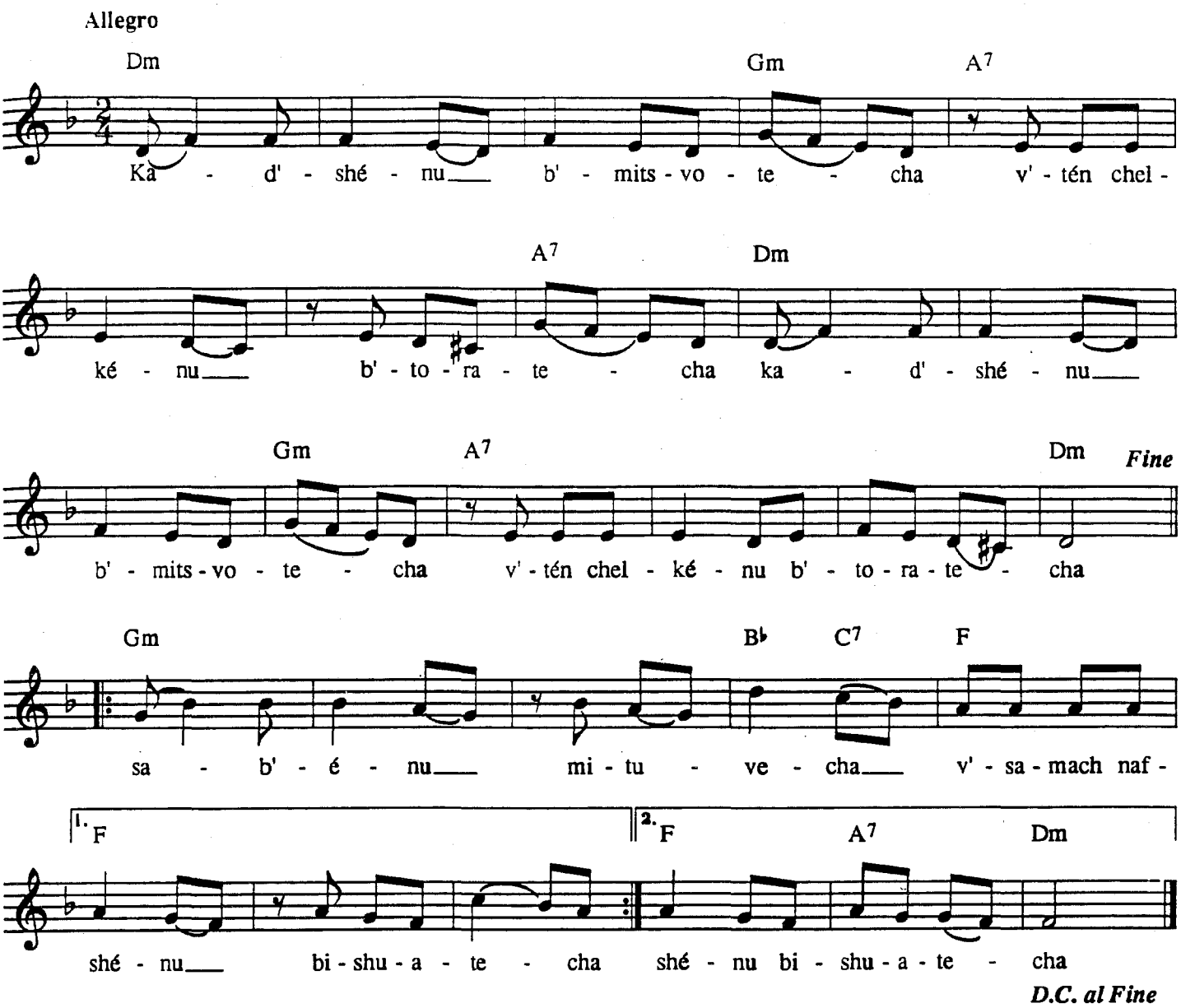
YISM'CHU
(They Who Call the Sabbath a Delight)

Those who keep the Sabbath and call it a delight
shall rejoice in Your kingdom.
All who hallow the seventh day
shall be gladdened by Your goodness.

ATO CHONANTANU
(You Have Favored Us)

You have favored us (with the ability) to know your Torah
and taught us to fulfill the statutes of your will.
You made a distinction, Adonai, our God,
between sacred and unhallowed,
between light and darkness,
between Israel and the peoples,
between the seventh day and the six work days.
Our Father, Our King,
commence for us the days that approach us,
in peace, devoid of all sin,
and cleansed of all iniquity,
and devoted to the fear of You.

KAD'SHENU



קַדְּשֵׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְתֵן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ
שַׂבְּעֵנוּ מִטּוּבֶךָ וְשַׂמֵּח נַפְשֵׁנוּ בִּישׁוּעָתֶךָ

Sanctify us with thy commandments and grant us a share in thy Torah; satisfy us with thy goodness and gladden us with thy help.

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MUSIC AND THEOLOGY: VESTIGES OF HASIDIC ELEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

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PREFACE

This project grew out of a paper I wrote for Mark Kligman a year and a half ago called "*The Hasidism and their Musical Innovations*." In this paper, I discussed how the early Hasidim used music in creative and innovative ways in order to inspire the community to experience the joy in prayer. I also discussed how the Hasidic spirit is alive and well today both in the Hasidic communities themselves and in "modern" Hasidic-style congregations like New York City's B'nai Jeshurun.

Mark then discussed with me the possibilities of this paper serving as the genesis for my master's project and I agreed that there was much here to be explored. Together we came up with the idea that I would, for my master's project, explore the Hasidic influence on contemporary worship on two levels, music and theology. Mark suggested a number of sources for me to begin my research, all of which proved to be extremely helpful in providing me with a direction and a manageable scope.

My research included the sources listed on my bibliography as well as interviews with five very influential figures in the field of contemporary Jewish worship. I often found that what was written about Hasidic theology and music was being echoed and reinforced by my interview subjects and vice-versa.

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the elements that made Hasidism an exciting and innovative movement in the late eighteenth century are, in fact, present in contemporary synagogues as well. The contemporary approaches to Hasidut are rooted in the Hasidim of old as well as in modern musical and theological innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Jews have found innovative ways to adjust their own traditions and practices to conform to the dominant culture or break free from religious practice that they deemed stale and obsolete. In response to the legalistic and restrictive *Shulchan Aruch* prescriptions, as well as political unrest, the Hasidic movement rose in Eastern Europe in the late 1700s. The movement appears to have resulted from social, political, and religious factors, that together sparked a form of Jewish renewal and spiritual rebirth. The Hasidic movement won thousands of Jews with a message that sought to triumph over despair and enable the Eastern European Jews of this era to find greater meaning in their lives as Jews.

This paper will examine the Hasidic movement as it unfolded in Eastern Europe from the eighteenth century onwards, through a theological and a musical perspective. I will also seek to prove that vestiges of Hasidic elements, theological and musical, are present in some synagogues. Hasidic elements are used with greater frequency and intensity as contemporary Jews seek a deeper and more profound meaning to their lives both in the synagogue and in their Jewish identities.

WHO ARE THE HASIDIM, WHAT IS THEIR HISTORY?

Hasidism initially emerged from a volatile religious and political climate in Europe during the late 18th century. We know that:

> the framework of Jewish leadership was shaken, and the authority and methods of Jewish leaders were further undermined and questioned in the wake of the upheaval brought about by the false messianic and Kabbalistic movements of Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank.[1]

Shabbetai Zevi had gained prominence during the desperate times following the Chmielnicki and Haidamack massacres when people were looking to a form of charismatic leadership to save them from destruction. The people were further disillusioned when Shabbetai Zevi converted to Islam and Jacob Frank converted to Catholicism and betrayed their followers to escape punishment during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Despite their disappointment with their fallen leaders, Zevi and Frank provided innovative and spiritually enthusiastic leadership that left an impression on future generations. Politically, Eastern European upheavals affected the stability of various Jewish communities. The Jews had lost considerable influence because of the breakup of Poland-Lithuania into three partitions, and consequently, there was considerable tension within the Jewish communities. Feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness filled these communities as well.

During the mid-eighteenth century, the Jewish community of Eastern Europe, drew strength from those Kabbalistic ideas that appeared so promising and uplifting in the days of Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank. At this time, many Jews formed small *havurot* (prayer groups) that became known as "mystic circles."[2] These prayer groups had their own particular behaviors during prayer. They were also strictly observant Jews and they

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[1]Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1973 ed., s.v. "Hassidism." By Andre Hajdu and Ja'acov Mazor.

[2]Ibid.

studied the teachings of the Kabbalah. The *havurot* were not yet, however, Hasidim as we understand them today. These early groups followed an ascetic approach to Judaism. An ascetic approach to Jewish life teaches self-denial, fasting, and other restrictions as the surest road to religiosity. Hasidim, however, believed in an anti-ascetic approach to Judaism, filled with joy, physical, and spiritual well-being.

The passionate devotion to the inner content of prayer, and the sincere search for spiritual ecstasy, sparked the popularity of Hasidism in the late eighteenth century and won defectors from ascetic Jewish groups across Eastern Europe. The great Hasidic rebbes taught that the people did not have to fast regularly to reach a spiritual connection to God nor did life have to be a tedious, painful longing for the coming of *Moshiach*. These Hasidic "masters" were charismatic teachers and religious leaders who were committed to the search for religious truth both for themselves and their communities. Hasidim paid great homage and respect to these rebbes who were, in the truest sense, role models for the community, and the Hasidim believed with the fullest conviction that the rebbes were closer to the creator than any human being could ever hope to be.

FAMOUS HASIDIC REBBES

The first noted Hasidic Rebbe was Israel Baal Shem Tov, otherwise known as the Besht (1700-1760). Israel B. Eliezer, as he was known is his younger days, was, at first, one of many Hasidic type leaders of his day whose teachings were characterized by ecstatic behavior and an anti-ascetic outlook.[3] Having distinguished himself as a healer of

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[3]Ibid.

body and spirit within his hometown of Podolia, and having learned how to use various "miracle medicines" to heal disease, the Besht later turned his attention fully to prayer as the best way to heal the suffering soul. The Besht developed a reputation for being extremely animated and passionate in prayer. He became famous for the following quote that is at the core of his religious philosophy, and summarizes his spiritual aspirations. "When a person is in communion with God's presence, and then directs his thought to the upper spheres, he is immediately transported to the upper spheres."[4] Thus, the Besht believed that prayers said with passion and sincerity on earth could influence the most sacred and exalted decrees on high.

The Besht, and the rebbes who were his disciples, managed to integrate many elements in exciting and creative ways. They were not combining the use of music, personal charisma, and a deep sense of religiosity consciously or manipulatively. Instead they were working to express fully how Judaism resonated for them within their souls. For example, the Besht did not emphasize the scholarly meaning of Jewish texts as much as many traditional rabbis of the period. He was more concerned with its personal, experiential and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, if he were to emphasize the non tangible, experiential aspects of Jewish learning, he needed to do so in ways that were at the very least, unconventional. A famous Hasidic legend tells the story of how Dov Baer - the Maggid, came a great distance to study with the great Baal Shem Tov. The Besht asked

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4 Simon Dubnow, "The Beginnings: The Baal Shem Tov (Besht) and the Center in Podolia," Essential Papers on Hasidism, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New York University Press, 1991), 34.

Dov Baer to interpret a particular message of text. When Dov Baer did so, the Besht dismissed his interpretation as incorrect. Dov Bear, whom this rebuke angered, asked the Besht for his "correct" interpretation. The Baal Shem Tov then began to read the text with great passion and enthusiasm and soon,

> [the] whole house was filled with light, and fire burned around it, and they actually saw the angels mentioned in the text. He [the Besht] said to Rabbi Dov Baer of blessed memory: 'It is true that the meaning of the text was as you stated it to be, but your study of the text had no soul in it.'[5]

The story goes on to describe how Dov Baer became a disciple of the Besht from that moment on and how he then understood how great the Baal Shem Tov truly was.

Use of Music - the Niggun

It was the Besht, Dov Baer, and the Hasidic rebbes who followed them, who began to use music in innovative ways designed to inspire the people to experience prayer on a deeper and more spiritual level. Musical elements such as the *niggun* (wordless song) came from the fundamental theology of Hasidism and became integral to the Hasidic religious experience. In fact the dynamic and creative way the Hasidim began to use music was as innovative as the Hasidic movement itself; their use of music contributed greatly to the success of Hasidism throughout the generations.

Specifically, the *niggun* became one of the most important musical elements within the Hasidic world, as it continues to be to this day. The *niggun*, a wordless melody that often repeats various melodic and rhythmic patterns on particular syllables, was the

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5 Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Thought, The Chain of Tradition Series, vol.V (New York: Behrman House Inc, 1976), 4.

was such an important element in Hasidic life that many categories of *niggunim* developed. Each category designated a particular function or life cycle event for which a melody was suited. For example, a particular *niggun* would be sung at the Rabbi's *tisch*, or "meal." A specific *niggun* melody known as the dance *niggun* might be sung at festive occasions such as weddings. Often, the melodies that the *niggun* evoked were, in fact, more important than the actual text of a particular prayer. Abraham Idelsohn writes in Jewish Music Its Historical Development that

> Shneour Zalman [an early Hasidic Rebbe of the late eighteenth century] was of the opinion that melody is the outpouring of the soul, but that words interrupt the stream of emotions. For the songs of the souls, at the time they are swaying in the high regions to drink from the well of the Almighty king - consist of tones only, dismantled of words.[6]

This Hasidic notion of the melody being more important than the text of prayers rings true in today's synagogue as well and will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

The *niggun* had exceptional spiritual power because it was often a melody that the rebbe himself developed. Thus when a rebbe sang a *niggun*, the people believed that the source of that melody had to be of divine origin. These *niggun*im were passed on to subsequent generations and were believed to be most holy because they were first sung by the great Hasidic masters. In fact, *niggunim* sung by the Rebbes in Crown Heights are said to be the same melodies that the great Hasidic masters themselves sang.[7]

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[6] Abraham Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Music: Its Historical Development, 1929; reprint, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1992), 46.

[7] Mr. Jacob Goldstein, Satmar Hasid, interview by author, 8 September 1996, tape recording, Brooklyn, New York, 1996.

The main objective of the *niggun* as used by the Hasidim of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was to attain *devekuth* or divine adhesion. Chabad Hasidim still believe that passing through many stages is necessary before one can even think about getting close to the experience of *devekuth*. It is therefore the job of the *niggun* to help pave the way toward deeper and deeper levels of spiritual understanding and enlightenment. According to Ellen Koskoff,

> traditionally, *niggunim* have been used to help achieve *devekuth* because they are felt to contain the potential to arouse two essential emotional states, *simchah* ["joy"] and *hitlahavut* ["enthusiasm"], which lie dormant in the Hasid.[8]

Eliyahu Schleifer discusses another aspect of the *niggun* that is extremely important. According to Schleifer,

> The Hasidic theory of the *Niggun* - a melody without lyrics - maintained that melodies, too, contain divine sparks, so that defiled melodies can be redeemed by being sung in sanctity.[9]

Thus, the Hasidim believed that even if a melody was "borrowed" from the secular world, they could release its innate divine nature when sung as a *niggun* by the Hasidim and their Rabbi. This idea is rooted in something Dr. Schleifer taught me in Israel in a class session on Kabbalah. The Kabbalists of the sixteenth century Sefad apparently adopted the earlier belief that when the world was created, there was a disturbance in the creation process and

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8 Ellen Koskoff, "Contemporary Niggun Composition in an American Hasidic Community," Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology, ed. James Porter, vol. III No. I (1978), 155.

9 Eliyahu Schleifer, "From the Bible to Hasidism," Sacred Sound and Social Change, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, Janet R. Walton, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 46.

evil came into the world despite God's objections. Therefore, "shards" of evil are imbedded in creation itself. The Kabbalists and later the Hasidim believed that through prayer, the performance of mitzvot, and *tikkun olam* (the repairing and healing of the world) one could turn those evil shards imbedded in creation back to their original good and pure form. It is therefore understandable that the Hasidim would believe in the power of the *niggun* to liberate the good within a melody and that *niggunim* could be steps in the process of *tikkun olam*, redemption, and the restoration of God's original good intentions.

Finally, Ellen Koskoff says that "the most important aspect of contemporary *niggun* composition is the composer's musical link to past generations."[10] Thus, when one hears a *niggun* one should hear a musical and spiritual reference made to generations that came before. Koskoff is writing here specifically about the Lubavitch community although I believe that what she is saying is relevant to neo-Hasidism as well (Neo-Hasidism is a modern manifestation of Hasidic elements like theology, davening style and music).

> If a contemporary tune can be made to sound old or reflect an old compositional practice, it has more direct access to the spiritually elevated and pure level associated with the past; it can thus be more readily accepted and used to help achieve *devekuth*.[11]

I will argue later that at Congregations such as B'nai Jeshurun in New York City, there are a variety of contemporary tunes rooted in old, Hasidic approaches to prayer and to attaining *devekuth*. While not being consciously aware of this, people who come to

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10 Ellen Koskoff, "Contemporary Nigun Composition in an American Hasidic Community," Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology, ed. James Porter, vol. III No. I (1978), 159.

11 Ibid., 158.

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun are, nevertheless, profoundly affected by the many levels of musical expression that combine the modern pop idiom with the soulful, gently rhythmic pulse of eastern European Hasidic music and *niggunim*.

In discussing the higher spiritual attainment and emotions that the Hasidim are aspiring to, Ellen Koskoff uses the traditional Lubavitcher Hasidim (descendants of Rebbe Menachem Schneerson) as an example of those who ascribe to a higher level. It is important to remember, however, that the terms she uses such as *simchah* (joy), and *hitlahavut* (enthusiasm) apply to the Hasidim of old and to the contemporary neo-Hasidic synagogue. In describing these "higher states" that the Hasidim aspire to in prayer, she insightfully points out that: "The concepts of *simchah* and *hitlahavut* are used by Lubavitchers to describe a variety of psychological states and deeply felt emotions. These words convey a more profound meaning than their literal, surface definitions imply."[12] Koskoff has touched on the reality that for Hasidim and, yes, neo-Hasidim, Hasidic-style worship contains a larger dimension than just joy, enthusiasm or even divine adhesion. There is a transformational dimension to the worship that transcends the mere act of prayer and leads to something greater and much more profound. It is the role of *niggunim* and music within Hasidic style prayer to be a bridge to that deeper, more profound level of experience. In this state the soul can, if even for a moment, inhabit the spheres usually reserved for the angels and the holy one of blessing himself.

This chapter has discussed the history of the Hasidim, some Hasidic theology and a description of the Hasidic masters or *tsaddikim* who personified the ideals of Hasidism. I

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[12]Ibid., 155.

have also shown how Hasidic communities used music in order for people to attain a higher connection to God and an opportunity for *devekuth* or divine adhesion. We have seen how the Hasidim integrated their theology with music in a masterful way that turned thousands of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Jews into spiritually renewed and enthusiastic people who would become known as Hasidim.

CHAPTER 2

MODERN MANIFESTATIONS\NEO-HASIDISM

The Hasidic struggle to make Jewish living and Jewish prayer deeper, more meaningful, and more joyful is not unique to the eighteenth century and to the early Hasidim. Jews in late twentieth century America are also searching for a stronger spiritual connection to Judaism, to God, and to their fellow Jews. These contemporary Jews have begun to use Hasidic elements (i.e., music, spirituality, and dynamic leadership) in ways that have begun to recharge and redefine Jewish worship in America. While the historical circumstances are, of course, different, many Jews struggle to find their spiritual center in a sea of materialism, assimilation, and indifference.

In looking at the modern manifestations of Hasidism in contemporary Jewish life, I chose to speak with a group of individuals who are at the forefront of a movement I will call neo-Hasidism (by neo-Hasidic, I refer to the modern manifestation of Hasidic ideas, approaches to prayer, music and spirituality, etc.). Though two of the three Rabbis I spoke with refer to neo-Hasidic elements within their congregations, and do not call themselves neo-Hasidic Rabbis, I nevertheless felt that their personal philosophies corresponded closely to the early Hasidic masters. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I can include them as examples of how Hasidic ideas and practices are finding their way successfully into the mainstream Jewish world. I also spoke to one renowned academic and spiritual teacher who has written and lectured extensively on the subject of Hasidism and its modern manifestations. In my interviews, I chose to focus on three

questions to determine if Hasidism influenced their personal philosophies and the worship style of their respective synagogues. In each interview, I focused on the use of music and whether these congregations approached the use of music in a way that they could describe as Hasidic. My first question was, predictably, are the Rabbis I spoke with and their respective synagogues consciously aspiring to be modern proponents of Hasidism? Second, do they (the rabbis) view the use of music in their congregations within a Hasidic context (i.e., participation, the use of *niggunim*, etc.)? Third, do they model themselves as Rabbis on the Hasidic masters of the eighteenth century? Essentially, I asked these questions to determine whether Hasidic theology and music as practiced in the past were manifested within the contemporary synagogue.

I first interviewed Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon, who is the Senior Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York City since December 1993, following the death of his mentor, Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer. Rabbi Matalon has presided over a rapid growth in membership at B'nai Jeshurun that presently totals sixteen hundred membership units (singles and families). Rabbi Matalon became Associate Rabbi there upon ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1985. He was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina and lived there until he left for Rabbinical School in the early 1980's. Services at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun are so successful that there are two Shabbat evening services, one at 6:00 P.M. and the other at 6:45 P.M.

I next interviewed Rabbi Lawrence Kushner of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts. Rabbi Kushner has written nine books, a variety of articles on the subject of Jewish spirituality and renewal, and he is one originator of the *Havurah* approach to

worship. The *Havurah* movement originated in the late 1960's and it advocated an approach to prayer that took place within small groups rather than in a large group in a synagogue sanctuary. *Havurot* are known as very informal, participatory worship; a guitar is often played, and generally a rabbi or cantor does not lead services. Most everyone sings the liturgy together and dances, physical movements are often associated with the prayers. The *Havurah* differs from a neo-Hasidic approach to worship in that there is often no strong personality at the head of the service leading the prayers and guiding the worship. *Havurot* are a group-centered dynamic, although there is often a leader in the beginning stages of a *Havurah* to teach the group what a *Havurah* is about. Study, celebrations, and the sharing of life-cycle events are also a part of belonging to a *Havurah* as well.

Last year, I studied with Rabbi Kushner in a class entitled *Psycho-Spiritual Readings of Parasha Hashavua*. At the time, I was struck by Rabbi Kushner's emphasis on the teachings of the Hasidic masters and, on that basis, I concluded that he would be ideal to interview for my master's project.

I also interviewed Arthur Green who is the Philip W. Low Professor of Jewish Thought at Brandeis University. He is both a historian of Jewish religion and a theologian; his work seeks to serve as a bridge between these two fields. Professor Green has studied with such notables as Abraham Joshua Heschel, and he has also taught Jewish mysticism, *Hasidut*, and theology to generations of students at the University of Pennsylvania, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (where he served as both Dean and President), and now at Brandeis University. He is the founder of Havurat Shalom in

Somerville, Massachusetts, and has been researching the area of Jewish spirituality and mysticism for most of his career.

Finally, I interviewed Rabbi Samuel Intrader who has been Rabbi of the Congregation Kehilath Jacob (the *Carlebach Shul*) ever since the death of its founder in 1994, Shlomo Carlebach. Rabbi Intrader told me that he worked closely with Shlomo Carlebach in the years preceding his death. Rabbi Intrader would often substitute when Shlomo Carlebach was away singing his music all over the world. Rabbi Intrader was educated at several Yeshivot and he is an authority on several aspects of *Hasidut*. He believes that Shlomo Carlebach was a Hasid in the truest sense of the word and it is Intrader's hope that the Carlebach Shul continues to thrive as a living legacy to its beloved founder and source of inspiration, Shlomo Carlebach.

The interviews conducted with Rabbi Matalon, Rabbi Kushner, Professor Arthur Green and Rabbi Intrader portray a sense that Hasidism, its music and its theology, have found a new home in the contemporary synagogue and in contemporary Jewish life. Recognizing these Hasidic elements is not always easy because they are integrated into the larger whole. A closer examination reveals the presence of the Hasidic imprint on Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, Congregation Beth El, The Carlebach Shul and in the teachings of Professor Arthur Green. This chapter is based on my conversations with these four individuals and a full transcript of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon

It was interesting that Rabbi Matalon did not initially identify Congregation B'nai Jeshurun as a neo-Hasidic synagogue (i.e., a modern manifestation of Hasidic ideas, approaches to prayer, music, etc.). Instead, he acknowledged that there is a "neo-Hasidic thread, definitely." Admitting to Hasidic elements within the synagogue while disavowing the neo-Hasidic label struck me as intriguing after having spoken to both Rabbi Matalon and Rabbi Kushner. I speculated that both rabbis did not want to be closely linked with those aspects of Hasidism that they disagree with, especially as practiced today in the Hasidic communities of Crown Heights and Borough Park, for instance.

Rabbi Matalon describes B'nai Jeshurun as an eclectic synagogue that combines neo-Hasidic elements with a variety of other influences that make B'nai Jeshurun a unique entity unto itself.

> I would not characterize it entirely as a neo-Hasidic place. You know, we use the *Chumash* published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Siddur Sim Shalom* that is conservative, we pray in a church, and we use a lot of Hasidic music, so it's quite eclectic.[13]

However, in discussing B'nai Jeshurun's eclecticism, its emphasis on Jewish renewal, and its use of Hasidic elements in its services, Rabbi Matalon appears to draw a parallel between B'nai Jeshurun of 1996 and the Hasidic innovations of the eighteenth century. Rabbi Matalon says,

> You have to remember that the Hasidic movement was a movement of renewal in the eighteenth century. And so B'nai Jeshurun takes that aspect of renewal, of going against that which is established, or that which is accepted, of going

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[13] Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 8 July 1996.

> against the wave in many ways, against the current. So that is one element. Another element is the emphasis on *kavanah* (inner devotion in prayer) and *ruach* (spiritual energy, joy) and the concept of *hitlahavut*, the passion and the fire in prayer. And so in that way, yes, you know we've taken a few of those elements and the music represents those attempts at *kavanah* and passion, and there are other moments for introspection.[14]

Thus, it appears that B'nai Jeshurun is, on many levels, using Hasidic elements within a contemporary context, speaking to contemporary needs and problems.

Having been a member of B'nai Jeshurun for eight years, it has been my experience that many people come to B'nai Jeshurun because of the spirituality and the strong sense of community that they find there.

1) People feel they can sing along with the congregation and pray even if they do not know any Hebrew or are not experienced with the liturgy.

2) People say that the rabbis and the cantor are singing with them, and inviting them to pray, and are not singing at them.

3) Jewish tradition at B'nai Jeshurun is studied and experienced within a larger struggle for *tikkun olam*, social justice, and spiritual living. Many teachings of the great Hasidic masters dealt with compassion, justice, and the struggle to do God's will on earth.

4) B'nai Jeshurun is a place where many people truly feel a strong sense of community, not only within the prayer structure of the synagogue but within the larger community as well.

Rabbi Matalon also discusses how B'nai Jeshurun places a very important emphasis on prayer with *kavanah* (inner devotion to prayer). This teaching, as he points out, is at

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[14]Ibid.

the root of the aspirations of the early Hasidim. They search for *hitlahavut*, Rabbi Matalon told me, or "the passion and fire in prayer." At B'nai Jeshurun on a given Friday evening or Shabbat morning, you find people engaged in a similar search, singing loudly and enthusiastically, clapping, and dancing during the *L'cha Dodi*. Rabbi Matalon told me that the energy filling B'nai Jeshurun during prayer is both vertical, going up from the people toward heaven, as well as horizontal, as people connect with each other in prayer and song. This struck me as a very powerful and relevant Hasidic concept reminiscent of the Baal Shem Tov.

Through a consideration of how music is used in inspiring people to pray with passion and with "kavanah," B'nai Jeshurun's similarities with early Hasidism become more apparent. When I asked Rabbi Matalon to discuss music at B'nai Jeshurun, he immediately began speaking about the *niggun*.

> Well, there are a couple of elements which I see in the *niggun*. One is that they're very easy, most of them are easy to sing and they have no words. So I believe that it helps concentration. And I believe that it helps participation because anybody who comes into B'nai Jeshurun, the first thing they will encounter at the very beginning of the service, whether Friday night or Shabbat morning, and even during the week, is a wordless *niggun* that anyone can participate in.[15]

In this statement, there is a powerful analogy to the early Hasidic masters for whom spreading the spirit of enlightened Jewish experience was very important. Often, the disciples of the Besht would travel great distances to spread the message of Hasidism to people who had not yet been exposed to it. Often, these disciples would travel to communities where Jewish knowledge may have been very low. Thus, they too relied on

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[15]Ibid.

the *niggun* to transmit a powerful message that was accessible to all members of a community.

Rabbi Matalon also discusses how important repetition of the *niggun* is at B'nai Jeshurun. He stated,

> Repetition helps the *kavanah*. Marshall (Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer) used to say that a Hasidic *niggun* is a melody in search of itself, returning always to the same point. But it's like a spiral, it returns but it progresses at the same time.[16]

The early Hasidim also understood the power of repetition in prayer, gradually increasing the volume and the intensity of the prayer as the emotional level of the community increased and people began to reach a deeper, higher level of *devekuth* and *hitlahavut*. All of this would happen while particularly exciting and beloved *niggunim* would be repeated by the congregation, the intensity of the voices increasing with each repetition.

But music at B'nai Jeshurun goes beyond just the *niggun*. The *L'cha Dodi*, for example, is sung at B'nai Jeshurun by the rabbis and the cantor with Hasidic fervor and the members of the congregation sing and dance with great passion. One can almost sense the imminent arrival of the Sabbath bride in the movement/gestures of the congregation. There is, in essence, a Hasidic-style synthesis of music, prayer, *kavanah*, as well as a communal connection that is inviting to everyone regardless of background or experience.

In addition, music is free-spirited at B'nai Jeshurun. The combination of pop style Israeli music, traditional melodies, and Jewish folk music is designed again to make most people feel comfortable there. The music, as Rabbi Matalon said, is a tool to be used for a higher purpose and not merely as an end by itself. Thus, spontaneity exists on the bimah

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[16]Ibid.

between the rabbis and the cantor. Each is never really sure what the other may add during a particular service. Very often, a powerful melody that motivates the congregation to sing and pray is repeated many times even after the music should have logically concluded. This is, of course, part of the Hasidic legacy where the spontaneity of the Rebbe often inspired the people to higher levels of *devekuth* and spiritual ecstasy or the importance of "experiencing the moment."

Finally, I asked Rabbi Matalon to respond to the question of whether he feels that he is a modern day Hasidic-style Rebbe? He said that he does not see himself that way, nor does the congregation see him in that role. However, in providing more details on his role as the "*Hazzan*" and "prayer leader" of the congregation, he very much does suggest a model for himself that is very much similar to the Hasidic rebbes of old. Rabbi Matalon, in fact, quoted from the teachings of Reb Nachman of Bratslav:

> There is a section from the teachings of Reb Nachman which talks about the *hazzan*, and how the hazzan helps to get all the vectors of the community aligned, centered, and focused on the *Hazzan* . . . I think that's true. I see myself, or the leader of prayer as being the enabler, you know the one who orchestrates, who brings it out.[17]

This remark is very revealing because Rabbi Matalon describes himself as the Hazzan, the leader of prayer. He is, in essence, both rabbi and *Hazzan* and both roles are fused together almost seamlessly. This was definitely an innovation of the early Hasidim because the Rebbe was all these things to the people: a rabbi, *Hazzan*, and the enabler to connect their highest spiritual aspirations and deepest religious longings.

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[17]Ibid.

I asked Rabbi Matalon, "when you pray for yourself, how do you pray for a thousand people at the same time? Are they just drawn into your prayer?

> No, you don't pray for the people, you enable them. What does a conductor do in an orchestra? A conductor is able not only to have the whole thing sound harmoniously, and to lead them through to that they're all together, but also to drag out of them the best sounds, the best tones, the richness, the variety. You know the conductor is able to draw it out, and I feel that the *Sheliah Tzibbur* (prayer leader) is in the same position. We're not one more of the crowd. We're there to try to, as we expose ourselves, as we try to be authentic, as we sing out loud or own prayer, but at the same time there is something that we do, which I don't know where it comes from, but we try to pull it out of people, to demand it, to challenge them to get it out.[18]

This is neo-Hasidism, for it applies insight and talent in a contemporary world where people still need to pray, to be moved, and to search for God's presence in their own lives and in the lives of their communities.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts also avoids referring to his synagogue as Hasidic or neo-Hasidic. Like Rabbi Matalon, Rabbi Kushner identifies Hasidic elements in this approach to prayer, but he says that others have pointed out those elements rather than it being a conscious choice on his (Rabbi Kushner's) part. He did say that his Congregation is more on the Hasidic side of the spectrum, if one sees the spectrum from ". . .high church Anglican to Hasidic Shtieblach (Hasidic Synagogues)." Kushner also says,

> I think that what they (visitors to the congregation) were calling Hasidic was that it (the service) was enthusiastic, and highly participatory and active,

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[18]Ibid.

> compared to most services which are passive, sit down, shut up and do what the man or woman in the front tells you to do. . .[19]

Thus, Rabbi Kushner identifies the same elements as Hasidic in his services at Beth El that Rabbi Matalon referred to at B'nai Jeshurun; specifically, participatory, highly enthusiastic, and expressive.

There are two other aspects to the service at Beth El that are very Hasidic. Rabbi Kushner states,

> . . .on Friday nights, the service is conducted around a large table which some people have correctly suggested is like a *tisch*, and I encourage people to think of me, the Rabbi, as saying Torah and not preaching.[20]

These elements are, of course, Hasidic and yet the concept of the rabbi teaching Torah while avoiding "preaching" is, I would argue, relevant for contemporary Jews as well. At B'nai Jeshurun, for example, the rabbis avoid anything that gives the appearance of a sermon. Instead, there are dialogues between the rabbis and between the rabbis and the congregation. These dialogues are more informal and involve the congregation more directly and actively in what is discussed and taught. This is a modern manifestation of a Hasidic idea in that it binds the people to the teachings of the rabbis and does not require all the rabbis to preach "as if" from high atop some holy mountain. So, when Rabbi Kushner says that he does not preach but rather teachers words of Torah, this echoes what the great Hasidic rebbes were trying to accomplish with their words as well.

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[19] Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, interview by author, 2 July 1996, tape recording, Sudbury, MA.

[20] Ibid.

Music is, of course, an integral and vital part of the service at Congregation Beth El, according to Rabbi Kushner. At the core of that musical experience is the *niggun*. Rabbi Kushner says that it was his Congregation, Beth El, that did play a role in

> . . .the revival of the *niggun* as a serious liturgical form. We begin all our services with two or three *niggunim*. And most of them are Hasidic and we sing them a lot of times.[21]

Interestingly, Rabbi Kushner discusses the *niggun* as fulfilling a need for the congregation to come together, to calm down, and to "focus worshippers on the task ahead of them." This is extremely similar to what Rabbi Matalon said concerning the use of the *niggun* at B'nai Jeshurun, as well as the power of repetition. When pressed, Rabbi Kushner told me that his congregation can relate to the other Hasidic uses of the *niggun* as well: to reach a higher level of *devekuth* (divine adhesion) and *hitlahavut* (joy or *simhah*).

On another level, Rabbi Kushner's experience at Beth El is very similar to Rabbi Matalon's at B'nai Jeshurun. Both rabbis had an opportunity to begin introducing Hasidic elements such as the *niggun* into congregations that were, at the beginning of the their tenure, empty congregations. Thus, each had the advantage of being able to introduce *niggunim* into congregations that were, as yet, unformed, and could gradually become accustomed to the neo-Hasidic style of worship and the use of *niggunim*.

Finally, I asked Rabbi Kushner whether he saw himself as a modern Hasidic rebbe. Having studied at Hebrew Union College with Rabbi Kushner, I know that he often quotes from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, as well as Dov Baer, the Maggid of

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[21]Ibid.

Mezritch. Rabbi Kushner teaches in a style that can be described as Hasidic. Text analysis of a particular section of Torah is often interspersed with Hasidic-style stories, and personal experiences as well as spiritual insights are often incorporated into Kushner's teaching. He is very much interested in Hebrew as a language of prayer, and often refers to gematria as well as the shape of the Hebrew letters to make a point about the mystical implications of Torah and Judaism.

In considering whether Rabbi Kushner views himself as a neo-Hasidic Rebbe, he responded by describing three different models for a Rabbi. Kushner stated,

> Let's take the three words that are available. There's a rav. This is somebody from Lithuania who studied Talmud. There's a Rabbi, who stands up in front of the congregation and can function as a kind of priest. Then there's a Rebbe, who is somebody who can get down and boogie. . .someone who is aware of the importance of emotional energy.[22]

Rabbi Kushner most identifies with the third model.

The fact that Rabbi Kushner identifies the Rebbe as his rabbinic role model is very apparent from a variety of factors. For example, although Rabbi Kushner has a cantorial soloist co-leading the service at Beth El, Rabbi Kushner is very much in charge of the spiritual tone of the congregation. It was Kushner who introduced the *niggun* into the congregation 25 years ago and it is he who organized the main Friday evening service as a *tisch* (i.e., a service around the rabbi's meal table). Also, Kushner will frequently punctuate a Friday evening service with a Hasidic story or two.

I asked Rabbi Kushner about a lecture that Neil Fackenheim presented to a group of reform rabbis in the 1970's. Fackenheim was quoted saying that the Reform movement

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[22]Ibid.

should return to some of the Hasidic ideas and practices in order to re-invigorate the Reform Movement which he felt, at that time, was stagnating. Kushner responded,

> It's like that old Yiddish joke, the vulgar punch line of which is that the doctor tells the nurse to give the patient an enema. The nurse replies that the patient is dead. The doctor says, well, it couldn't hurt. . .I think the Reform Movement is moribund. I mean, do you know any reform congregation where you would be eager to go back?[23]

Thus, Rabbi Kushner is clearly in favor of a neo-Hasidic approach to synagogue worship; an approach that integrates music, prayer, and the inner longings of the community to be in touch with one another and with God. Rabbi Kushner is also a neo-Hasidic-style rebbe, who uses many of the same elements that the early Hasidic masters used in to teach the wonders of Judaism as well as the mysteries of faith.

Rabbi Arthur Green

Rabbi Arthur Green is a Professor of Religious Studies at Brandeis University, and the former Dean of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. As the author of several books, including Tormented Master, The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, Professor Green is known as a scholar as well as a spiritual seeker. He has been a guest lecturer at many synagogues and Jewish organizations including B'nai Jeshurun, and Eilat Chayim in Woodstock, New York. I chose to talk to Professor Green concerning his perspective on neo-Hasidism. I first asked Professor Green whether he viewed Congregation B'nai Jeshurun as neo-Hasidic. Unequivocally, he answered,

> Yes, it is neo-Hasidism. It sometimes calls itself that and sometimes doesn't, but I think it is. The values of the Hasidic movement are very much present

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[23]Ibid.

> there, and that is the values of worship, being at the center of Jewish life, a kind of personal ecstatic worship, a worship filled with joy, and a sense that Judaism is about finding a path to discover God in one's life and serve God and be in God's presence. I think those are very much key values of early Hasidism, in a very different context of course. Early Hasidism existed strictly within both a shtetl context sociologically, and a *halachic* context Jewishly, and those both are changed. But I think there's an attempt to recapture some of the values of early Hasidism. Hasidism itself in some ways pulled back from those values in the nineteenth century, as it became a movement devoted to preserving orthodoxy. In its earliest days, Hasidism was not that. It was very much a kind of spiritual revival movement, and so are these (in the neo-Hasidic synagogues).[24]

This statement is worth examining on several levels. First, Professor Green's comments regarding worship echo the teachings of the early Hasidic masters, as well as what is occurring at Congregations such as B'nai Jeshurun. Rabbi Matalon spoke of the importance he places on worship that is filled with joy and meaning for the worshiper. This priority of Rabbi Matalon's, that worship be meaningful and heartfelt is Hasidic, and Professor Green recognizes it as such by pointing to B'nai Jeshurun as a modern manifestation of Hasidism.

Second, Professor Green discusses an aspect of Hasidic practice that is central to both the philosophies of Rabbis Matalon and Kushner, that of Jewish renewal and revival. Green points out that the early Hasidim recognized their movement as a form of Jewish renewal and Green also observes that the early Hasidic aspirations were very similar to the aspirations of today's neo-Hasidic practitioners. Thus, there is a relationship here that defies the sociological differences of each particular culture. Although Hasidism arose initially in the shtetl and within a community that was *halachic* and observant, there is still

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[24] Rabbi Arthur Green, personal interview by author, 18 July 1996, tape recording, New York, New York.

an attempt by those who are neo-Hasidic to re-capture some of the values of the early Hasidim minus the need to be halachic or strictly observant.

I then asked Professor Green whether he felt that neo-Hasidic synagogues offered people a spiritual high but did not ask of them the religious commitment to be observant that was required of all Hasidim in the late eighteenth century and beyond. Green said that the Hasidic masters understood that *halachah* and Jewish observance were means to an end and not ends by themselves. Green feels that by the nineteenth century, the Hasidim were no longer true to their initial spiritual objectives and instead became protectors of the status quo (orthodoxy). Green sees neo-Hasidism or the contemporary integration of Hasidic ideology into mainstream Jewish worship as the best hope for the original aspirations of the Hasidim. These aspirations are centered, says Green, on "an intimate relationship with God, and realizing Godness in one's life."[25]

We proceeded to focus on how contemporary neo-Hasidic synagogues use music. Keeping in mind that Professor Green is not a musicologist, I, nevertheless, wanted to get his insight into how the musical elements are woven into the neo-Hasidic approach. He immediately saw a parallel between what is going on at B'nai Jeshurun and what he remembered from the days he founded a *havurah* (prayer group) called Havurat Shalom, in the late 1960's. Green emphasized the importance of community singing in that Havurah and the incredible mood it created. Green talked about how the *havurah* would continue singing a particular prayer as a *niggun* long after they had finished singing the

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[25]Ibid.

words. Many people did not know the words and would come in just for the *niggun*. Green then stated,

> Now BJ [B'nai Jeshurun] has learned to do that; there's this wonderful young cantor at BJ. Ari Priven, and he's learned to use the keyboard in a way that's very inviting to singing rather than the synagogue organ of my childhood which was a concert; which turned people off from singing. He's the first one I've seen really manage to just form instrumental music as a way of encouraging participation, and I think that's a tremendous innovation.[26]

Thus, Arthur Green sees congregations like B'nai Jeshurun as a manifestation of the neo-Hasidic spirit that first began to take shape in the midst of the *havurah* movement that Green helped create almost 30 years ago.

I asked Professor Green if he felt that Rabbis like Marshall T. Meyer (who originally made B'nai Jeshurun so successful) were like Hasidic rebbes in that they mixed a charismatic persona with creative uses of music, prayer, and *kavanah* in the synagogue. Green said that Marshall Meyer was not a Hasidic rebbe. Green pointed out that Hasidic rebbes make many life decisions for their disciples; who they should marry, whether a certain career pursuit is right for them. People would also go to the rebbe for a bracha. I pointed out, though, that many people went to Rabbi Meyer with intensely personal problems and religious conflicts. Rabbi Meyer would counsel congregants, and was said to have incredible insights into issues related to death, dying, and bereavement. Many people would say that Rabbi Meyer had a healing energy about him that may have been similar to that of a Hasidic rebbe. Professor Green says, however, that going to a rabbi for

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[26]Ibid.

personal guidance or counseling is not the same as going to a rebbe for important life decision-making.

Finally, Professor Green was excited about the advent of neo-Hasidism in the contemporary synagogue. He felt that this approach to worship helped bring young Jews back to the synagogue and to Judaism. Professor Green said,

> If they (the neo-Hasidic Synagogues) work for Jews and bring Jews closer to the *Kadosh Baruch Hu* [God] through means that are Jewish, means that belong to the treasury of our tradition, then I feel they are valid.[27]

Both Rabbis Matalon and Kushner are committed to this objective of bringing Jews closer to God. As we have seen, they have each chosen neo-Hasidism (a modern manifestation of Hasidism) in order to obtain this objective.

Rabbi Samuel Intrader

Rabbi Samuel Intrader has been the Rabbi of the Carlebach Shul on the Upper West Side of Manhattan ever since Shlomo Carlebach (a Hasidic-style rebbe, musician, and composer) died in 1994. Rabbi Intrader began by assisting Shlomo Carlebach and later filled in when Shlomo was away doing concerts. I first asked Rabbi Intrader if the Carlebach Shul is a Hasidic-style synagogue. Rabbi Intrader responded,

> Well, I think the essence and the philosophy, the learnings and the way of prayer, is very much a Hasidic influence. . . .Obviously, a lot of surface things we do aren't what traditional Hasidut is looked at, dress and a whole bunch of other things. But I think there's a deeper essence, a deeper message that is rooted in Hasidism, in that sense it's very strongly spiritual. . . .[28]

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27 Ibid.

28 Rabbi Samuel Intrader, interview by author, 25 July 1996, New York, tape

In this statement, Rabbi Intrader strikes a chord that all three previous interviewees touched upon. They all spoke of authentic Hasidut (the spirit of Hasidism) as being true to the initial objectives of the Hasidic rebbes, that of spiritual renewal and prayer with *kavanah* (inner devotion). Rabbi Intrader told me, "I consider him (Shlomo Carlebach) very much Hasidus, authentically a Hasid. I consider him authentic *Hasidus*."[29] Rabbi Intrader then went on to tell me how the Baal Shem Tov was addressing "Moishele the water carrier" while Shlomo Carlebach was, in a sense, addressing the Moishele of his period, the Jew who desperately wanted to feel connected to Judaism but through circumstances of his life, was not able to connect, either through fear, ignorance, or disillusionment.

I then asked Rabbi Intrader about Shlomo Carlebach's use of music in a way that might be described as Hasidic. Rabbi Intrader told me that, "Carlebach wanted very much to inspire and bring people to the service and make it very much alive. . . ."[30] He continued by saying,

> Carlebach would say that if two people are speaking at the same time, then neither can be heard. But if two people are singing at the same time, then you have harmony, which was very important to Carlebach, the creation of harmony.[31]

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recording, The Carlebach Shul, New York, NY.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

Shlomo Carlebach was, in fact, a master at integrating his music into the services at the Carlebach Shul. Rabbi Intrader said,

> I think bringing music into the service was Shlomo's contribution. Certain Hasidic dynasties would do whole service with melodies. So again, it's rooted in Hasidut, but making the service come more alive right now, through song, through spirituality, inter-mixing . . . explaining the *kavanot* (inner meaning) of a prayer, and singing the appropriate melody to it is something Shlomo put a lot of energy into. . . .[32]

I recall attending a Simhat Torah service at the Carlebach Shul a few months before Shlomo Carlebach died. Shlomo was sitting up on the bimah with his guitar and the sanctuary was filled to capacity. Everyone was swaying as Carlebach played some of his famous melodies. There was, at the time, a look of serenity on Carlebach's face. He seemed to be in perfect sync with the music, his eyes closed as if his thoughts were deeply focused on the prayers. The congregation, though, was riveted on him and the spiritual energy that filled the Carlebach Shul that evening was unmistakeable.

Finally, I asked Rabbi Intrader about Shlomo Carlebach, the "Hasidic" rebbe. He responded,

> You know, Shlomo was looked at by people in the shul . . . as a rebbe-like person, and we looked at ourselves as Carlebachian *Hasidus* (Hasidim who were led by Reb Shlomo Carlebach) and I still think that his kind of music and prayer (sincere, with passion) is still resonating all over the world.[33]

I would add that Shlomo Carlebach epitomized the neo-Hasidic rebbe. He was a man who was conscious of applying the beauty of Hasidism to a modern existence, albeit an observant one. He was a composer and entertainer, who enthralled people with his music

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

and his guitar-playing. He was a story teller, who always managed to weave personal and religious anecdotes into his concert, and he was the Rabbi of his congregation. One congregant told me that Carlebach inspired her to become an observant Jew, that he was at the core, a great Jewish teacher. Carlebach never told anyone to observe the Sabbath or to pray three times a day, but he inspired them with his music, stories, teachings, and his *neshama* (Jewish soul) to lead a Jewish life. The combination of these qualities that Carlebach possessed can leave no doubt that he was, in the truest sense, a neo-Hasidic rebbe.

We have seen how Rabbis Matalon, Kushner, and Intrader each relate to the use of Hasidic elements within their respective congregations. While they are individual rabbis with particular religious and spiritual orientations, they, nevertheless, each resonate on some level with what the early Hasidim were trying to accomplish; a greater and deeper sense of spiritual connection as well as joy (*hitlahavut*) in worship and in Jewish living. They each use music in creative (Hasidic) ways that engage the congregation in participatory prayer and in a search for *devekuth* (connectedness to God). *Niggunim* are often used for this purpose as well as other neo-Hasidic elements (dancing, clapping, etc.).

Finally, Professor Green comfortably labels congregations such as B'nai Jeshurun and Beth El neo-Hasidic, because of the Hasidic elements woven into a contemporary vision; elements he incorporated into the Havurah (use of *niggunim*, congregational participation, use of musical instruments in an inviting way to encourage people to sing). He also recognizes that the early Hasidim led a movement of "Jewish Renewal," a theme fueling many of todays neo-Hasidic congregations and movements, including one in

Philadelphia, headed by Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, which Professor Green belongs to.

CHAPTER 3

HASIDIC MUSIC THEN AND NOW: MUSICAL DESCRIPTION AND COMPARISON

This section will attempt to demonstrate a link between "traditional" Hasidic music and the music that has been composed by contemporary composers in a Hasidic style. This link is not only a musical one. The Hasidic music of old and the more modern compositions of contemporary composers are also rooted in the philosophy and theology that defines neo-Hasidism. In my discussions with Ben Steinberg, William Sharlin, and Charles Davidson,[34] I found a thread that connects these three composers and their creative impulses to the Hasidim of old. This Hasidic thread for each of these composers is a childhood link to the music of the Hasidim that each of them heard growing up in their respective environments. Though none of these composers actually grew up Hasidic, they nevertheless were exposed enough to the music and the style of Hasidic music to have been profoundly affected by it.

For this particular paper, I chose to focus on composer Ben Steinberg, his approach to writing Hasidic-style music as well as a piece of his Hasidic-style music, *Yism'chu*. In my discussion with Steinberg, I found that he was most concerned with integrating

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Composer Ben Steinberg, interview by author, 20 August, 1996, tape recording, Temple Sinai, Toronto; Cantor Emeritus William Sharlin, interview by author, 7 August, 1996, tape recording, Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, California; Cantor Charles Davidson, interview by author 14 August, 1996, tape recording, Congregation Adath Jeshurun, Elkins Park, PA.

Hasidic elements into his "Hasidic style" compositions in a way that would bring the spirit and intent of Hasidism to contemporary reform Jews.

I first decided that it would be valuable to analyze particular pieces of traditional Hasidic music in order to determine what, specifically, makes the music Hasidic. The pieces I chose to analyze follow a formula that is simple, but nevertheless weave a variety of musical motifs and rhythmic patterns in a "Hasidic way."

The first Hasidic piece I studied was *"Baruch Eloheynu,"* found in the collection The Songs of the Hassidim.[35] I chose this as a representative piece because it encompasses many musical components one finds in traditional (old world) Hasidic music. It is also sung or known by all Hasidim as well. While the date of this piece is unknown, according to Velvel Pasternak, "It (The Songs of the Hasidim) is rather an attempt to introduce the public to the more popular and texted melodies of the Hasidic repertoire."[36]

The *"Baruch Eloheynu"* begins with a syncopated rhythm in measure 1 and the first two measures are centered on the tonic (E). The first 3 measures of the piece establish the fact that *"Baruch Eloheynu"* is in the E *Ahavah Rabah*. Measure 3 and 4 is a sequence of measure 1 and 2 and the melody becomes centered in measure 3 on the 3rd of the scale, G#. There is a heightened sense of emotion as the piece proceeds to get higher in the 3rd measure. The 5th measure of *"Baruch Eloheynu"* begins a long musical phrase that ends with the 8th measure of the A section. The first ending ends on a G# and the second

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[35] Velvel Pasternak, The Songs of the Hassidim, Cedarhurst, NY: Tara Publications, 1968, 20.

[36] Ibid., preface.

ending of the A section ends on the tonic (E). Contained within that long musical phrase are a series of descending 3rds (measure 6) that lead into a descending scale from the 5th degree down to the tonic in measure 7. Reinforcing the *Ahavah Rabah* feeling, there is a fervency and a sense of devotion contained in the melody and the rhythm of this *"Baruch Eloheynu"* that begins in the A section and continues throughout the entire piece.

Section B of *"Baruch Eloheynu"* has the same phrase structure as the A section although the melody is now centered on the 5th of the scale. This repetition of the rhythmic structure higher up the scale once again has the effect of creating a heightened emotional sense as well as a dramatic urgency. The long musical phrase in Section B which begins in measure 13 of the B section corresponds rhythmically to the phrase in section A (measure 5). The melodic relationship between the two sections is defined by a sequence which, again, increases intensity but also balances out both the first and second sections. The melody in section A, measure 5 is centered on the 4th degree of the scale. The melody in section B, measure 13 is centered on the 5th scale degree.

Beyond the musical format I outlined, there are intangible aspects of this piece of music that transcend mere musical description. Indeed, one may be moved to cry, to smile, and to dance while hearing or singing this piece. There is also a dramatic intensity that builds within this *"Baruch Eloheynu"* that I think is especially Hasidic. One could repeat a piece such as this many times, beginning slowly, each time quickening the tempo and building the dramatic intensity and the piece would, in a sense, transform itself

dramatically. The implicit goal in the music is for the Hasid to attain a level of *devekuth* (divine adhesion) and *hitlahavut* (joy in worship).

Finally, the syncopated rhythms that are found in *"Baruch Eloheynu"* in section A, measure 1 as well as in section B, measure 9 give rhythmic vitality to the piece and I think that the syncopated rhythms can inspire clapping, dancing as well as a feeling that is unmistakably Hasidic.

The next Hasidic piece I examined was "*Hoshia Et Amecha*," a popular Hasidic melody that I recognize from the year I spent at the Yeshiva of Flatbush in second grade. This *"Hoshia Et Amecha"* has an engaging and spirited melody and is suitable for festive occasions and *simchas* (i.e., weddings and bar-mitzvahs). I chose to focus on this piece because it evokes a different mood from the previous example and it is also different musically.

The "*Hoshia Et Amecha"* is written in *Allegro Moderato* (moderately fast), in 4-4 time, and is in the key of D natural minor.

The *"Hoshia Et Amecha"* also follows a syncopated rhythm at the beginning of both the A and B sections which is often found in Hasidic music. Once again, the B section of the piece repeats the rhythmic structure of the A section but it does so with a melody centered on a higher tone in the scale, an A (the 5th), section B, measure 9, as opposed to D (the tonic) (section A, measure 1). In the first half of the following measures (section A, measure 7; section B, measure 15), 16th notes are used to accommodate the words, and in the second half of these measures, the 16th notes are used decoratively. The 16th notes add more energy and emotion at this time.

At the beginning of the B section in *"Hoshia Et Amecha"* (measure 9), by the way the piece is harmonized, we can say it switches into the relative major, and then back to minor in section B, measure 11. There is an example of a Ukranian Dorian feeling in section B, measure 13 with an augmented 4th being used. The piece modulates into G minor, section B, measure 12, and reverts back to D minor in section B, measure 14. As in the *"Baruch Eloheynu,"* both the A and B sections in the second repeat ends on the tonic.

I feel that there is a resilience or a feeling of determination built into "*Hoshia Et Amecha"* piece. One can imagine the Hasidim singing this piece in response to a difficult circumstance in the community or in a time of crisis. The text of course lends itself to this interpretation: "Save thy people and bless thine inheritance; tend them and sustain them forever." As in many examples of Hasidic music, the piece can take on many different musical levels depending on the tempo, the instruments used, and, of course, the context in which the piece is being used. For example, the piece might be played and sung with more freedom and joyful expression at a wedding and with more of a prayerful feeling at the festival of Sukkot.

The *"Hoshia Et Amecha"* differs from the "*Baruch Eloheynu"* in terms of mode. The "*Hoshia Et Amecha,*" we recall, is in natural minor while the "*Baruch Eloheynu"* is written in *Ahavah Rabah. The "Hoshia Et Amecha"* is also particularly suitable for joyous occasions *(simchas)* while the "*Baruch Eloheynu"* is more suited to liturgical expression.

The style, tone and the rhythm of the *"Hoshia Et Amecha"* combine to make this piece Hasidic. When "*Hoshia Et Amecha"* is sung, played, or danced at an ever

increasing tempo, with increasing fervor and intensity, it has the potential to ignite those sparks of *devekuth* and *hitlahavut* that is said to be integral, if not primary, to the Hasidic experience.

Ben Steinberg, Composer and Choir Director: An Approach to Hasidic Music and Theology

Ben Steinberg is a composer, conductor, and lecturer. His music is utilized by cantors and choirs in reform congregations across the United States and Canada. He is the author of two publications on choral technique and organization, and he was recently appointed Composer-in-Residence at Toronto's Temple Sinai, where he has served as music director for the past 26 years.

In a telephone interview with Mr. Steinberg on August 20, 1996, I first asked what inspired him to write Hasidic music for the contemporary synagogue. Steinberg explained that he was exposed to Hasidic music from infancy, having grown up in a religious environment." His father, also a cantor, exposed him to a large quantity of synagogue music at a very early age. As a child, Mr. Steinberg, in fact, remembers spending time with a Hasidic rebbe who came to visit his father after services on Shabbat.

In our discussion, Mr. Steinberg provided a distinction between the Hasidic music he picked up as a child and the approach he took to studying Hasidic music later as a trained musician. He said that as a child the experience of hearing Hasidic music was similar to a young person learning to speak a given language. At first, the language is experienced as

something that "washes over" the child and only later is it truly studied, analyzed, and broken down into its composite parts.

Mr. Steinberg also told me that when he began to write Hasidic or Hasidic-style music for the contemporary synagogue, he did not do so deliberately. Instead, these Hasidic influences that he had absorbed over the years began to feed into his music sub-consciousness and he was able to combine that Hasidic influence with his formal training in music and composition.

> A lot of things that I feel have a Hasidic influence may only have a partial Hasidic influence, because there are stylistic tools that become part of the arsenal at hand. For example, I may use, in a piece, one small part of a Hasidic technique rather than saying the entire piece is in Hasidic style. It may be one part of the piece that borrows from what the Hasidim did so successfully.[37]

Mr. Steinberg echoed something I had mentioned in previous examples of Hasidic music. He said that in Hasidic music, there is a gradual movement from slow to fast, from piano to forte. He also observes that,

> Hasidic music is close to Hasidic philosophy. Hasidic philosophy teaches that you do not enter a house with a beautiful room right away; first you start with lesser rooms and build up to the experience of the beautiful room. You gradually work up to that delicious experience.[38]

This statement echoes what we have studied about the *Chabad* or Lubavitcher Hasidim. They believe that one cannot simply arrive at a level of *devekuth* or *hitlahavut*, but that one must spiritually prepare onself for a period of time. Only then can one hope to attain

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37 Cantor Ben Steinberg, interview by author, 20 August 1996, tape recording, New York, New York.

38 Ibid.

the deeper and more profound levels of spiritual experience in Hasidic prayer that are reserved for the more experienced Hasidim. Not only does the person new to the Lubavitchers need to gradually become accustomed to praying as a Lubavitcher Hasid, but the experienced Lubavitcher himself must warm up and make transitions to higher spiritual levels every time he prays. So, as in Hasidic philosophy, the writing of Hasidic music is also a process.

I asked Ben Steinberg how he incorporates the search for *devekuth* and *hitlahavut* into his Hasidic-style music. He replied,

> I generally start writing music with a study of text; sometimes fifty percent of my time is devoted to the study of text and textual commentary before a note is put down on paper. . .also a Hasidic thing to do - to start with the text as well as commentaries and considerations of text, when creating a musical composition.[39]

In other words, the text feeds Steinberg's musical writing the same way the text inspires a Hasidic rebbe to compose a melody or a *niggun*.

Mr. Steinberg also told me that inner textual meanings can be helped by music as well as enhanced by it. He also said that "if the music is successful, it can take over the text and supercede it, also a Hasidic idea."[40]

Finally, Mr. Steinberg said something to me that struck me in a profound way. He said that when he is composing for the synagogue, he often finds himself *davening* (praying) on the organ. The music that he composes comes through him as part of the prayer process. I find this way of composing music Hasidic, for it puts prayer and the

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

search for God's presence first and artistic priorities second. Of course, Ben Steinberg applies his vast knowledge of composition and music theory to his work but his music evolves from that initial first step. That first step of *davening* on the keyboard indelibly links Steinberg to the Hasidim of both yesterday and today. The Hasidim have always composed melodies that are rooted in prayer and their music, as we have discussed, is a bridge for them to a higher level of religious and spiritual experience.

Yism'chu (They Who Call the Sabbath a Delight) based on a Slonim Hasidic Niggun by Ben Steinberg

Ben Steinberg says that it is the text of "*Yism'chu*" that lends itself to Hasidic interpretation. The text, of course, refers to how those who keep the Sabbath and call it a delight shall rejoice in God's kingdom. It is therefore easy to see how a text based on feelings of delight and rejoicing is easily applicable to Hasidic interpretation. The second line of "*Yism'chu*" says that those who hallow the seventh day shall be gladdened by your (God's) goodness. There is, of course, a spiritual message in this text that speaks to how we (the people) are made joyful by God's goodness. Thus, the text of "*Yism'chu*" speaks on every level to the Hasidic spirit and to Hasidic aspirations of *devekuth* and *hitlahavut*.

Ben Steinberg's understanding of Hasidic music is, in part, we recall, that there is a movement from slow to fast, piano to forte, and that there is within the music a sense of joy that builds or heats up throughout the composed or ad-libbed melody. Ben Steinberg's "*Yism'chu*" (non-published, 1964) begins slowly and softly in major. There is a sense of yearning to the music, and a sense of prayer taking place. There are no words

for the first eight measures. Instead, Steinberg uses syllables that are typically used in the *niggun* such as *"Bim Bam"* etc. By the 4th system, page 1, a stronger rhythmic pattern is established that carries throughout most of the piece. The piece is, as is typical of Hasidic music, in 4-4 time.

By page two, system 2, the music has also split into two parts (melody and counter-melody) between soprano and alto. The rhythmic pulse adds to the dramatic intensity as do the half notes in the second system, 1st and 2nd measures of page 2. There is also, by this time, a distinct sense that this music is Hasidic, but that it is also a more elaborate, complex example of Hasidic music than the traditional material examined earlier. Indeed, Steinberg takes a Hasidic melodic idea and uses it in a more developed, compositional manner throughout the piece.

By system 2, measure 1 on page 3, the melody of *"Yism'chu"* is now in the Alto line where the division into 8th and 16th notes gives it a greater sense of urgency and intensity. The base line matches rhythmically in measure 3, system 2 on page 3 and yet counters the melody in the alto line. The entire piece has remained up to this point at a level of piano (soft) or mezzo piano (moderately soft). In this section, one can see Steinberg's sophisticated musical knowledge and his instinctive feelings of Hasidic music working together.

By page 4, system 1, measure 2, the music follows the format that Ben Steinberg has discussed earlier (that Hasidic music goes from piano to forte). It is now moving ino mezzo forte (moderately loud) and the music is divided into 16th notes in both the alto

and bass lines at the top of page 4. This leads to a feeling of even more intensity within the musical line as well as an even greater level of emotional energy.

There is one more element that makes this *"Yism'chu"* Hasidic. As discussed earlier, the *Ahavah Rabah* mode is an integral part of Hasidic music and it is utilized throughout this entire piece (E *Ahavah Rabah*). The *Ahavah Rabah* mode consists of a minor scale with an augmented 2nd step.

The piece ends where it began. The use of the wordless syllables re-establish the feeling of the niggun. By the third measure of system 1 on page 6, the soprano, alto and based lines are all in unison, creating a feeling of harmony and resolution. The piece ends on the tonic, E, which reiterates the fact that this *"Yism'chu"* is in E *Ahavah Rabah*.

This piece, though written in a more musically sophisticated and harmonically complex manner than traditional Hasidic music is nevertheless Hasidic for the following reasons: 1) the use of the *Ahavah Rabah* mode; 2) the use of 4-4 throughout the piece; 3) the rhythm and pulse which is recognizable to the trained ear as Hasidic; 4) the dramatic intensity that builds throughout the piece dynamically as well as musically; 5) the intangible spirit and underlying emotional life of the piece which is unmistakably Hasidic.

We have seen how Ben Steinberg used his knowledge of Hasidic music and theology as well as his sophisticated musical understanding and experience in order to create Hasidic-style music for the synagogue. His music speaks to contemporary generations of Jews because it links them to the Hasidic musical and prayer experience, to the text of the Jewish liturgy, and to their own inner sense of what it is to pray as a Jew.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

If Hasidut spoke to a particular generation of East European Jews at a specific time in the history of East European Jewry, neo-Hasidut has the potential to speak to a generation of American Jews at the brink of the twenty first century. Neo-Hasidism with their own particular musical and theological innovations has the potential to be a potent force for re-vitalizing an assimilated and disaffected American Jewish community.

In this paper, I have sought to explain how Hasidism at its core transcends mere geographic and historical boundaries. In other words, there are qualities inherent in Hasidism that are universal and that speak to generations of Jews whether they lived years ago in the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe or today on the upper west side of Manhattan.

The most important aspect of Hasidut that speaks to contemporary Jews is the search for spirituality. For example at B'nai Jeshurun, Congregation Beth El and The Carlebach Shul, there is an underlying spiritual vision that motivates these congregations and infuses them with a great deal of energy and passion. These communities sing, pray, and dance together, and there is a generally acknowledged spiritual feeling to their services.

While Jews are struggling to find a deeper, more meaningful spiritual connection to their tradition, they are also struggling to create a worship experience that is more warm, participatory, and inviting to the average Jew. Rabbis and cantors are beginning to sense the value in a Hasidic-style approach to worship that not only struggles to connect the community to God, but also seeks to connect every individual to the larger community. Jews are responding to these congregations because they feel connected to the energy and

passion of the Hasidic or neo-Hasidic type services. Many Jews who have stayed away from synagogues for years are returning.

There is a mistaken notion among some that a neo-Hasidic approach to worship automatically eliminates those musical elements that are not of a participatory nature. This is not the case, according to Ben Steinberg. He believes that there is much room within a Hasidic or neo-Hasidic synagogue for composed synagogue music that integrates composition, emotion, and prayer in deeper and more profound ways. Both Steinberg and Sharlin pointed out that many of the Hasidic rebbes, though they were not skilled at notating music (nor did they want to do so, for fear of the melody being put to an inappropriate use) were, nevertheless, gifted composers whose compositions were often very musically complex. Steinberg sees many opportunities for cantors, composers, and choirs to be actively involved in a neo-Hasidic approach to worship, if one truly wants to recapture the essence of Hasidism and not just substitute camp music for synagogue music.

Finally, the years ahead will determine if neo-Hasidism can survive in a society that prizes its materialistic goals (i.e., the attainment of wealth, power, and property) above all else. As we approach the year 2000, I believe that we will see an intensifying spiritual hunger for the many unaffiliated and disaffected Jews across the country. This spiritual hunger may propel many to connect with Jewish experiences that are alive, resonating, and ultimately relevant to their lives in the twenty first century. A modern Hasidic experience rooted in the values and aspirations of the Hasidic masters has the potential to help light a

spark of genuine Jewish renewal and rebirth for contemporary Jews well into the next century.

Appendix A

Interview With Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

Temple Beth El, Sudbury, Massachusetts

July 2, 1996

MP: Is Temple Beth El a modern Hasidic synagogue, and if so, what does that mean?

LK: Several visitors have suggested after attending a service that there was something that felt Hasidic about it. I'm trying to figure out what would make them say that. I think what they were calling Hasidic was that it was enthusiastic, and highly participatory and active, compared to most services which are passive sit down, shut up and do what the man or woman in the front tells you to do and do stuff in a kind of hollow way. In our congregation, all the prayers and all the singing with rare exceptions are done by everybody there are few, if any dramaturgical instructions, the lion-share of the liturgy is done in Hebrew, on Friday nights, the service is conducted around a large table which some people have correctly suggested is like a *tisch*, and I encourage people to think of me, the rabbi, as saying Torah and not preaching.

MP: Do you then consider it a Hasidic approach, because you said they called it that? What do you feel it is?

LK: If that's Hasidic, yeah. From what I know. Compared to the spectrum from high church Anglican to Hasidic *Shtieblach*, yeah, we're a lot closer to that.

MP: I heard one person describe you once, a student describe you as kind of a modern Hasidic rebbe, specifically in terms of your connection to the Hasidim, and in terms of the class that I took with you, and you quoted a lot of the Baal Shem Tov.

LK: I think that Hasidism is the last great flowering of the Jewish spiritual imagination and I believe that is an important piece of the vision for liberal Judaism in America. I've tried to mime that as deeply as I could.

MP: In terms of how you use two important Hasidic elements, one mystical things and the other being mystical/Kabbalah and the use of music. How do you incorporate those elements into your service at Beth El?

LK: Well, I don't think you need to do the mystical thing. I don't know. I guess if I set up a spectrum that runs between rational on one hand and mystical in the other, I'm going to wind up with a parallel spectrum that is going to be a little bit more controlled and repressed, and left brain, and linear and logical on one side, and something that is a little more evocative and emotive and enthusiastic and mystical on the right hand side. So yeah, it would be interesting to see whether or not there is a necessary correlation. Could you be a rationalist and have a participatory evocative service? In principle, I think you could, but it doesn't seem to be that way. The mystical thing is a fluke of my own style, but not essential to the thing. People don't lie over, people don't go into trances. People aren't the heavy meditators, disappointed and leave this congregation.

MP: So, if someone steps say from the world of the Baal Shem Tov, some of those early Hasidic services and stepped into your synagogue magically 200 years later, maybe, would they recognize some sense of what they were used to from their own era, or would it be totally different?

LK: Depends, it's what they compare it against. That's really the important thing.

MP: How about the use of music in the service. You talked about the *Tisch*?

LK: Music plays a very important part in the service. I used to joke that one of the reasons that there's such group participation and singing is because I couldn't sing well. I can carry a tune but I don't have a big voice, a deep voice. So I used to say to people if I can sing you can sing and we didn't have a cantor and actually we hired a cantor and I love her. I'd do anything for her to keep her. She's not invested, but she's a gifted professional, and the congregation, I wanted an assistant rabbi and they said we need a cantor, so I hired her without hearing her sing. I was hiring her solely on her *neshama* (soul) and she turns out to have a wonderful voice. But the congregation made it clear they didn't want her doing many solos either. And we have a big choir, but it doesn't perform at services but rarely. They want to continue singing together. The other big part of the singing was that I think we really did play a small role in the revival of the *niggun* as a serious liturgical form. We begin all our services with two or three *niggunim*. And most of them are Hasidic and we sing them a lot of times. So there's something about that at least that's transnational, if not mystical.

MP: Can you talk for a second then about how you use the *niggun*? Did one or two congregants start this?

LK: We use the *niggun* to bring the congregation together, to calm the congregation down, to focus worshipers on the task ahead of them.

MP: So in that sense do you feel like you're using the *niggun* in the same way that Hasidim have done for centuries?

LK: I don't know how they used the *niggun*. I think so.

MP: In terms of some of the things you say, if they use the *niggun* for lifting the spirit or for raising *devekuth*, the level of closeness to God, the spiritual ecstasy, these things. Can you relate to some of those things or is that kind of far-fetched?

LK: We can relate to that a lot and that people sing a lot of *niggunim* here.

MP: I'm just trying to figure out how it was, was it a spontaneous spark that began the *niggunim*, did one person have the guts to start, because you say it was there before the cantor was there.

LK: Oh, but the cantor's only been here five years. I've been here for twenty-five, and I've been doing *niggunim* like since the first day I was here.

MP: You probably in the beginning, I would imagine, came up against people who weren't used to singing *niggunim*.

LK: I had a funny advantage. There was sort of nothing when I came here, so nobody could say this is the way we've been doing it and I just started doing it. Not everybody liked it. I survived several attempts to fire me over the years, but that wasn't so much because of the liturgy. I don't think people who wanted to fire me cared much about that at all I think it's because I was just pretty tough and often argumentative and combative, and pretty clear about what I wanted.

MP: So it seems like, from my little reading of it that you're somehow using a lot of Hasidic-style elements. Your personality, which is very important, you brought the *niggunim* in, I mean historically the rebbes would do the *niggunim* themselves, they would elevate. They would start off and then people would sing, so do you see more parallels; I guess you discussed that enough in the parallels that you see. In the sense you're the rebbe, you brought

in the *niggunim*, you directed it pretty much, so in that sense, I guess, calling you a modern Hasidic rebbe would be.

LK: Let's take the three words that are available. There's a *rav*; this is somebody from Lithuania who studied Talmud. There's a *rabbi*, this is somebody who stands up in front of the congregation and can function as a kind of a priest. And then there's a rebbe, and this is somebody who can get down and boogie or somebody who can, who is aware or the importance of emotional energy.

MP: And you feel you've integrated those.

LK: I feel more comfortable with the third, yes.

MP: How about, the Hasidim would kind of integrate their music and *niggunim* to not only services but life cycle events, and daily living and all of that. Do you find that because-

LK: Yes there are people that use *niggunim* like that often.

MP: Outside of the service?

LK: At weddings certainly, and at bar mitzvahs that happen at services, at baby namings I'll hear people sing a *niggun*.

MP: And when they talk about their use of the *niggun* do they describe a kind of spiritual feeling connected with it, an openness, a freedom or, is there a power to it?

LK: I think they use the *niggun* the way we do at services. To focus them, to calm them down, to bring the community together, to make a transition from secular garbage to something that's a little holier, a little higher.

MP: Do people ever come up to you afterwards and say it was a transformational experience, or it was really mystifying, do they ever describe to you

LK: People are touched by our services. We get 10% more than my colleagues get, but that's all. And it's a different clientele and the difference is that we never advertise anything. We never announce sermon titles, often when we have a guest speaker we don't publicize it, because when people come we want them, we want everybody to know that the reason that they come is to make Shabbos. And that clears things up a lot.

MP: Two questions as part of that. One is the use of movement because that interestingly is one of the Hasidic features

LK: We're not as good at movement. We stand for the *Amidah*. We've been standing for the *Amidah* for twenty-five years and it wasn't our idea, but it's now becoming very popular in the reform movement, but we also did, we also pioneered the notion of cacophonous davening, so people will stand for the *Amidah* and the room is a sea of noise. And people wander around the room until they find a good place to stand. Sometimes people will watch outside and stand in the garden, some people will stand and face the wall, I mean it's a very intense personal time.

MP: So there's no real dancing say, during *Lecha Dodi* or anything spontaneous like that

LK: No, and that just because I don't know how to dance if I did, I would.

MP: In terms of some of the melodies you use for *niggunim* and otherwise, are they

LK: A lot of Shlomo melodies.

MP: Shlomo Carlebach.

LK: They're very accessible and part of the problem is now that we have a cantor she's able to bring in more complicated *niggunim*. I can't remember the melodies, but she'll bring in much more complicated and beautiful *niggunim*.

MP: In terms of her role then as cantor,

LK: Uninvested cantor.

MP: Whatever her role is as your cantor, is she bringing up new melodies, is she leading the prayer, are you leading the prayer but she's kind of adding some of the musical motifs? How are you kind of organizing that service? I'm just trying to see how the cantor fits into a kind of Hasidic style?

LK: Well the cantor has complete musical control over everything that happens in the synagogue.

MP: Including the *niggunim*?

LK: Everything. I mean that's my style of leadership. I believe you give real responsibility to people, and that's the way you get the best out of them. It's worked very well for me. So, I walk in, whatever she wants to do musically she does. Sometimes I'll say I've got a melody, could I lead it? She'll say fine.

MP: So are you kind of separating the prayer function from the musical function, where you kind of emphasize your role as more prayer-oriented and her role as music?

LK: No, she's a *Sheliach Tzibur*, *Shelichat Tzibur*. And the truth is I would let her lead all the prayers. I have enormous faith in her ability to lead me and the congregation in prayer. And it's only to keep the baal habatim happy that I stand up and read a few prayers. One of the things we've never done though is one of these things where she sings and I read. So a typical service, she'll stand up, we'll get up. Like Friday night, she may sing, I may tell a little *Vort*, and we'll light candles and make *Kiddush* and then we'll do *Lecha Dodi*, and then she'll do the whole service up to the *Amidah*. I might introduce the Amidah and preach, you know,

and then she would lead *Aleynu* and I would do *Kaddish*, and the service would be over. And on *Shabbos* morning, I don't even appear until the *Amidah*. I sit up in the front, she leads the service. So, I mean sometimes we take turns reading parts of the service. Neither one of us like the back and forth thing, I think that's silly.

MP: Carol Balin told me that Neil Fackenheim was giving a lecture to reform rabbis, I forget how long ago, may be in the 70's and he had said then that he felt that the reform synagogue should maybe return to some of the Hasidic ideas and practices that would be a great idea for kind of reinvigorating the movement. Do you agree with that? Do you see that happening as yourself a pioneer of that?

LK: It's like that old Yiddish joke, the vulgar punch line of which is give him an enema, and he says I'm sorry he's dead and she says, well, it couldn't hurt. Okay?

MP: So kind of give it some life, give it a boost?

LK: Couldn't make it worse! I mean prayer, I think the reform movement is moribund. I mean do you know any reform congregation where you would be eager to go back?

MP: Not personally.

LK: Really? I'm serious.

MP: So do you feel that your ideas as important as they are in terms of attracting, I don't want to get political, but what do you think are that spiritual or religious obstacles to other rabbis and cantors maybe incorporating some of that which is working at your synagogue?

LK: The biggest obstacle is the architecture of the room. You can't do that I'm talking about if you're on a *bimah* and if people are sitting in boxed pews. You can't have it. You're wasting your time.

MP: You have to be around?

LK: People have to be around. They've got to be closer to one another, there's got to be something intimate going on. They've got to be able to see one another and the person leading the prayers has got to be with the people.

LK: The Baal Shem Tov could be, in most American synagogues, you couldn't pull it off.

MP: He would have to use the Chapel at a different time.

LK: The chapel is no good either because the chapel is just a smaller main sanctuary. When I do prayer workshops around the country for congregations on Shabbos morning, I can never use a sanctuary. I always use the social hall and a portable ark, and I think I'm able to get people pretty high, and I don't think that I'm gifted. I've got the architecture working, I've got a neutral architecture, that's all. You go into the main sanctuary and people are frozen, they're terrified, they're dead; they fall asleep

MP: The argument that the early reforms made, or may be it's still made in order to reach God we have to have some austerity, we have to have some formality, and a sense of, I don't know if austere is the word but a litter more regal. You don't feel that works period, right? Maybe on the holidays?

LK: Yeah, maybe on the holidays. I don't want to be that blanket. You know, sometimes it's beautiful, for a huge congregation of more than 100 people, and if there's a great choir and a great sound system, a great chazzan and a great orchestra, like Hoffman's clip, it's not that performance worship is bad, it's just that, you know, you have bad performance. In principle, I'm not opposed to a performance. I mean we've had some times when our choral society has made an offering and it was thrilling and beautiful. We've had some times when

the chazzan has soloed and it's been beautiful, and we've had times when people have come up and read solo poetry, it's been beautiful. In principle that's not bad, the question is what's the matrix? I don't believe one person can pray for another.

MP: Can you help out, get them started, boost them up a little bit?

LK: I've got to get you to decide I'm going to do this for myself, then I can help you. But until you decide you're going to do this for yourself, then it won't happen.

MP: Isn't that in a sense being a *Sheliach Tzibur*, helping people out?

LK: Yeah, that's what I think it means

MP: Empowering someone else

LK: Sure

MP: In terms of how the Hasidim, say the Baal Shem Tov were castigated at the time as being rebels and heretics, I think a few of them were excommunicated by the mainstream orthodoxy of the time, do you see a parallel in terms or your role, I guess that was one part of my question. The other part was the fact that even though the Hasidim were changing things and being experimental, they were still *halachic* and very knowledgeable Jews. Is that where perhaps a community like yours parts because they're not, . . . I guess I'm losing track of my question. I'll rephrase it. Do you see a parallel between you role as a rebbe or rabbi today, versus the Baal Shem Tov's role in trying to reinvigorate the synagogue of the eighteenth century, being a rebel, in a sense?

LK: I don't think of myself as a rebel. I think 25 years I was, I was bouncing off classical reform. I just see myself now as doing the only thing I know how to do, work.

MP: I mean, historically, do you see a parallel between what's happening today in the reform synagogue, where people are saying some of the exact things that were said in the eighteenth century, the services are boring, the tisch, people are shuckling but nothing happening?

LK: I would like to think there is, but can't say that with surety I mean it should only happen, right. Between you and me my prayer is that what we're doing is not only right for us but actually is getting a path, charting a course for other communities, and that it's the beginning of something important. But that's not for me to say. Who knows? It could turn out to be a fluke. What I can say is, if I look in the mirror and say I would daven at my synagogue; it's a good place to make Shabbos.

MP: There's something maybe kind of liberating in terms of the way you are integrating things, you're integrating certain Hasidic ideas and musical ideas.

LK: I mean. I'll go back to high participation high personal involvement. I think prayer happens when people say, I'm in this. I want this to happen for me.

MP: Do you think that's universal? In other words, anybody kind of needs that, but they don't know it until it's tapped inside of them, until it touches a chord, in other words, any Jew or any human being is a potential kind of Hasid in a sense if they're sparked?

LK: I don't think everybody's a Hasid, my teacher *alav HaShalom*, Petuchowski wasn't a Hasid; he was a rationalist, but he prayed regularly and prayer was meaningful and beautiful for him. I don't understand what he did when he prayed but I respect that, and that's beautiful and I'd like to think that I'm smart in the sense that even enough to know that not everybody prays the same way. What I do know is, is that there's a whole lot of people out

there who would like to pray more along the model that we're talking about now, and they're right now starving to death.

MP: If you had to kind of compare youself with say modern Hasidic comunities, where some of the ancient Hasidic practices are still beginning, but of course there's a different emphasis on certain things, how do you see yourself in that spectrum? In other words, do you think you're both drawing from the same place?

LK: Definitely. I had the honor to daven where Nachman Borshtein was leading the Bratslavers in Jerusalem, and I have to admit that much of what he did, I would hope people would say I was trying to do.

MP: What are your unique challenges with your community? I'm sure they're very informed, but they're probably not as knowledgeable halachically or as Jewishly in terms of Jewish practice as some of the more observant folks?

LK: My experience is that the more people know about the tradition, the more of it works. The more they do of it, not all of it obviously.

MP: Do they then take it into their lives, into their homes, do they make Shabbat at home? Do they do *niggunim* at home? Is it part of the kids growing up? Is there a real effect on their lives, or do they leave it at the synagogue when they go home?

LK: It's too easy to say, to make it a blanket statement. The truth is, some people are desperate for it, they get it and it changes their lives but if they didn't get it they would have found something else. There are other people who didn't know they were desperate for it, and they get it and it touches somehting deeply and they keep doing it and it changes their lives. When I was younger, I would have spoken with more sweeping generalizations, but

I'm 52 now, people come to it for a lot of different reasons, they take away what they take away for a lot of different reasons, and then all that I'm left with is trying to behave with spiritual and religious integriy, not to lie by what I say or do or sing and I believe that's the best shot.

MP: Last question, do people sometimes look up to you the way they might have looked up to the Baal Shem Tov generations ago?

LK: No, that's a fluke of peoples' ways of relating to rabbis and I think they'd relate to any decent rabbi that way.

MP: Someone who makes them think.

LK: Somebody who touches their soul that they love it and it's wonderful.

Appendix B

Interview With Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon

Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York, New York

July 8, 1996

MP: Would you call B'nai Jeshurun a modern Hasidic synagogue?

RM: I wouldn't call it a modern Hasidic synagogue or a neo-Hasidic synagogue. I would say that it has. . .that there are a number of influences on this synagogue, that this synagogue is quite eclectic and quite suigeneris, and one of the threads here is a neo-Hasidic thread, definitely. Definitely. I wouldn't characterize it entirely as a neo-Hasidic place. You know we use the CCAR Chumash, Sim Shalom which is conservative, we pray in a church, and we use a lot of Hasidic music, so it's quite eclectic.

MP: Do you think that a lot of that comes from the Hasidic revolution in the eighteenth century?

RM: Oh yes, yes. I think a lot of the spirit of the early Hasidic movement. . .was, I think rediscovered. . .maybe, what thirty years ago? Forty years ago? In Buber's writings. . .and then taken up by the Havurah movement. . .you know there was a whole movement towards existentialism. . .and uh. . .generally in western culture. . .and then it was matched in the Jewish tradition by a return to the Hasidic sources. . .and uh. . .the Havurah movement picked it up. ..and so since B'nai Jeshurun in many ways has been influenced by the Havurah movement, then it also has taken that. . .you know that tone, if you will, the neo-Hasidic tone.

MP: What specific Hasidic elements make BJ what it is?

RM: Well there are a few key concepts in hasidut that we don't uh. . .I would not say that we represent Hasidism. We represent certain elements of Hasidism. Number one, uh. . .you have to remember that the Hasidic movement was a movement of renewal, you know, in the eighteenth century. And uh. . .so in that way B'nai Jeshurun takes that aspect of renewal, of going against that which is established, or that which is accepted, of going against the wave in many ways, against the tides, against the current. So that's one element. Another element is the emphasisis on the. . .on kavanah, and ruach, and the concept of hitlahavut, you know, the passion and the fire in prayer. And so in that way yes, you know we've taken a few of those elements, and the music I guess represents those attempts at kavanah and passion, and there are other moments for introspection.

MP: How specifically do you use music to incorporate this?

RM: Well there are a couple of elements. . .uh. . .which I see in those *niggunim*. One is that they're very easy. . .most of them are easy to sing. . .and they have no words. So I believe that it helps concentration. . .and uh. . .I believe that it helps participation because anybody who comes into B'nai Jeshurun, through B'nai Jeshurun's doors, the first thing they will encounter at the very beginning of the service, whether Friday night or Shabbat morning, and even during the week, is a wordless *niggun* that anyone can participate in. You don't have to know, in order to be a part of the prayer experience at B'nai Jeshurun. So that's one thing. Another thing, it helps the *kavanah* by repetition. . .uh. . .I believe that, and Marshall used to say that a Hasidic *niggun* is a melody in search of itself. And I find something very compelling about. . .you know, the melody in search of itself, returning. . .yet it always returns to the same point. But it's like a spiral. . .it returns but it progresses at the same time.

It's. . .you know it's like a staircase. There's something very powerful about that. You can, in many ways play with the intensity and the volume and the rhythm and the tempo. . .and so you know it increases and inceases and. . .it is not static, it is very dynamic. It is embodying many elements.

MP: At one time, many people felt the Hasidim short cut Jewish knowledge and the liturgy just to get to the "experience." Is that a valid criticism of the approach today?

RM: It may be a valid criticism. I think there are a lot of people who come to our doors who are not necessarily experienced in the words of the *Tefila*, they don't even know Hebrew, and some of these concepts are foreign to them, and certainly. . .the wordy. . .first of all the service is enormously wordy, and second of all. . .it has. . .when you pray, you have to. . .most of us go through some process of translation. . .not into English, but a process of translation of those concepts. We Midrashize those concepts, so as to be able to you know. . .all those metaphors. . .God as king, God as father, and so on and so forth, *mechayey hamaytim*. We have to Midrashize a lot of those concepts in order to engage in prayer. Now for a lot of people, the language is a barrier, cause they are not equipped with the Midrash as you are and I am after many years of struggling with this, and we, who are a little bit more experienced, still get, sometimes, entangled or put off, or whatever. . .although more so for the people who come in for the first time or the second time or the fifth time, and are not yet experienced. So the *niggun* and the Hasidic melodies help them to come in and not have to immediately be put off, and then turn off, and not ever come back. So in many ways it's helpful to have that. Now we then go into the text of the prayer, and hopefully, people avail themselves of the literature or of the courses that we offer in order to deal with and struggle

with the meaning of the prayer. But I think what we say is let's begin with less resistance, and let's move in to more and more and more resisitance, meaning let's move into places in the prayer book where we are asked to struggle with it, where we're challenged. But let's begin, let's not turn people away, and turn people off. . .and I believe in the service there's something for everybody, whether it's Friday night or Shabbat morning. There's more depth and there's more complexity, and there's search, and there's comfort, and there's letting go, and there's engaging. I don't believe that necessarily the *niggun* will lead you to superficiality. On the contrary, it can be focused on very, very profound things as you see.

MP: Do you believe that the *niggun* can bring you to a level of ecstasy and *devekuth*?

RM: Yes, yes, yes, yes. It opens doors inside. But also, what it does here which is very powerful is it breaks barriers between people, and so it creates community.

MP: How would you distinguish the experience at BJ from a secular community experience with music and people clapping and getting physical?

RM: Well here there is a dual connection. The horizontal connection of people to people and the vertical connection of community with God, and the individual with God, and that's very powerful. . .and I think it gets generated here very often, and very often thanks to those *niggunim*, which break barriers, inner barriers and outer barriers between people.

MP: Do you see yourself in the role of the modern Hasidic *rebbe*, whose *niggun* is holier than that of the congregation?

RM: No, I don't think so. I don't see myself that way and I don't think people see me that way. I think there's a very beautiful passage in a very beautiful collection of the teachings of Nachman of Bratslav. There's a section which talks about the hazzan, and how the hazzan

helps. . .as the focus. . .it's like all the vectors of the community, all of the vectors of all the members of the congregation get aligned, get centered, and focused on the *hazzan*. And the hazzan draws them out of people, and it's very, very beautiful, very poignant, and in that way I think that's true, I see myself, or the leader of prayer as being the enabler, you know the one who orchestrates, who brings it out.

MP: How do you do that?

RM: By trying to be authentic, sincere. By praying, by developing the ability of praying openly in front of people, of exposing myself, in front of people. I don't say out loud my silent prayers, but I am out there, you know I celebrate and I cry, and I get into the mood of the different parts of the prayer as they match whatever is happening in my life, or as they articulate with my life. And I serve as a model, I think, and I serve as a model of. . .of. . .I'm not always praying, by the way, but I'm most of the time struggling to pray, and I think that's what is valuable. I don't put up a mask; I don't pretend that I'm praying when I'm not. But at least, I think that most of the time my responsibility there is to put a fight. . .a struggle to pray.

MP: When you pray for yourself, how do you pray for a couple of thousand people at the same time? Are they just drawn into your prayer?

RM: No, you don't pray for the people, you enable them. . .you know, what does a conductor do in an orchestra? A conductor is able not only to have the whole thing sound harmoniously, and to lead them through so that they're all together, but also to draw out of them the best sounds, the best tones, the best sounds, the richness, the variety. You know the conductor is able to draw it out, that's the only expression that I have, and I feel we, the *sheliach*

tzibbur, are in the same position. We have to. . .and that's why there's a responsibility on us, an additional responsibility. We're not one more of the crowd. We're there to try to, as we expose ourselves, as we try to be authentic, as we sing out loud our own prayer, and so on, but at the same time there is something that we do, which I don't know where it comes from, but we try to pull it out of people, to demand it, to challenge them to get it out.

MP: Do you think that is possible with anyone, any Jew, or do you think they have to come in with a particular openness?

RM: No, I think it is a combination, as everything, of two things: being endowed with it, having this gift, I think it is a gift, but also a lot of work on yourself and on your skills as a *sheliach tzibbur*. But unfortunately, I feel there's a lot of accent on little tricks, so much as it is in the authenticity, in who you are, in how you struggle, in how you study, in how you pray, and how you are able to then put that on the bimah. You can have all the tricks in the world but if you don't have any *neshama* that you can open up, then nothing's going to help

MP: Tricks meaning creative uses of the language?

RM: No. . .it means what do you wear, how do you stand, how do you use the microphone, how do you move, what do you do with your eyes, what melodies do you use. . .those are all tricks. . .There's a wonderful story which Heschel has in one of his articles on prayer. And the story. . .is of an apprentice, of a blacksmith. And the royal blacksmith dies, and the young man is now appointed to take the place of the old man. And he's commissioned for some work, and he goes out, and he realizes he can't do the work. He's learned all of the tricks, every one of the things he's learned, how to manipulate all of the different instruments. How to use the bellows, how to prepare the wood for the fire. The only thing he didn't learn was

how to create a spark for the fire. So he learned everything except to light the spark. And so that's what happens with a lot of our training and a lot of training in general. ..not just the rabbinic vocation or the cantorial vocation, but in general. You learn a lot of tricks, but you don't learn how to light the spark, and how to light the fire. And unless you have fire, nothing is going to happen in the service. And I think the Hasidic. . .I can't generalize and I won't talk about present day Hasidism, but what early Hasidism tried to accomplish, was to light the spark.

MP: Is it a necessary element in modern Hasidic style to have prayer leader, rabbi, and chief musician meshed into one?

RM: I think it is a very good question. I believe a lot in individual styles. I believe that there are many different models, and many different models that work. And they're all tied to personalities. . .so I don't know if there's one thing that works, but I think that it's best practiced when the people on the bimah, the leaders of the congregation work together harmoniously. . .and there's no competition and there's no jealousy, or little competition or little jealousy. . .and that's one of the things that plagues the American Jewish pulpit. . .is those troubles. Obviously, if those feelings dominate, there's no room for the other feelings, for the genuine prayer, the genuine search. . .I mean if you are consumed on the bimah with thoughts about that type of conflict. And it's not easy, I'm not minimizing it, some of these conflicts are not easy at all. I'm sure that people are thinking about that, thinking about how to minimize. . .it is very difficult.

MP: Do you see this kind of eclectic, participatory kind of Judaism as a reaction to the regal, "cleaned up" style of reform Judaism? Do you still see a value in formality?

RM: Sometimes. But very few times. I think that it provides a nice contast from time to time to have something a little bit more formal. We become a little bit more formal on the High Holidays, and I think it's very appropriate. But it's still participatory, but it's a little bit more formal. . .you know I think it distinguishes this occasion from every Shabbat, and I think it's fine. . .I wouldn't overuse the formality. Now I acknowledge that there may be congregations where people feel more spiritual in that mode, and I think that synagogues like that should exist. You know, I don't think that every synagogue has to become one way or the other. I think that there is a whole variety of spiritual experiences and spiritual aspirations that people have and people are more comfortable this way or that way, and I think there's room for everyone. You know I hear a lot of disdaining comments about Temple Emanuel. I think Temple Emanuel has a very important place on the American Jewish scene. There are a lot of people who connect spiritually in that setting, so why not?

MP: The early Hasidim incorporated music not only into the service but into their daily lives, the life cycle, their homes. Do you see that as part of your mission?

RM: Yes. I think the music is a magnificent way of not only incorporating, but expressing . . .emotions. . .you know the Hasidic movement believed that *simhah* was one of the aspirations, or that the attainment of *simhah* was a great mitzvah. And so there is a tradition of music in the pursuit of *simhah* or joy. And I believe in many ways that our lives are so devoid of music. We live in cacophony and noise and subways and telephones, and even the computers now make noise when you connect them to the internet. . .and we live surrounded by television and words and words and words and words and words and words, so much words. A little melody, without words number one, or if it has to be words, meaningful

words, sacred words. . .Heschel talks a lot about this, about the fact that going into prayer is the opportunity of going into words that are so meaningful, that are profound, not the words of the surface that we use all the time, but the words deep inside that mean something. It's rescuing, redeeming the words from meaninglessness. So here we have an opportunity to get away from the cacophony and the noise and the meaninglessness and sing in search for joy, it creates a bond among human beings whether it be friends or family. So we feel very strongly that music should be taken out of the synagogue. . .at the table on Shabbat, the different celebrations and so on. And I think that it fulfills that need for music in our life, for joy in our life, for bonding.

MP: Do you feel that it connects people Jewishly?

RM: Yes, you know what it does, is that it. . .what the Hasidic movement was brilliant at, the Hasidic movement was brilliant at taking spirituality out of the academy. Those who were asked to debate *Midrash* and go to the Yeshiva were ones who were privileged to have access to God. Now what if I couldn't afford it? So the Hasidic movement brought Judaism back to the masses of the Jews who didn't have time to study in the Yeshiva because they happen not to have a rich father-in-law who would support them. So what they did is they took it out of the Yeshiva, but they also took it out of the synagogue, they took Judaism and the connection with God, spirituality, the pursuit of the connection with God, to every aspect of your life. So there are Hasidic stories that tell of. . .shoemakers or carriage drivers. . .who don't have the time to go to prayer because they have to be working on their shoes, early in the morning before. . .you know there's a famous story of the shoemaker who couldn't go to the *minyan*. Because people were poor, they had one pair of shoes, so they would leave

the pair of shoes at night, and they would pick it up in the morning. So the man was working all night and couldn't get to the morning *minyan* because he was still working on the last pair of shoes, so that his customers could go to work. So he would put the nails in the shoes. . .singing a *niggun*, and that way he would feel a connection with God. He would say. . .this shoe is now going to be used for sacred work. The people are going to synagogue with this and they're going to go to work and redeem the world. . .you know it was a beautiful concept of taking Judaism outside of the synagogue. And there again Judaism needs to be something that pervades life not just relegated to once a week or once every month or once a year in a cathedral or in a synagogue.

MP: How do you see yourself accomplishing this today? Is that one of your goals?

RM: Oh yes, most definitely. We have people coming to the morning *minyan*, we have people having prayer groups. We have people having. . .you know most of it happens on Shabbat, but we have people gathering also during the week to study and to celebrate, and there are fellowship groups here. . .most definitely. . .My goal would be to create. . .I don't want to become unrealistic or sound messianic, but I would like to have a congregation where people live their Judaism twenty-four hours a day.

MP: Would you compare BJ to a Shlomo Carlebach type of synagogue?

RM: No I think we're different. We're very friendly. . .I really admire what Shlomo Carlebach has done and what his successors are trying to do, and it's wonderful. . .we're different, and there's room for everybody.

MP: In order to keep the neo-Hasidic spirit going, is it incumbent that one becomes more observant and more halachic? Or is that not a prerequisite in modern times?

RM: No, look. . .I prefer to talk about a more intense Jewish life, a more committed Jewish life, a more felt spirituality, a more intense prayer, rather than talking about more or less *halachic*. I believe that there are some Jews who do not define themselves as *halachic* Jews but perhaps as *aggadic* Jews who are equally committed and passionately committed to their Judaism, except that they don't necessarily have the *Shulchan Aruch* as the prime text, the sacred text in their lives. But that doesn't mean that they don't pray with *kavanah* or they're not passionate or committed Jews. So I would like to talk, to leave room for *halachic* Jews and non-*halachic* Jews, to talk about a more committed, passionate, integrated, intense Jewish life. . .Whether you observe Shabbat this way or that way, I don't care, observe Shabbat. . .If you light candles after dark because that is your tradition or before dark, or whether you pray three times a day, that's less important to me than the fact that you pray, the fact that you pray with *kavanah*, the fact that you are involved in Jewish life intensely. Whether you live *Glatt kosher* or less kosher, I mean, you know, that's less important to me. . . .and that you live Jewishly.

MP: Do you see a neo-Hasidic approach working in other parts of the country or the world where Judaism is weak, or people don't come, or just the old people come? Could it work in a place where people are more conservative politically?

RM: Yes of course it could. It's not a question of politics, and it's not a question of persuasion. It's not a question of halacha either. It works on the Upper West Side, it works in Williamsburg. . .the melodies. . .right? So it has to do with spirit, in a non-political way. Now I believe that it has the power to revitalize, to bring in more people to participate. . .now some people are opposed. . .they claim they want to see younger Jews come in and have the

synagogue filled with people and a lively service. . .but they're very afraid of losing their power. They boycott all of those aspirations which they claim. . .they aspire to. . .and instead they boycott it and want to keep it a small little club where they can have a say. So I think that's what the issue is.

MP: Do you think there is a way for the modern day musicians of the synagogue to maintain their artistic integrity while fusing some of this together?

RM: Certainly. I think that's a very profound question and I think a lot of people are dealing with that. I believe that there is room for the choir, I believe there is room for the cantor, I believe there is room for the organist or the keyboard player or other instruments. I believe, however, that things have to change, things have to shift. That doesn't mean you go from an organ/choir/cantor service to a. . .campfire style with guitar. I mean, I believe that things have to shift, have to begin to work in a transition and see how we employ these people. . .in a creative, imaginative, and spiritually appropriate way. Now you see what we've done at B'nai Jeshurun in terms of employing a musician, and what we've done in terms of employing a choir, which sings on the holidays, but also we're now incorporating on certain special occasions. . .like the morning of Pesach, or Shabbat before Pesach, or Channukah, or different holidays, we incorporate the choir singing a few songs that are pertinent to that day. And I think people love that, much more than if the choir were to be there every single Friday night or Shabbat morning. So I think there has to be some flexibility. And the cantor also has to have flexibility. I think there's room for a couple of wonderful, beautiful pieces in the service, but not to monopolize the service at the expense of the congregation. I mean why should . . .there seems to be some kind of dichotomy between cantor and participation. Maybe we

should talk about cantor and participation at the same time. Why should it be opposed? And I think the cantor should do his other art and at the same time, bring the congregation in to sing with prayer. . .There's room for both. It's not either or.

MP: Can you contrast the neo-Hasidic approach with the modern day Hasidim in Crown Heights and Williamsburg? Are they the true heirs of the Hasidic movement because they can trace the dynasty back?

RM: No, I think the Hasidic movement is a movement of the Jewish people and I think who inherits. . .we all inherit. Am I the descendant of Rabbi Akiva or are you the descendant of Rabbi Akiva? We're all descendants, and we can appropriate and take whatever we want from our Jewish experience, and that's what we're doing. I would not say that they are more authentic or that we're more authentic, I don't like those terms. We're authentic, they're authentic. They take whatever they want, we take whatever we want. There's room for everybody.

MP: What are your thoughts on the Jewish Renewal Movement?

RM: I think it's yet another option. I think they've been on the fringe but they've made a very big contribution to the Jewish community. They've tried things that then have become mainstream. So when they tried something new, everybody laughed. Many people laugh at them. . .and they call them names and they say they're "touchy feely" and they're this and they're that. And the truth is that many of the things they try on I'm not comfortable with . . .but. . .they experiment, and eventually out of five things that they try, one or two fall into the mainstream of the Jewish religion. So we should all be very grateful to them for their

willingness to take risks, for their enormous creativity, and for their courage. And so. . .not everything has to be your cup of tea but let others live.

MP: Is there a danger of appropriating a Jewish mysticism without knowledge of Torah?

RM: I think there is a danger, making it too superficial and too popular.

Appendix C

Interview with Professor Arthur Green

Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts

July 18, 1996

MP: The first question is whether you feel that what's happening at congregations such B'nai Jeshurun and places such as Jewish Renewal, would you consider that neo-Hasidic, a modern day Hasidic approach and if so, why?

AG: Yes, it is neo-Hasidism. It sometimes calls itself that and sometimes doesn't, but, I think it is. The values of the Hasidic movement are very much present there, and that is the values of worship, being at the center of Jewish life, a kind of personal ecstatic worship, a worship filled with joy, and a sense that Judaism is about finding a path to discover God in one's life and serve God and be in God's presence. I think those are very much key values of early Hasidism, in a very different context of course. Early Hasidism existed strictly within both a *shtetl* context sociologically, and a *halachic* context Jewishly, and those are both changed. But I think there's an attempt here to recapture some of the early values of early Hasidism. Hasidism itself in some ways pulled back from those values in the nineteenth century, as it became a movement devoted to preserving orthodoxy. In its earliest days, Hasidism was not that. It was very much a kind of spiritual renewal spiritual revival movement, and so are these.

MP: So, do you see these modern day revival movements as valid, even if they are not as *halachically*-connected or religiously observant as the older ones were?

AG: Valid. Define the term valid. If they work for Jews and bring Jews closer to the *Kadosh Baruch Hu* through means that are Jewish, means that belong to the treasury of our tradition, then I feel they are valid. Hasidism always understood that the halacha is a means toward an end. And the end is the *Kadosh Baruch Hu.* The end is an intimate relationship with God, and realizing Godliness in one's life. Hasidism even in its fullest never considered the mitzvot or the halacha to be an end in themselves, which is, I think a kind of Jewish idolatry and Hasidism was able to understand that, and so, in this sense, the means are different, the means are not the same but the end is the same.

MP: So, if you would describe some the means that you say, the means used to reach God, aside from the joy and the ecstasy and the dancing, the movement, is there something implicit in the philosophy and the theology in these particular synagogues that is also Hasidic, or is it primarily the approach to prayer, and to music and to davening that makes it Hasidic?

AG: Well, you have to read the thinkers, on whom they rely. So, I'm not very modest, I'll say that I am one of them and my book, Seek My Face, Speak My Name and other essays that I've written certainly were influenced Hasidism. In Seek My Face, Speak My Name you have pages and pages of footnotes that tell you that, so there, about my own writing I can be quite explicit. Other people who are being read as theologians or religious thinkers who influence this movement, I would say first, neo-Hasidism was a, let me do a little history for you, okay. Neo-Hasidism goes back to the turn of the twentieth century. Two thinkers are most prominently associated with it: Martin Buber, writing in German for Jews in the west. Now Buber's first volume, Hasidic Towns was published in 1906 or 1907, so it was close to the turn of the century that this began. He wrote the legend of the Baal Shem Tov and of Rabbi

Nachman, 1906 or 1907, I think. It was a young Buber's, very romantic, recreation of Hasidism as kind of spiritual wanderlust. At the same time in Warsaw, there was a Jew named Hillel Zeitlin. Zeitlin wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish for East European Jews, and he began in 1910, publishing articles and books on the philosophy of Hasidism. He was a very interesting Jew, he had been part of the circle of writers who started modern Hebrew literature, people like Brenner and Berdechefsky (sic) were associates. He went to the first Zionist congresses but unlike anybody else in that era, he began to turn back to the tradition. He published a book on Spinoza, he wrote a Nietcle (the viner) in Hebrew. He was trying to create a Hebrew philosophical language, and then before World War I, he began to return to Hasidism, and write a kind of philosophy of Hasidism. Zeitlin was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto, was one of the famous stories of the Warsaw Ghetto during his death and Buber for West European Jews, and Zeitlin for East European Jews, in the inter-war period were both leading a kind of neo-Hasidic philosophy. Zeitlin became observant, and Buber never did, but Zeitlin was not accepted by the Hasidim either. Because even though he was very frum, and grew a long beard and looked like a Hasid, in his books he would always compare things to Indian religion, or he would make references to Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, he was a literate, western man, and so the Hasidim didn't take him seriously and neo-Hasidism never got off the ground in this country because Americans weren't interested in that stuff, Americans were so "pragmatistic." You know, Mordecai Kaplan was the philosopher for American Jews and that was American philosophy; a very western, and Kaplan came anyway from Vilna, not from Hasidic areas, and was a misnagid. Jews in America began to discover Hasidism only after the war. In a theoretical way, Buber's writings helped and Heschel's writings helped.

Heschel, even though he tried to represent himself as theologian for all Jews, everybody knew that he came from a Hasidic family and represented the Hasidic spirit. So Buber and Heschel, I would say theologically brought a lot of the spirit of Hasidism to American Jews. But then in the 1960's, there were two younger men who did a great deal to make neo-Hasidism a reality in the American scene. They were Zalman Schachter and the late Shlomo Carlebach, and they had a tremendous influence. They were, as I understand it in some ways the first two emissaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe since the American college campus, and the Lubavitcher's point of view, they both went bad.

MP: When you say they went bad, how did they go bad? Did they go away from the halacha, traditional Hasidic teachings? Were they too strong as personalties?

AG: They were strong personalities, but that was not the issue. Yes, they both went away from certain kind of *halachic* depictions, and that's outside the camp. Shlomo was having mixed singing and dancing and everybody holding hands already in the 1960's and that in the orthodox, the Hasidic world is strictly taboo, and Zalman was experimenting with psychedelics in the 1960's and in his personal life he just stopped being as observant as the Hasidim were, and Shlomo remained more observant to the end, Zalman was lax in observance. But Shlomo caused this taboo of mixed groups, mixed dancing, and so on. So they were both, as far as the rebbe was concerned, as far as orthodox Hasidism was concerned, they were both outside. But they have, the two of them had a great deal, Zalman still has, a great deal of Hasidic knowledge, tremendous learning of Hasidic text, much more than some people realize.

MP: So when you look at a group like Jewish Renewal, that's kind of taking off up there in Woodstock, do you still consider that to be within the neo-Hasidic camp or is it becoming something really on the fringe in terms of its approach to Judaism and its integration of Eastern philosophy?

AG: You use dirty words like "valid" and "fringe." Let me discourage you as a researcher, this is a research project, not an approval or disapproval project. So as a scholar, let me try to coach you away from those words. It is influenced by neo-Hasidism, is influenced by Buber and Heschel, and also by Zalman and by Shlomo, and by myself in other ways. But it's also influenced by other things. It has been influenced certainly by the American counterculture revolution since the 1960s. You can't examine it without seeing that part of it, the historical context. It certainly has been influenced by Arthur Waskow and his whole rooting at American political radicalism. It certainly has been tremendously influenced by the feminist movement which is not a Hasidic product of course. So all of those things have come together - - Hasidic sources, neo-Hasidic sources have combined with other forces from the general culture to create this phenomenon.

MP: Do you see a parallel in terms of what's drawing people to groups like Jewish Renewal and congregations like B'nai Jeshurun to what drew people into the Hasidic movement of the eighteenth century, something that they were missing and that they needed, a spiritual connection, a vibrancy, that's there's a parallel historically between then and now?

AG: I see there is some, and there's some very grave differences. The answer is yes and no. In many ways, in the Hasidic movement, people were looking for a rebbe, remember. Hasid means disciple in East European context and a disciple is a disciple, that means he's a rebbe.

And the Jewish Renewal movement has tried to avoid that model. So you don't find a rebbe the same way you do. You can say that there are thousands upon thousands of people in our culture that are looking for gurus, whether they go to EST or to some Eastern discipline, or whether they go to Lubavitch and the Jewish Renewal movement gets some of those people, but it doesn't provide a rebbe in the same way that those others Jewish and non-Jewish do. So that's one difference.

MP: I was there for a week last year and I thought that a lot of people revered Zalman Schachter in that way' no?

AG: I don't know. I haven't been there with him in that way, so I can't say.

MP: BJ you had Marshall Meyer at B'nai Jeshurun, a lot of people looked up to him.

AG: Yeah, looked up to, but not quite the same thing. Respecting a teacher is not quite the same thing as going to a rebbe for a bracha, and the rebbe decides who you should marry, and the rebbe decides how you should live your life, and then whether you should go to college and all theses kinds of things that spiritual masters decide for people. There is some difference. Now I think in BJ and in Woodstock, there's also something else, and that is a very strong social factor. Spiritually inclined young Jewish men go to look for young Jewish women of the same variety. You couldn't do that in the old Hasidic communities, because there were no women to be seen, right, it was an all male phenomenon pretty much. You might meet a nice father-in-law there, you wouldn't meet the daughter (laughter), so there's a difference in that context, too. There is a social component which I don't think anybody should be ashamed of; what goes on. I was just there, and that's a piece of it, I would say. So the answer is it's all complicated like any phenomenon on the social scene. There are

Hasidic roots but there are also very American roots, and on the one hand, you have to say the whole Jewish Renewal thing is an American religious movement based in the 60's, based in the counterculture, based on the popularity of meditation and eastern religions as a Jewish response to all that. And on the other hand, you've got a Jewish historical context which is Hasidism, Buber, and Heschel and everything else I said and both of those are true.

MP: Now I know you're not a musicologist, even though my paper is going to deal with a lot of musical elements, I wanted to ask your opinion about how music is integrated into these services, and into these neo-Hasidic approaches, with the *niggunim* and with the participation, do you think those are the vital elements to make it successful, the participation?

AG: Absolutely vital, they have a tremendous impact and Shlomo has made a tremendous contribution to that and all the work from him, not only his *niggunim*, but his way of singing *niggunim* for half-an-hour. And style of interspersing *niggunim* and stories, and using *niggunim* to create a mood and so on. Shlomo was a tremendous teacher of that. In Chavurat Shalom which I founded back in the late 60's in Lawson, that was when the Chavurah movement started and we always sang *niggunim*, even if we started something with words like El Adon, Adon Olam, or wherever it was in the service, we always kept singing the *niggun* long beyond the words, because there were lots of people that didn't know the words, that couldn't read Hebrew, but who could come in for the *niggun*. And there is something about that kind of singing that's very inviting, as you see at BJ. Now BJ has learned to do that, there's this wonderful young cantor at BJ, Ari, and he's learned to do that with the keyboard in front of him. He's learned to use the keyboard in a way that's very inviting to singing rather than the synagogue organ of my childhood which was a concert;

which turned people off from singing. He's the first one I've seen really manage to just form instrumental music as a way of encouraging participation, and I think that's a tremendous innovation.

MP: So let me ask you about some of the critiques, some of the more traditional cantors have of the B'nai Jeshurun approach, the rabbis are really there as the *shelichei tzibur*, they do most of the music, even though Ari's playing and singing, he's not up there on the *bimah*. Is that an essential aspect of the neo-Hasidic approach that the rabbis integrate the music, the prayer, the liturgy, there is no traditional cantorial model up there just singing.

AG: That's right, there should be no cantor/performer. The cantor should not be a performer in any way. I don't care if the person up there is called rabbi or not, I don't think that's the issue. But we have completely moved away from cantor as performer and back toward *sheliach tzibur*, or *shelichei tzibur* collectively encourages participation. It's all about participation; it's not about performance in a neo-Hasidic approach. The removal of the bimah is very important. The prayer leader, even the congregation represents the congregation that speaks up, sings up from the congregations' midst, not from up front. Never a model of the person who's looking at the congregation and singing the service.

MP: If you had to look at it since you've been around to these places and you've done it yourself, how much of what happens there is genuinely spiritual/religious, how much of it is kind of an emotional/psychological thing where people connect with the community, or can not separate it?

AG: It's basically inseparable, and I'm not going to even begin...what do you want 52% versus 48%, do you know what I mean? Where are the lines between the spiritual and the

emotional? I don't think anybody can give you those lines, even in a Hasidic synagogue. I don't think anybody could divide those lines in the Baal Shem Tov's synagogue.

MP: But would you say something is happening?

AG: Something is happening that is spiritually real and powerful that cuts across people with a wide range of emotional needs and make-ups. See, if it only happened to one person or only to people who had a particular need or something like that, then it would be easier to say this is just a psychological phenomenon, but it obviously impacts on a very wide number of people, very different types and it has produced. . .It has produced people who have who have given their lives to Jewish life, it has produced a generation of people who have come out of it and been inspired by it.

MP: Yeah, I'm one of them. I had asked Roly about the fact that some rabbinic critique years ago on the early Hasidim that they were making it too simple, anybody could sing bim-bim bam, anybody could participate, you didn't have to be learned in Talmud, Rashi, or in anything and Roly said that that was one of the gifts that the Hasidim at the time made Judaism accessible. Do you think that's a benefit, can it also be a danger in having many more people who kind of just want to get into the fun of it but not really know what it's about?

AG: Well listen, we've tried the other thing (laughter) which is keeping them out and that doesn't seem to do as much good, ok. It's easy to keep them out, right, just get out of here, come back when you know Hebrew. We've tried very hard to keep them out. We have seen a whole generation of Indian and other oriental spiritual teachers who have come west and who have never said learn Sanskrit first, who have never said convert first, who have never said observe all the Hindu feasts and fasts and choose a cast and put an ark on your forehead

and then come back to me. They have said, "oh mishanti, oh mishanti, come chant with me." That's about as inviting and simple as you can be and we have seen thousands of young Jews follow them, partly because there are no barricades. They learned when they came west not to insist that you become an Indian or a Tibetan culturally before you can be one of the enlightened. And I think we have, we are responding to them in some ways with Hasidism, which is saying we too have a Judaism that you can come directly into. Now, when you get to step 2, 3 or 17, you would still have the need to learn Hebrew because ultimately Judaism is very language-based and needs Hebrew. When you become serious in your path you have to make some decisions about how you're going to keep Shabbos. But no barricades on the front door. The front door has to be wide open, and if *niggunim* help us with that, and Ari's keyboard helps us with that and Hasidic stories help us with that, I think terrific. Let's open the doors.

MP: Is there a point where something becomes, in a sense watered-down and so accessible that it ceases being what was traditionally Jewish and becomes something else?

AG: Maybe the something else is good - maybe it's time for something else. Times have changed and we don't recognize that times have changed a lot. You and I both belong in Williamsburg, you don't belong at HUC, I don't belong at Brandeis. Times have changed drastically, and so we have to create something that will speak to people in these times, open the doors for them and bring them in. I think there's still more time to give them serious stuff. I spend my life studying and teaching text, that's what I care about, but as to my doctoral program, by the way, you can't get in unless you have a very high level of Hebrew text knowledge. But that's the doctoral program, that's serious stuff.

doctoral program, by the way, you can't get in unless you have a very high level of Hebrew text knowledge. But that's the doctoral program, that's serious stuff.

MP: So when a professor told me that Fackenheim spoke to a group of HUC rabbis in the 70's and he told them that he felt that this neo-Hasidic approach was the future of Reform Judaism, do you think that it's really the future of Judaism in America if Judaism is to survive?

AG: That's a surprise from Fackenheim, I'm happy to hear that from Fackenheim. I think it is a key to the future survival of Judaism in America. I never say *the* key, because I really am a committed pluralist, and I think there misnagids and neshamas out there who really will never understand this stuff. And I think Gene Borowitz has to have disciples, so there have to be people who are different.

MP: When I spoke to Dr. Borowitz about it, he said he felt that somehow in his way of describing it, I don't want to put words in his mouth, that God helped create what was going on at B'nai Jeshurun, it was even a surprise for Marshall Meyer. Do you agree with that?

AG: That's wonderful; it's a lovely way to say it.

MP: So are we prepared to say that in places like B'nai Jeshurun and Jewish Renewal there is a sense of the shechinah, the sense of God's presence there, everybody feels it, they might describe it differently, but that's what they're experiencing?

AG: It seems to be, that's pretty powerful.

MP: One or two last questions. Some of the teachings of the early Hasidic masters like the Baal Shem Tov and the Nachman of Bratslov, what do you think of some of those most critical teachings that are still relevant today, especially in the neo-Hasidic synagogues?

something and *shichlut*. You can look at those four chapters. See what you recognize in those four chapters in the neo-Hasidic synagogues as you see it.

MP: One or two last questions then, the Hasidic synagogues of old, through the music and the life of the community was not limited to the synagogue, the synagogue was one place people sang together in the Tisch, sang together at weddings, the Brit Milah, everything, there was *niggunim* in this modern day world.

AG: Have you gone to Hasidic places?

MP: I went to Carlebach and I'm going to be going out with one of the professors here to some places in Brooklyn, to Williamsburg. I'm still trying to get at that distinction between, because I know for a fact that at BJ a lot of people come, a couple of thousand people sing together, daven together, but they'll go off after services and very often, they might connect with one or two other people, but it's not a community where everybody knows everybody.

AG: Of course not, it's New York. Listen, do yourself a favor. Go to Bobov in Borough Park, and go for a Shabbos, go for a Yom Tov, Sukkos is wonderful in Bobov. Hear the davening, hear the Bobov Rebbe daven on Sukkos, the Bobov Rebbe daven hallel on Sukkos, it's an experience you won't forget. It's very easy; it's 49th Street and 13th Avenue in Borough Park, and I think to go for Sukkos would be wonderful, but even for a Shabbos, they'd be delighted to have you there for a Shabbos. I mean, you're a guy, women have a harder time doing that, you can do this. As a Jew, it's an experience to have, to see what a Hasidic community is like, and the music is wonderful. Bobov has beautiful *niggunim*. You'll hear wonderful davening.

MP: Last question, would you agree with Roly that you can't really say what's the genuine Hasidic, there's the neo-Hasidic, there's Williamsburg, each community is borrowing from the same place, the Hasidic revolution of the old 18th century. Is that true, each pulling from that source in different ways?

AG: Hasidism survives today in two very distinct ways. I don't know if I agree with Roly about this. There is the Hasidic community and there is the neo-Hasidic community. They are very different. They're very clearly different. The Hasidic community is still strictly *halachic*, its teachers have lineage, whether it's parental lineage or master/disciple, lineage that goes back to the Baal Shem Tov, and they're trying to continue the path, even though that path has been transformed in some ways by historical circumstances. We neo-Hasidim are outsiders. We grafted ourselves onto the tree, only beginning in the early 20th century, and our grafting is incomplete, because we did not accept the full halachic authority. Most of us are not Orthodox Jews, and that means we will never be part of the Hasidic community, that is the old way. We never expect them to recognize us as fellow Hasidim, of course not, because we don't believe that the way to create the Jewish future is to live in the style and garb and morays of the 18th century. We don't think that's what Hasidism should be about.

MP: How do you feel about a lot of more traditional Jews, are against the teaching of Kabbalah to people who don't have a solid grounding in Torah, Talmud, and Jewish learning, and they feel that can be dangerous when it's taken out of context? Do you feel that's a potential risk at places like Jewish Renewal where Kabbalah is really taught and assimilated?

AG: I think it is a risk when you have charlatans like Phillip Burg and the Kabbalah Institute, because he's promising people that if you study Kabbalah you will have success in business,

success in love, the stars will protect you. It's at the lowest level. There is charlatism. There are people around who are sort of pseudo-Kabbalists. We are not teaching Kabbalah in that dangerous sense. For Kabbalah to be dangerous to the mind, you have to take it at the literal truth, in a much sharper way than we do, though I don't think there's any such danger there. Nobody every said that about Hasidism. Hasidism was meant to be something anybody could study, unlike Kabbalah. So that criticism doesn't apply to Jewish Renewal.

MP: But Jewish mysticism is an integral part of places like Jewish Renewal. It doesn't seem to be as much at places like B'nai Jeshurun, Carlebach, but definitely at Jewish Renewal.

AG: There is some, but it is rather light Jewish mysticism, and it's not taken literally. So I don't think there's any such danger.

Appendix D

Interview With Rabbi Samuel Intrader

Congregation Kehilath Jacob ("The Carlebach Shul"), New York, New York

July 25, 1996

MP: How did you come to be Rabbi of The Carlebach Shul?

SI: Basically, I had worked with Shlomo for many years. . .mostly assisting him with his concerts and traveling with him and stuff like that. . .so our relationship evolved. . .even if it started on the business end it had a very strong spiritual side of it too. . .to make a long story short, on the Shabboses that Shlomo wasn't here, they needed to have someone at the synagogue. So, they brought a lot of different people in to do Shabboses periodically. . .I was not living here, but I was doing things a little bit with the shul too at that point. . .So about a year or two after that the Board asked me to be the assistant rabbi on the weeks that Shlomo wasn't here.

MP: Are you a rabbi?

SI: Yeah. So then when Shlomo wasn't here, I did some variation of what I'm doing now. And that I think went on for a few years. . .I don't know the exact time. . .and then when Shlomo passed away, to oversimplify. . .It started again with the Shabboses that he wasn't here, which was all of them, I guess. . .so it evolved into this phase.

MP: Is The Carlebach Shul a Hasidic-style synagogue?

SI: Well, I think the essence and philosophy, the learning and the way of prayer, is very much a Hasidic influence. . .Obviously, a lot of surface things we do, aren't what traditional Hasidus

is looked at, dress and a whole bunch of other things. But I think there's a deeper essence, a deeper message that is very much rooted in Hasidism, in that sense, it's very strongly spiritual, obviously. . .but classic definitions of Hasidus. . .over the years. . .usually it's a Hasidic rebbe. . .and his disciples. So Shlomo himself wasn't. . .his parents were German and not of Hasidic influence, and he came into Hasidism. I think it took him a long time to be able to hear himself called 'rebbe' by a lot of us. . .So in that sense, in the traditional rebbe disciple official way, the shul probably is not that. But on the other hand, I think the essence of a rebbe and Hasidism, the shul very much is that. You know Shlomo was looked at by people in the shul. . .as a rebbe-like person, and we looked at ourselves as Carlebachian Hasidus when he was alive. . .and I still think that his kind of prayer, which is right now resonating all over the world. . .at the Kotel they daven his style, Friday nights there's a minyan. In L.A. there's a happy minyan which started about a year ago. . .They want to start one in Santa Cruz, they just called. I've been to Boston a few times, and they've started there. . .in L.A., I've been there so many times and they daven so strongly . . .So it's happening in different places where people are adopting.the style of davening and that whole approach to Judaism spiritually. . .and learning-wise.

MP: Would you say a place like B'nai Jeshurun is connected to Carlebach's influence?

SI: It's hard to say. I think bringing music into the service was Shlomo's contribution. Certain Hasidic dynasties would do a whole service with melodies. So again it's rooted in Hasidus, but making the service come more alive right now, through song, through spirituality, inter-mixing. . .explaining the *kavanot* of a prayer, and singing the appropriate melody to it is something Shlomo put a lot of energy into, and so I don't know enough about

B'nai Jeshurun. . .to speak intelligently, but I think that the style is very much used. . .I know they sing a lot.

MP: Would you consider Carlebach Hasidic in the way that he combined the elements of music and prayer?

SI: I consider him very much Hasidic. I consider him authentic Hasidus. I would say if the Baal Shem were alive today, he would favor Shlomo Carlebach kind of Hasidus. . .But he (Carlebach) took it into the twentieth century. The Baal Shem was addressing Moshele the water carrier who was oppressed by a system that didn't make room for him in his time period, and the Baal Shem popularized Hasidim and showed that, as I'm sure you know, that ignorant people who are not so knowledgeable in scholarly teachings, can also have very high experiences if not higher. So Shlomo, I think, was really bringing it into our generation.

MP: So people who walk into the Carlebach Shul could be connected very much the way someone walking into a Hasidic shul back then could?

SI: I think a lot of Hasidim, you know, contemporary Hasidim, or called Hasidus today, come into our shul and they blend in right away because there's a real *neshama*, an old world soul But it's done in a way that is communicating to this generation. So by all means, I think that it's the old world in our generation. . .as opposed to the old world. . .trying to take our generation and say okay, we're not living in our generation we're living in the old world. It's an oversimplification, but it's probably a little bit of a critique. . .and for good reason. There's a lot in the contemporary world that's scaring people, and it's making people lose spirituality, and I think Hasidus is afraid to step into it for that reason. I think Shlomo stepped into it knowing that we're still not living two hundred years ago, that we're living

today. Things aren't good, other things are maybe even better than they were. Some things are not. And he tried to develop music for our generation.

MP: Can you talk about how Carlebach used music to make people feel spiritual, feel Jewish, get them moving, dancing?

SI: He (Carlebach) said something from Reb Nachman. . .that maybe catches it in a strong way. . .that if you and I are talking together at the same time. . .then neither you nor I can be heard. If you and I sing together at the same time, we give each other harmony. So song very much looks to be inclusive. It needs harmony, it needs greater participation. So you're right. He wanted very much to inspire and bring people to the service and make it very much alive, and everybody's contribution to the service makes it that much greater. Minus one person is missing that energy, that source. As opposed to when we're talking if I'm talking to you, if you understand what I'm saying, hopefully, I'll communicate. But if I'm singing, you don't need to understand anything, it's a universal language, it's a whole other experience. So you're right, that was a way of touching people of all walks of life and bringing them into it wherever they are.

MP: Can you compare the early Hasidim of the eighteenth century and today in terms of the role of the hazzan or rebbe in the service?

SI: You clearly need a focal point to inspire and probably the difference between a rebbe and a hazzan the way we know it in the last few hundred years is the word hazzan probably comes from the *hazzon*, which is being a visionary. . .but the sad truth is it became almost cantorial . . .an opera. . .I'm not knocking it but you're right, and that's beautiful, but that's not what davening is about. But it still needs a focal point, somebody to inspire, something to inspire.

So the rebbe would do that, but it was done in a way. . .he would inspire and he would be inspired by the crowd, and they would be tapping off each other, and it would be very impromptu, very real, very in the moment as opposed to an official scripted performance. So it's life, it's the living Torah while you're davening, as opposed to even reenacting. It's not reenacting, it's happening right now. Probably an opera is a re-enactment at best, and here it's the living Torah, it's living with us while we're learning it, while we're davening it.

MP: How about the dancing?

SI: It's all of our bones, everything, praying out to God. And yes, it's like davening, connecting your innermost feelings with the outer place you're at while you're praying. So, Shlomo would say from Reb Nachman. . .when you jump, you're trying to bring heaven down to earth. When you clap, you're like bringing the right and the left together, you're trying to integrate, and you're purifying the air around you. And when you shake and when you sing, you're bringing your inner things out. So ultimately, it's a connectedness. It's universalism at it's highest form. In this moment in time where I'm at, I'm trying to universally connect to anything. So it's connectedness is the word. So whatever it takes. Some people can be very strongly connected by being in a meditative. . .they're on that level where they can so that. A lot of us are caught up in the every day running world, need to shake ourselves out of that world, into a *devekuth*, into a connectedness. So probably a meditative, more peaceful, transcending type of approach is maybe in some ways higher, but we can't just tune into that so quickly. So that's shaking off the shackles of every day work.

MP: Do you find critics today among the Orthodox who say that you can't just give people joy, they have to have the knowledge first? You have to do it slowly, step-by-step?

SI: By and large, I'm so pleasantly surprised that the opposite is happening. I think people are so hungry for this, and there's so much emphasis on the 'how to' approach. Even in *teshuva,* return in the last twenty years, it's a whole scripted away. I think now we're coming to a higher, inner more form of *teshuva*. Shlomo said that the word isn't outreach, the word is 'inreach,' and that it's really an inner connectedness. . .I'm impressed with. . .from Young Israel to *Misnagdim* to Reform and Conservative, who come and say, "wow, this is what Hasidus is, we want more of it.' So I think it's a hidden gem. ..Shlomo didn't live to see enough of that. I mean he did when he traveled, people were very much connecting to what he was doing, but he was still a little controversial and it was a new approach. I think something has happened in the last few years. I saw it coming at the end of his life and I would see in the last few years when he would do a service here. I would see twenty Satmar Hasidim here on a Saturday night. . .standing next to hippies, next to people in three-piece suits and people from all colors. And it was just coming together, it was starting to happen. I think there's a deeper spiritual return unfolding before us as we're sitting and talking.

MP: What is the power of the *niggun*?

SI: I think Shlomo once said the *niggun* and the word are like the body and the soul. The word is the body as how you're clothing it, but the melody is the soul, it's beyond the spoken word. It's the inner connectedness. It's the sigh, it's 'ah!' It's me, it's my *neshama* singing. When I'm putting it into words I'm already reducing it a little bit. So the Hasidic *niggun* is very much taking you to a place that's beyond and yet it's within you. It's something in you that's stirring it and it's not limited by words or by space, by time or by anything. It's timeless. A *niggun* you can just sing forever. So a lot of Shlomo's melodies that he put to

words we sing as *niggun*. Even Friday night after we say the words often times we'll sing just the melody for a little while, so once we get beyond the bodily clothes of it, so to speak, you just hopefully take off and go to that place.

MP: You talked about the Ashram before. Is there some of that in the service, the chant, the expressions on peoples' faces, the higher state?

SI: I would say that that state is very much a *Beis Hamikdash* state, to be truthful.

MP: How do we know that?

SI: I think what's passed on from the services of what the *Beis Hamikdash*. . .imagining 60,000 Levites and then 120,000 instruments. . .Just imagining what that would do to people and we find historically, especially I think in the Roman period, people from all nations would come. What is Isaiah's vision? That my house will be a house of prayer for all the nations of the world. That on the higher level we want the whole world to be connected to our prayer. But yet it's a temple that's giving us inner peace. Yet it says when they stood in the temple, they were standing in a very narrow place, there was barely enough room. But somehow when they bowed down there was enough room for everybody to bow down. So the *Beis Hamikdash* wanted to give you a place to go beyond yourself and wanted to give you a place. . .the philosophy of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the way the windows were built, looking in versus looking out, etc.

MP: In Hasidic life, music is brought not only into service but into the daily life and the life cycle. What resembles that at Carlebach?

SI: There's an interaction between *negina*, learning Torah, Hasidut, story-telling. Last Friday night we went till two in the morning and it was a heavy singing component. So you're right,

it's sanctifying food, material, it's sanctifying Shabbos. Everything is done with holiness. And again is our physical way of expressing it but what's so powerful about it and the Shabbos *tisch*, the Shabbos meal, is that the physical is there, the food is there, the material, that which is still sustenance. But yet again, you want to take that and elevate that. It's like . . .I think it was once said everyone has fish for Shabbos, but who's going to have Shabbos for Shabbos? You need the chicken and the food and the vegetarian. . .you need all that to create an ambiance and an atmosphere. But ultimately you dress nice on Shabbos, and you look materially well put together, but then it's to elevate it.

MP: What do you think happened in the eighteenth century that inspired the Hasidim to break away and do their own thing?

SI: Basically, the Baal Shem Tov was speaking to his generation and the scholarly Torah of that generation was not reaching every person. So I think a rebbe one time said for the average person of the shtetl who did not learn the Shulchan Aruch, who did not know the *Halachas*, his living *Shulchan Aruch* became the rebbes. He would get to a rebbe's *tisch*, see the way a rebbe washed his hands, and then he would learn the *halachas* of how to wash your hands by watching the rebbe. He said that the Hasidus discovered the concept of the audio-visual long before the western generation did. It was really the multi-media approach of the *negina*, of davening, of story-telling, of doing all those things, and that became the living Torah, the living *Shulchan Aruch*. So I think that's what this generation needs right now. The lingo is right, multi-media, audio-visual, third dimension. It's all. . .we're looking for that. I think that's what a Shabbos is about, what Torah is about. And I say if you to Bobov, if you go to Borough Park you see it there. It's just unfortunately not done in a way

that is accessible. But I think the sweetness and if you can get past the long black robe and the wall that separates us from them. 'Walls are beautiful,' Shlomo said.

A. They separate us and keep us out maybe,

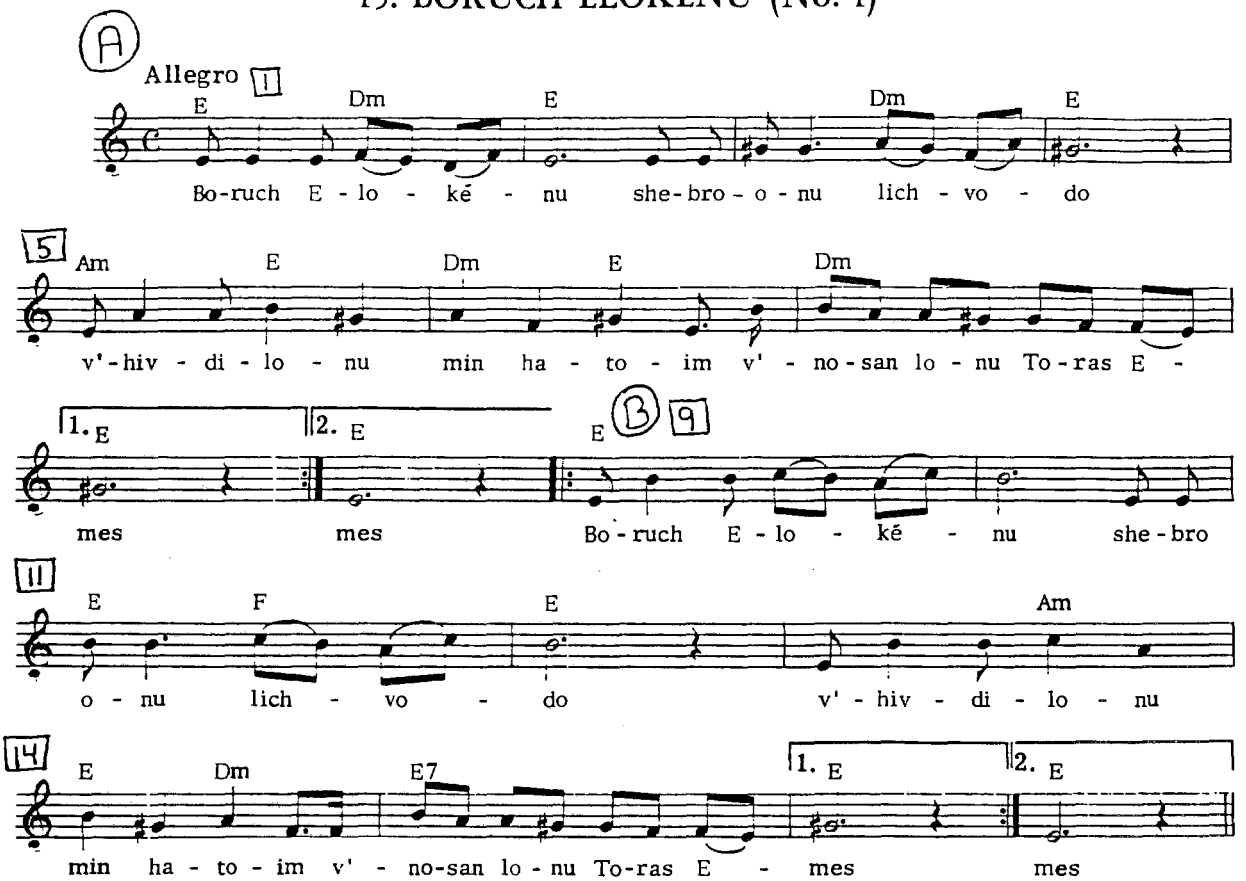
B. They bring us in.

Where so you have your most intimate moments? Behind wall, you know. So after you get past all those walls and break them down, you see that.

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Appendix E

15. BORUCH ELOKÉNU (No. 1)



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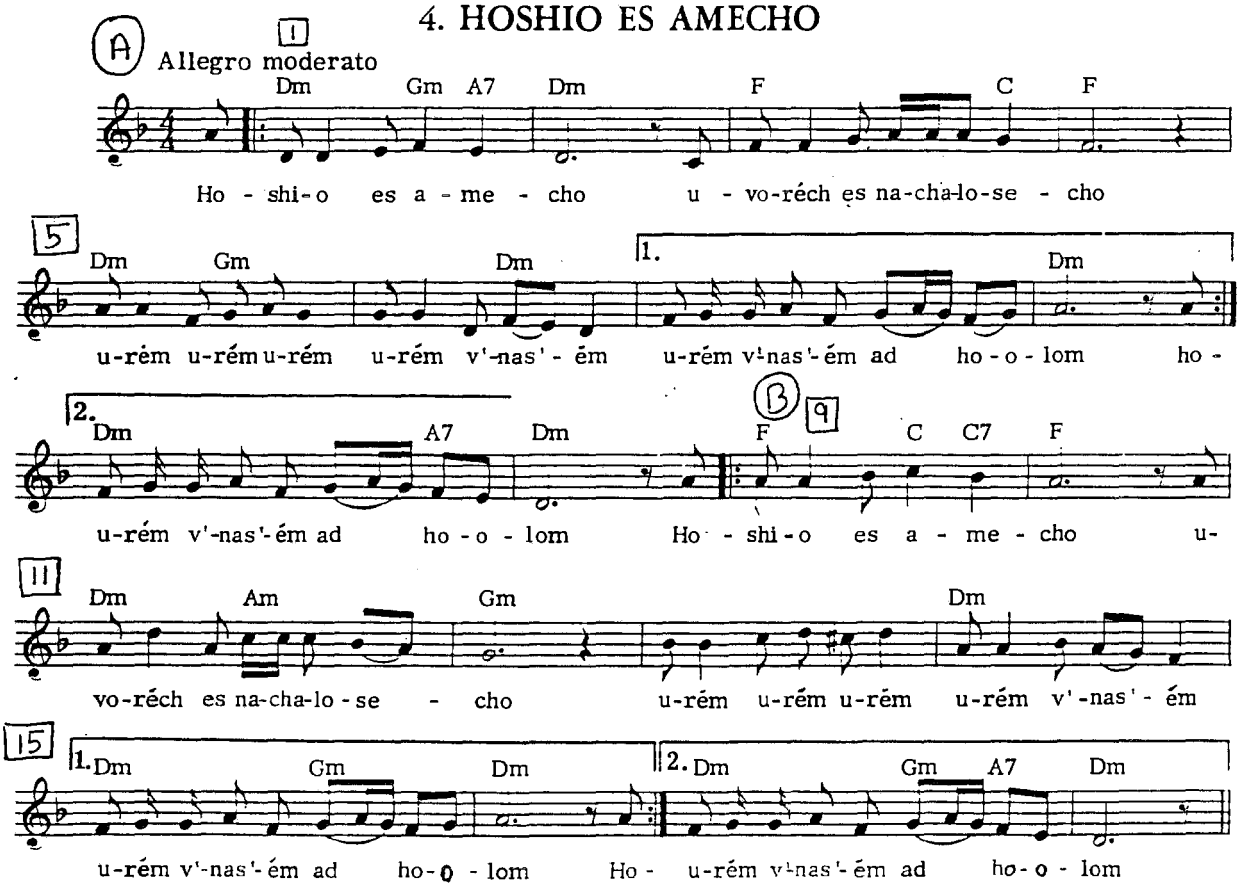

YISM'CHU

(They Who Call the Sabbath a Delight)

based on a 'Slonim' chassidic nigun

by

BEN STEINBERG

for SAB Choir and Piano

TEXT

Those who keep the Sabbath and call it a delight shall rejoice in Your kingdom. All who hallow the seventh day shall be gladdened by Your goodness.'

יִשְׂמְחוּ בְמַלְכוּתְךָ שׁוֹמְרֵי שַׁבָּת
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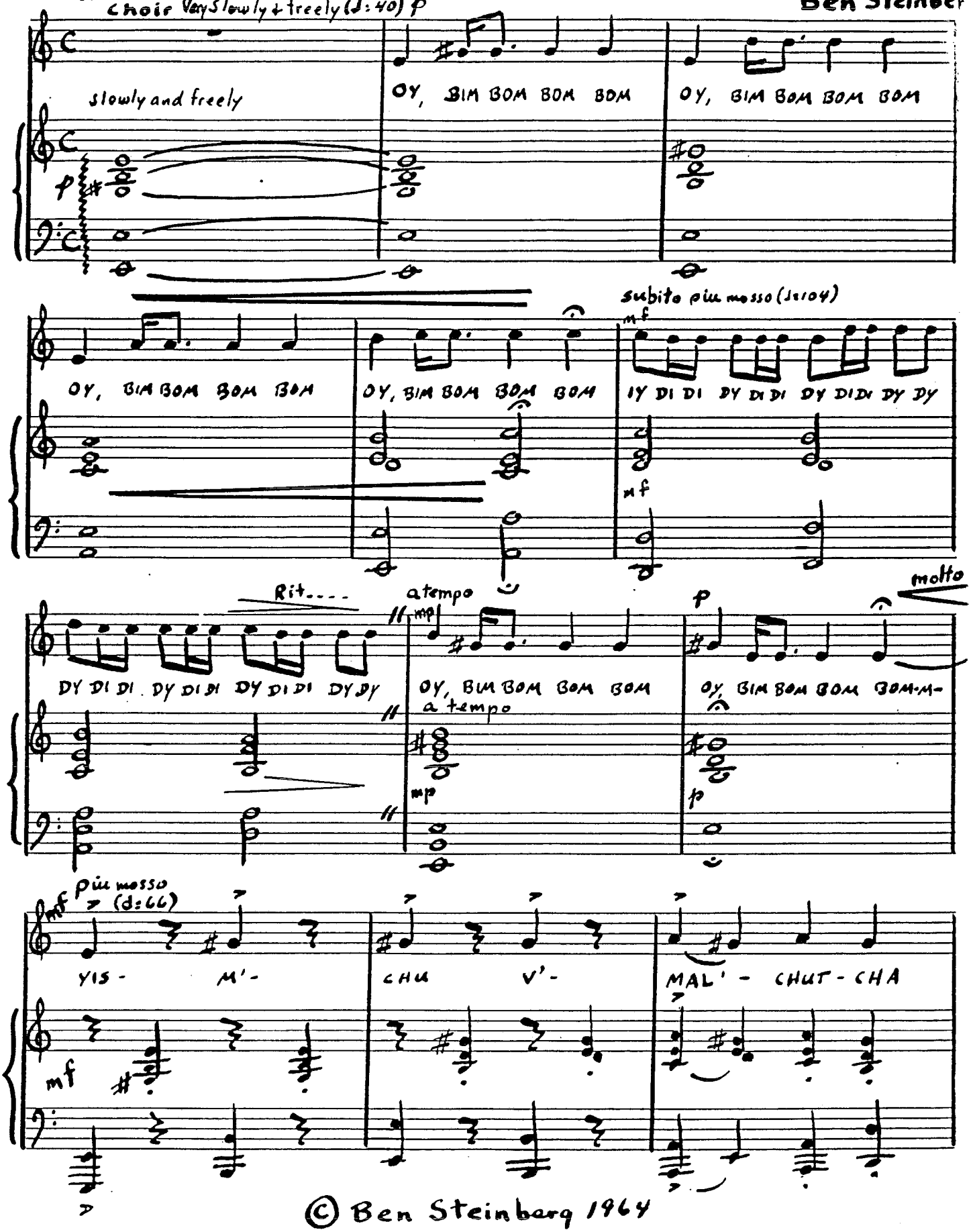
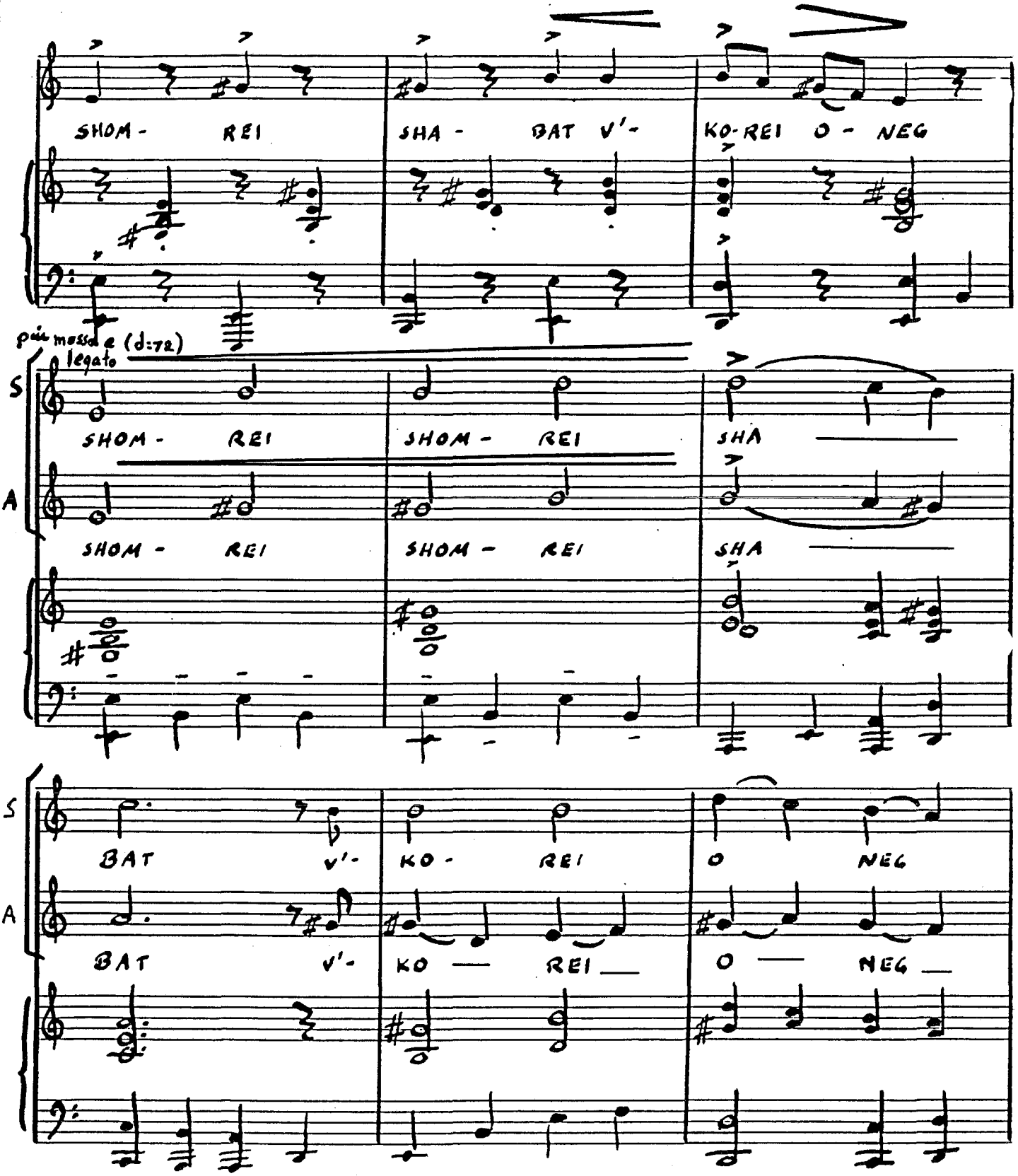
כֻּלָּם יִשְׂבְּעוּ וְיִתְעַנְּגוּ מִטּוּבֶךָ.

YISM'CHU

Based on a 'Slonim' chassic nigun

Ben Steinberg

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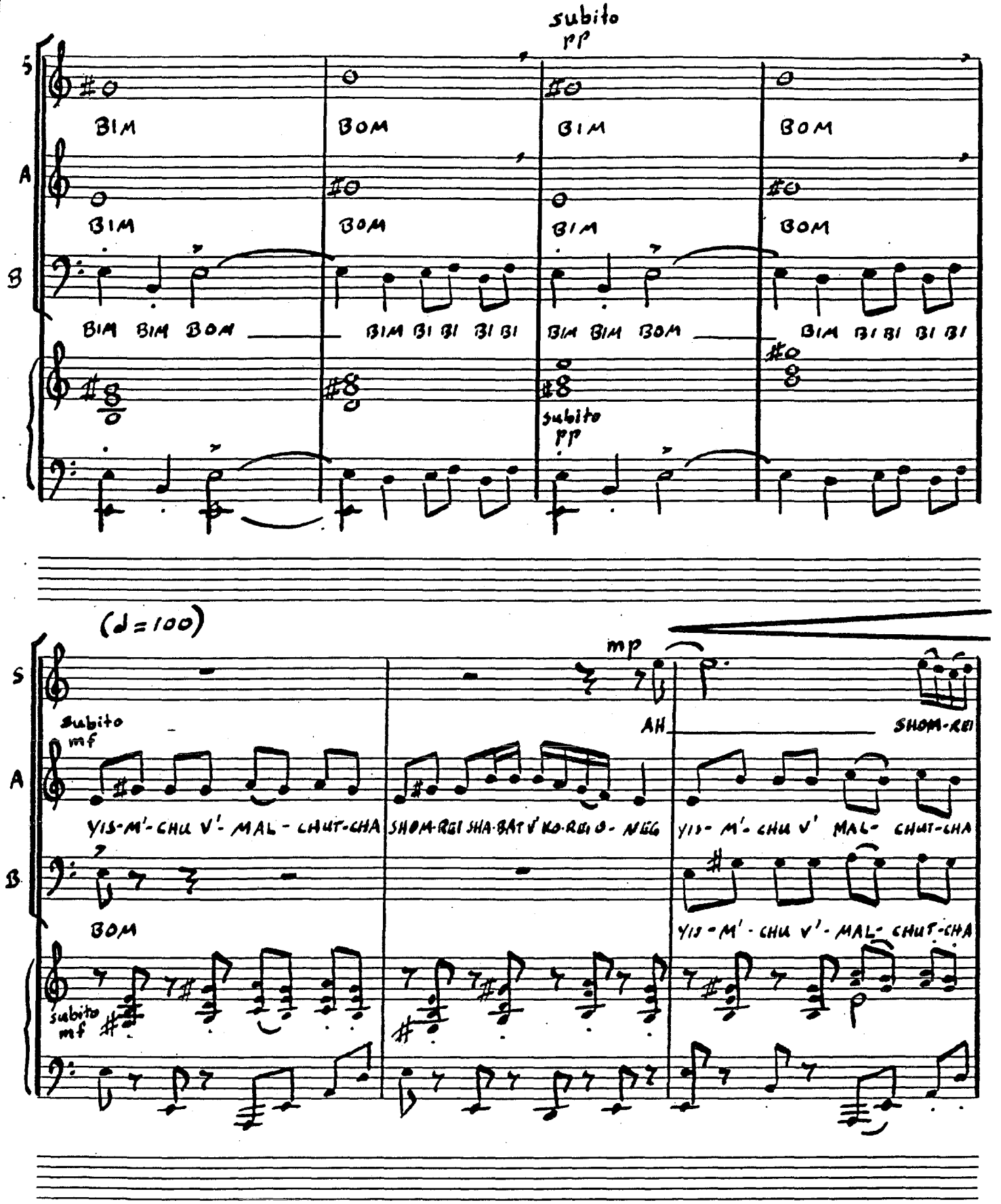
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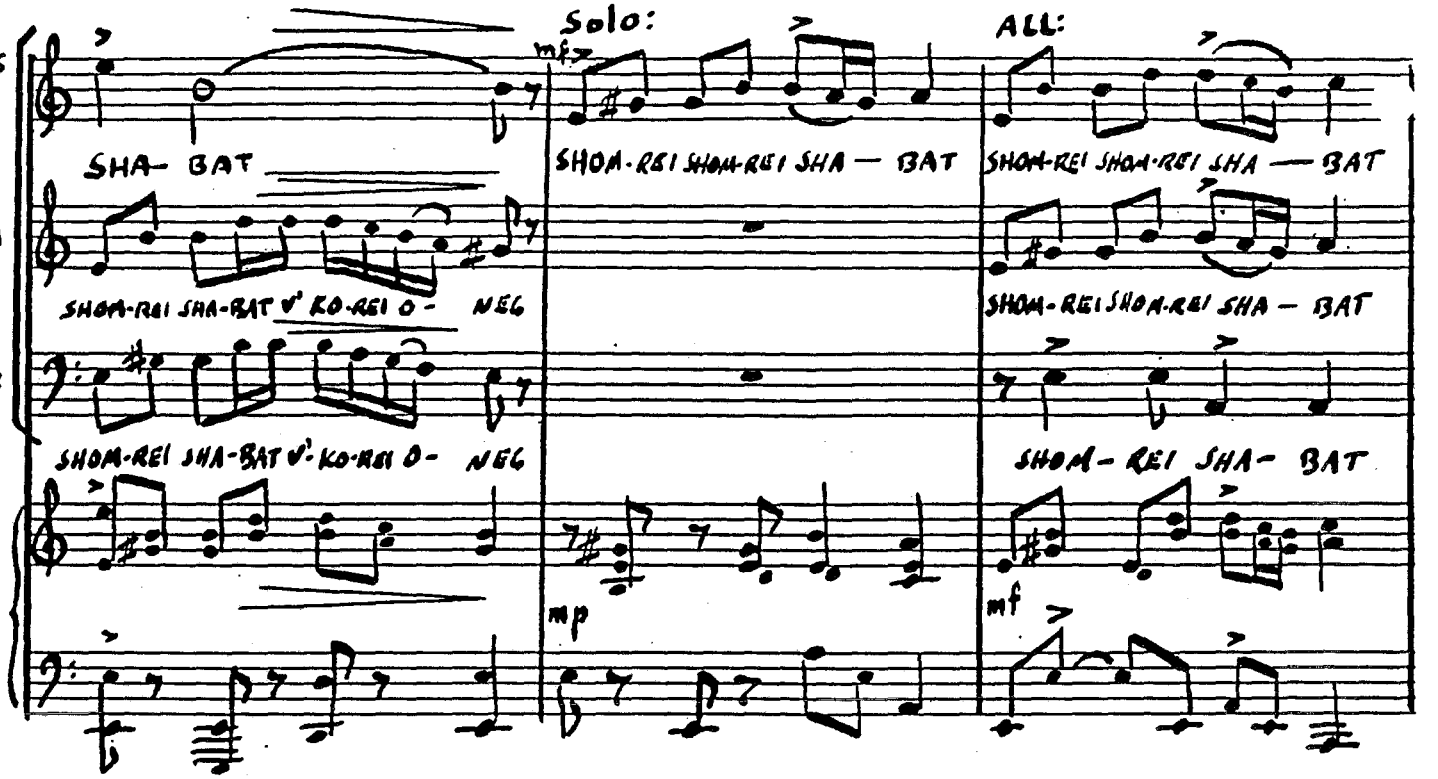
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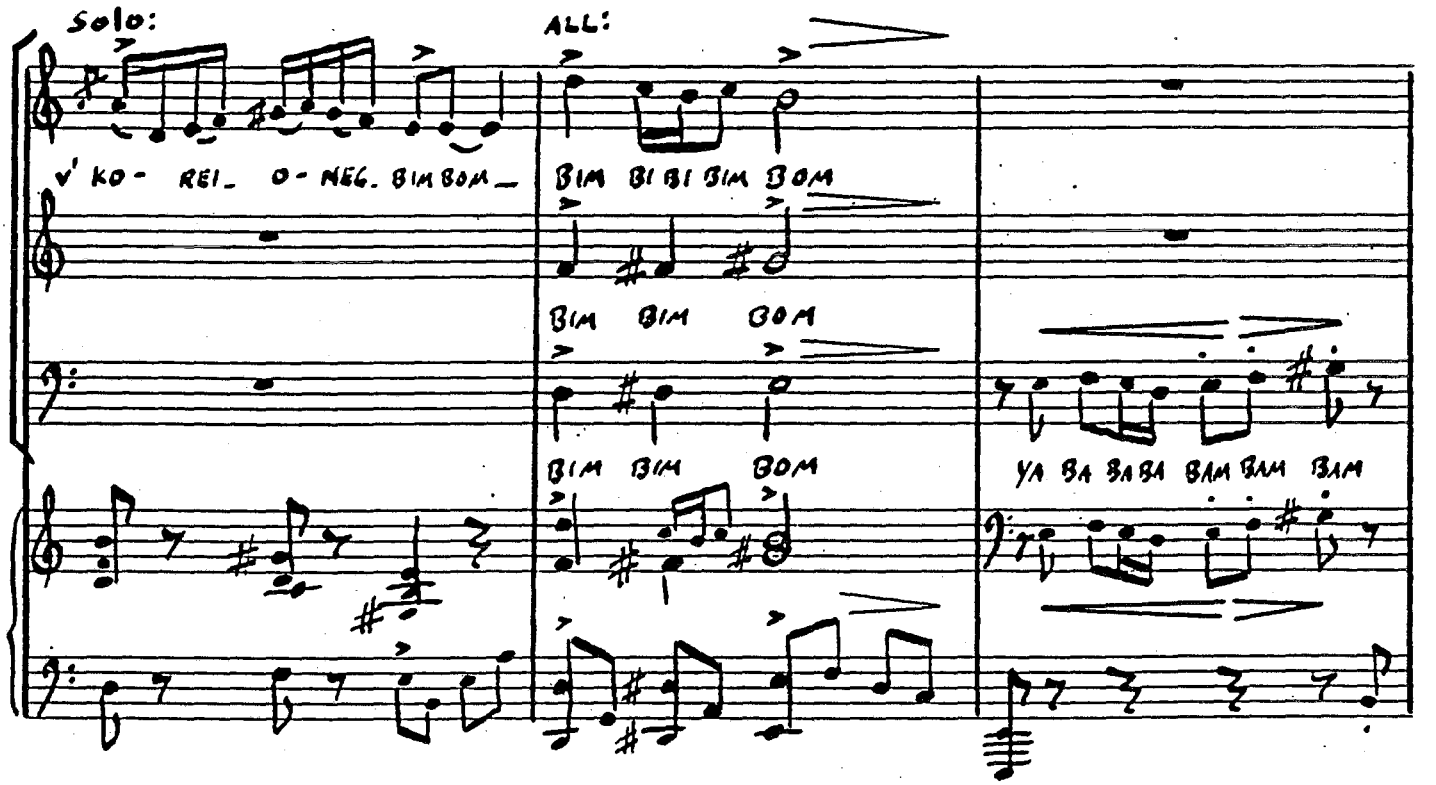
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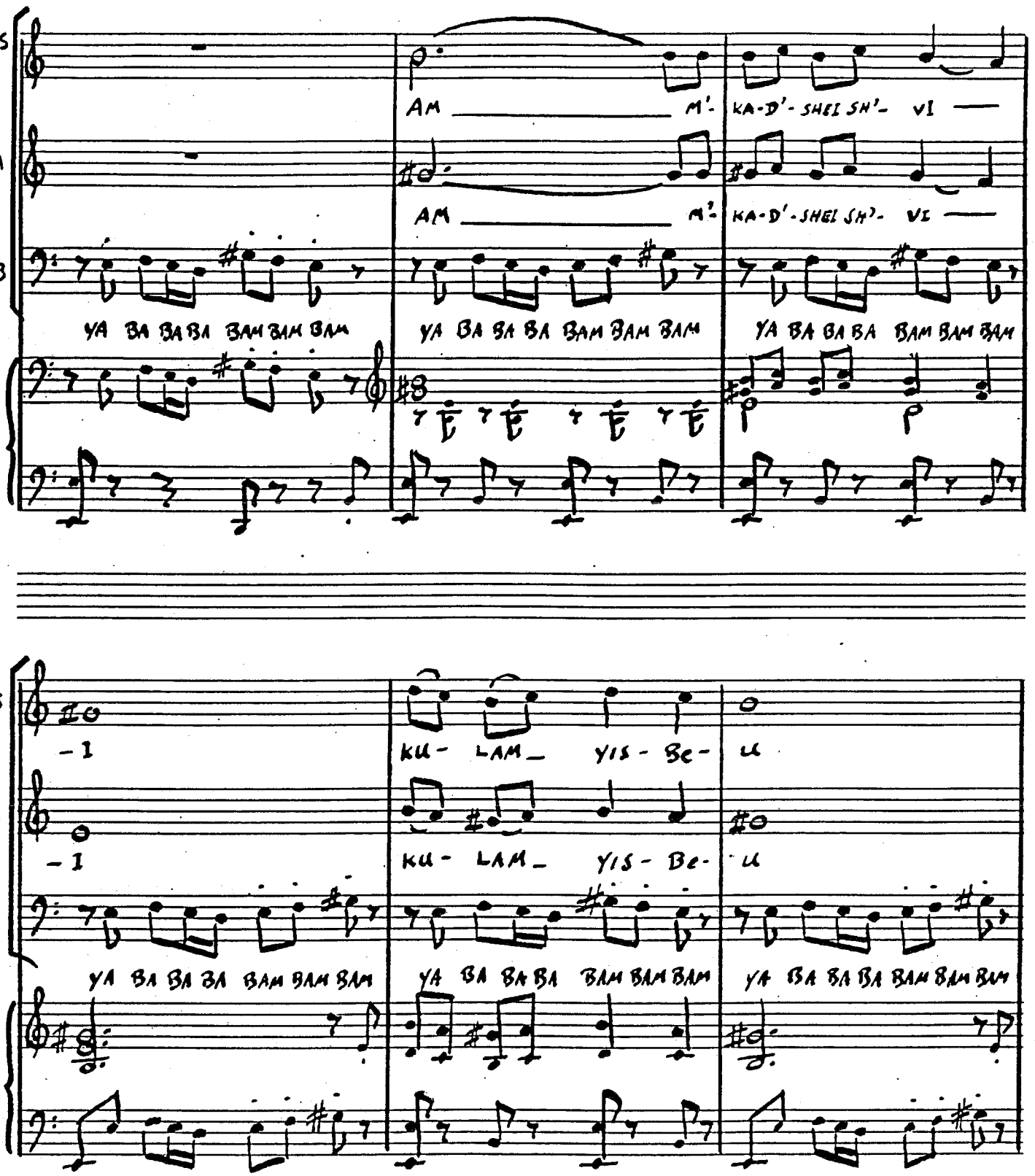
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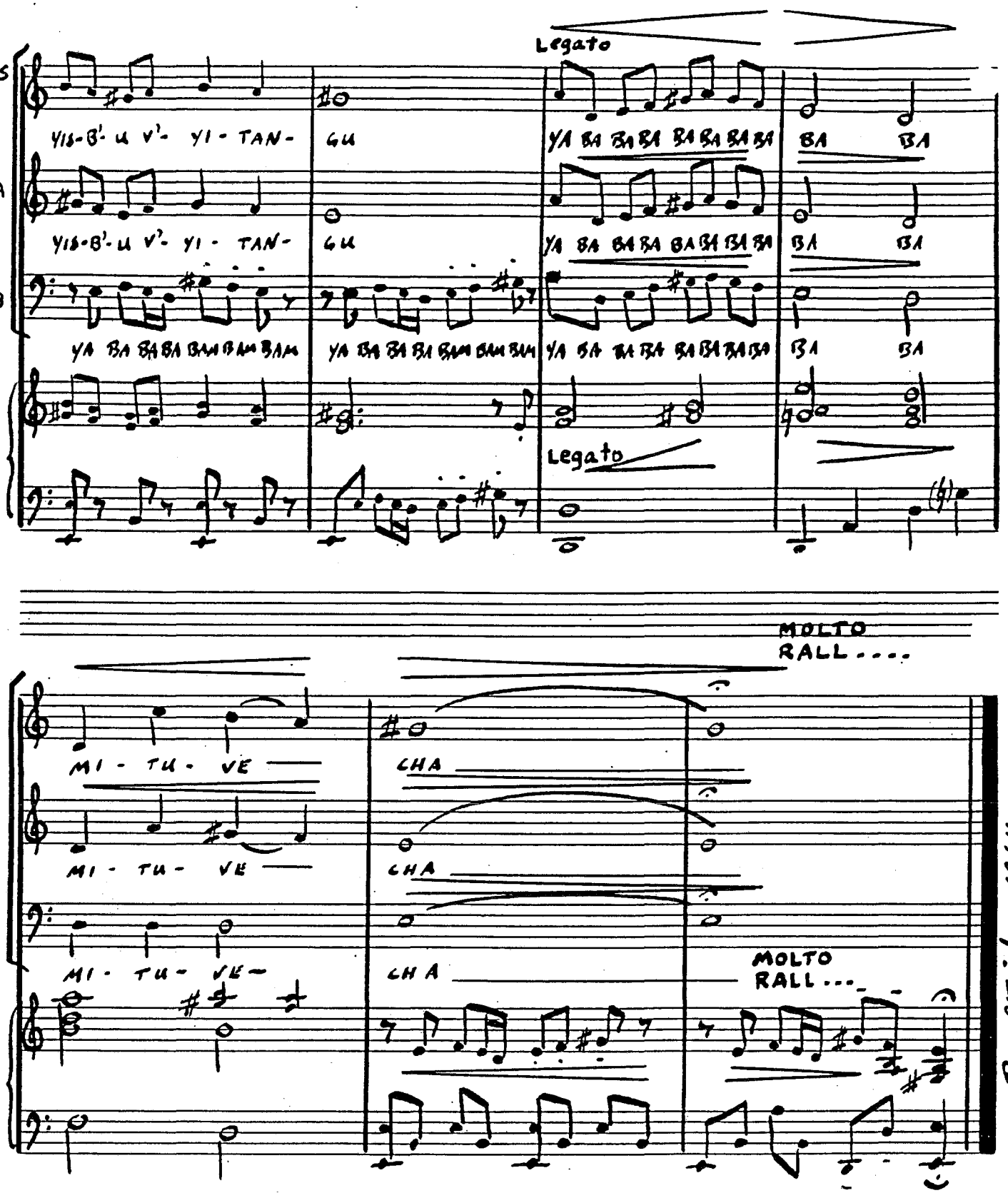
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