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"KOL T'HILLOH (קוֹל תְּהִלָּה)"
THE SYNAGOGUE MUSIC OF CANTOR JOSEF HELLER

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Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Master of Sacred Music Degree

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

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I am especially grateful to Dr. Kurt Stern for introducing me to the work of Cantor Josef Heller, his grandfather. Dr. Stern also shared with me the personal notes he had written in 1946 on his grandfather's life, photocopies of reviews of Heller's music and concerts, and obituaries of Josef Heller.

Some of the history of the Jewish community of Brno was available only in German, as were the reviews and obituaries. I am very thankful to Mrs. Elsa Rapp and Mr. Max Frank, members of my Riverdale Temple community, and Dr. Susanna Fulmek, at Mount Sinai Medical Center, for helping me to understand the German, and to Professor Paul Becker of New York University for his assistance with "Erhebe Seele," a poem Heller set to music for the memorial service of Yom Kippur.

Finally, and above all, I wish to thank my parents and my wife for their sustained support and nurturing of my Jewish and cantorial education.

PREFACE

I discovered the music of Cantor Josef Heller in an extraordinary manner. The story takes place in Jerusalem, where I began my cantorial studies at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. It was exciting to spend the 1988-1989 academic year in the Holy Land with my wife, Lise, and our children, Anna and David. All of us were learning Hebrew and trying to live in this unusual country. And it was in Jerusalem that we met Dr. Kurt Stern.

Dr. Stern is an observant Jew and a physician, whose life-long passion has been research in immunology. A long-time friend of my father, who is also a research immunologist, Dr. Stern had spent most of his career in Chicago. But upon retirement in the late 1970's, he and his wife, Florence, had moved to Jerusalem where he remains active in medical research. From time to time, we would visit the Sterns on the Sabbath. We would talk mainly about our families. In the spring of 1989, the Sterns joined us in celebrating Anna's bat mitzvah. My parents, sister, and my sister's two daughters were also able to attend, thus giving the Sterns the pleasure of being with my parents once again. We were saddened by Florence's death a few months later, just before we were to return to the United States.

After my second year of cantorial studies, at the New York City campus of the College - Institute, I returned to Jerusalem with other students for a two-week concert tour. I paid a visit to Dr. Stern in August of 1990, just after the outbreak of war between Iraq and Kuwait. He showed me two volumes of synagogue music, *Kol T'hilloh* (קול תהלה) published at the beginning of the 20th century in Brno, the capital of Moravia in the

Czech Republic. He then revealed to me that the composer of this music was his grandfather, Cantor Josef Heller.

I immediately began to peruse the music, and was delighted to find synagogue music written in my tenor range. Heller had written cantorial recitatives, solos with organ accompaniment, and four-voice choral pieces with organ accompaniment. Obviously, this was music for a liberal congregation.

Dr. Stern had sent this music, about forty years ago, to the Hebrew Union School of Education and Sacred Music and to the Jewish Theological Seminary, both in New York, as well as to several other American schools of higher education in Judaism. I discovered that one of my teachers, Cantor Chaim Feifel, had studied Heller's music when he was a student at the Seminary, and still remembered some of it, too! But other teachers of mine had never heard of Cantor Josef Heller. The fact that Heller was not generally known at my school but still remembered by Cantor Feifel led me to re-examine this music, and present it to a new generation of listeners.

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INTRODUCTION

The synagogue music of Cantor Josef Heller of Brno, Moravia, was published in that city (or Brünn as it was then called in German) in the beginning decades of the twentieth century. Heller was the Chief Cantor, from 1889 to 1927, of a largely liberal Jewish community which numbered about nine thousand. He published two volumes of synagogue music. Heller set the entire Sabbath service in *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 1, published in 1905, and the entire Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 2,[1] published in 1914. A third volume of music for the festival services was planned but never completed, according to unpublished biographical notes written by his grandson, Dr. Kurt Stern, in 1946.[2] Volume 2 contains five appendices: (1) מַעֲרִיב לְחוֹל, (2) סְלִיחוֹת קוֹדֶם רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, (3) מִנְחָה לְחוֹל, (4) מִנְחָה לְשַׁבָּת, and (5) an untitled appendix containing eight miscellaneous musical settings. The pieces are numbered consecutively, with the second volume continuing from the end of the first.

There is great variety in texture and style: we find unaccompanied recitatives using traditional modes and motives, solos with organ accompaniment that contain a mixture of traditional and modern melodies, and four-voice choral settings with organ accompaniment that are entirely modern in style. A number of liturgical texts are set more than

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[1]Josef Heller, *Kol T'hilloh* (קוֹל תְּהִלָּה), *Vierstimmige Chöre und Soli sowie Recitative für den israelitischen Gottesdienst mit und ohne Begleitung der Orgel*, 2 vols. (Brno: Carl Winiker, 1905 & 1914).

[2]Kurt Stern, biographical notes, unpublished, 1946.

once and in different styles,[3] according to Heller's personal taste and his community's musical traditions. A mixture of styles is used for some liturgical rubrics.

Heller's music emphasizes a sustained, *bel canto* melody line in the tenor range of  or A to a'.[4] The recitatives are written with traditional musical modes and motives. Prayer texts are set almost entirely syllabically, that is, one tone per syllable. In contrast to Polish or Ukrainian cantorial styles, Heller's music rarely has melismas, and almost never repeats words or phrases of text. Such an avoidance of excessive vocal "gymnastics," and an appeal to Western musical taste, was common among liberal communities in Germany and Austro-Hungary. Today, this style of music may be found in many Conservative congregations in the United States.

Dramatic moments are created by word painting, by musical leaps, and by chromatic inflections. When the organ is present, its role is an integral part of the music, creating a liturgical art song. Accompanied solos combine elements of traditional style and Western tonal harmony. *Coloratura*-like passages, when present, are usually found in the organ accompaniment.[5] The harmonies are enriched by the use of chromatic inflections, although sometimes these chromaticisms appear obtrusive, and the organ accompaniment becomes unnecessarily busy.

At various points in the service, Heller uses the choir to express a traditional response of the congregation to the prayer leader. Good examples of this are "לְכָה דוֹדִי" in

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[3]The Sabbath texts "וְשָׁמְרוּ," with six settings, and "נַעֲרִיצְךָ," with nine, are the most numerous in *Kol T'hilloh*.

[4]Letter notation of pitches follows the standard in Don Randel, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1986), 640.

[5]See, for example, *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 1, nos. 126-163, in which Heller embellishes קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם of the Sabbath מוּסָף service.

the Sabbath evening service, קְדוּשַׁת הַשֶּׁם in the Sabbath עֲמִידָה, "לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין" in the morning service for Rosh Hashanah, and "אֲשָׁמְנוּ" in the Kol Nidre service.

Heller wrote two special pieces of music for the memorial service on Yom Kippur.[6] This service is dedicated to the memory of his daughter, Elsa, who died in childbirth in 1913. It opens with an illustrated title page noting her vital statistics. The mourner's kaddish, No. 721, sets a text that is not usually sung. "Erhebe Seele," No. 714, is a German song. The text of this poem may be found, with slight differences, in a nineteenth century book of Jewish prayers by Lion Wolff.[7] Both versions are shown in Figure 1.

Unfortunately, most of Heller's music lies unsung today. It has not been entirely forgotten, however. In the *Cantorial Anthology* of Gershon Ephros, we find Heller's setting for the mourner's kaddish and his recitatives for the נְעִילָה service of Yom Kippur.[8] This project is an attempt to look again at Heller's contribution to synagogue song, and to assess its place in the modern repertoire.

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[6]Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 2, pp. 263-275.

[7]Lion Wolff, *Agende für den Gottesdienst in der Synagoge: Handbuch für alle Casualfälle von der Wiege bis zum Grabe*, (Halberstadt: H. Meyer, 1880), 100. I am indebted to Rabbi A. Stanley Dreyfus for locating this source. "Fleucht" in Heller's version, an archaic form of the verb "fliehen," is used instead of "flieg(e)," from the verb "fliegen." I am indebted to Dr. Susanna Fulmek and Prof. Paul Becker for pointing this fact out to me. Professor Becker also told me that Heller's spelling of *Glückes* and *Geschickes* with two k's is commonly done when German words are broken into syllables for musical purposes.

[8]Gershon Ephros, *Cantorial Anthology* (אנתולוגיה חזנית), vol. 3, "Sholosh R'golim" (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1975), 341; idem, *Anthology*, vol. 2, "Yom Kippur" (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1964), 328.

Erhebe Seele

Heller's version with English translation*	Wolff's version
Erhebe Seele deine Schwingen, Soul, lift your wings,	Erhebe, Seele! deine Schwingen,
fleucht hin zu jenem stillen Kreis, fly to that other quiet sphere,	Flieg' hin zu jenem stillen Kreis,
wo nach vollbrachten Kämpfen und Ringen where struggles and strivings will be completed,	Wo nach vollbrachtem Kämpfen, Ringen
sanft ruht der Jüngling wie der Greis. and the youth gently rests like the old man.	Sanft ruht der Jüngling, wie der Greis.
Ob sie hinieden hoch gethronet, Whether they be enthroned on high here on Earth,	Ob sie hienieden hochgethronet,
umstrahlet von des Glükkes Pracht bathed in light from the glory of happiness,	Umstrahlet von des Glückes Pracht
und ob in Hütten sie gewohnet, or whether they dwell in huts,	Und ob in Hütten sie gewohnet,
umflort von des Geschikkes Nacht — veiled from the night of destiny —	Umflort von des Geschickes Nacht —
Nun schlummern beide in der Erden, Henceforth both shall sleep in the Earth,	Nun schlummern Beide in der Erden,
der arme Mann wie der vom Thron, the poor man as the one upon the throne.	Der Hüttenmann wie der vom Thron —
was Staub ist, muß zu Staube werden, What is dust will be dust.	"Was Staub ist, muß zu Staube werden!"
bedenke dies, o Erdensohn. Consider this, o Earthling.	Bedenke dies, o Erdensohn!

Figure 1

*The translation is mine.

THE LIFE OF JOSEF HELLER

The most detailed published account about the life of Cantor Josef Heller is given by Aron Friedmann in his *Lebensbilder berühmter Kantoren*,[1] biographical sketches of famous cantors that were written on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Louis Lewandowski. A more complete, but unpublished, account was written by Dr. Kurt Stern, who was raised by Heller from the age of four. In 1946, ten years after his grandfather's death, Dr. Stern wrote eight pages of biographical notes for his wife and children.[2]

Josef Heller was born on March 25, 1864, in the village of Ujfalu in the county of Szatmar, Hungary, a region that became part of Romania after World War I. Josef was the oldest son of a tenant farmer, who was a tall, austere, and religious man. Through bad fortune, he was forced to leave the land for a livelihood in business. In more ways than one, he steered Josef toward a cantorial career. Josef received a religiously-oriented education at local *yeshivot*. In addition, from the time Josef was seven, his father encouraged his natural musical talents by endorsing his participation in the boys' choirs (משוררים) of itinerant cantors.[3] This also helped to supplement the family's income.

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[1]Aron Friedmann, *Lebensbilder berühmter Kantoren*, vol. 2 (Berlin: C. Boas, 1921), 163-166.

[2]Kurt Stern, biographical notes, unpublished, 1946. Dr. Stern also has a collection of published reviews of *Kol T'hilloh*, reviews of Heller's concerts, and obituaries. I am grateful to Dr. Stern for sharing much of this material with me. The biographical notes are reproduced in an appendix to this report..

[3]The names of these cantors are not known.

Josef Heller received formal musical training at the Music Academy of Debreczen, where, in addition to music, he studied literature and history. He was graduated at the age of 18 with his teachers' recommendation to sing in the chorus of the Royal Opera in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. He tried as much as he could to maintain his religious practices, despite being mocked occasionally by his colleagues. In one story about such mockery, he told his family that when he returned to his dressing room one evening, after performing in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, he found his טלית קטן adorned by sausages hanging from its fringes! Josef's father was worried that the opera life would eventually cause Josef to compromise his Jewish practices. During a visit to the capital city, Heller's father begged him to leave the opera for a rabbinical career. Although Josef, having completed his first year at the opera company, was on the verge of getting his first small role, he compromised with his father by promising to become a cantor.

At the age of twenty, Josef became the Chief Cantor (*Oberkantor*) of Kaposvár, a central Hungarian city with a liberal Jewish community.[4] He remained at this post for five years, during which time he met and married his wife. The bitter circumstances of this meeting are recorded by Dr. Kurt Stern. Josef's mother became ill from cancer, and Josef took her to the University of Vienna for treatment. While arranging to have food brought to her from a kosher restaurant, Josef met and fell in love with the restauranteur's oldest daughter. By the time that his mother left the hospital, a few weeks later, Josef announced his marriage. But the happiness of the newlyweds was lessened by the death of Josef's

[4]I use the term "liberal" to refer in a general way to the absence of strict adherence to Jewish tradition. In Dr. Stern's notes, he uses the term "reform." But that term was not usually applied in Hungary. Rather, liberal Judaism was termed "*Neolog*."

mother only months after the family had returned to Hungary. Josef and his wife had one child, Elsa, born July 14, 1887.[5]

On November 19, 1889, Josef Heller replaced Salomon Schwarz as Chief Cantor of Brno. Cantor Schwarz had died in June, after 30 years in that post.[6] Heller would serve even longer as Chief Cantor: 38 years. During this time, he officiated at worship services as cantor and choir director. Heller also organized a cantorial school in Brno, as part of the Jewish pro-seminary. This school (*Kantoren-Bildungsanstalt*) provided training in Judaism and offered a general music education with vocal instruction. Heller encouraged his students to express the content and the intention of the prayer texts, insisting on his students' full knowledge of Hebrew grammar and pronunciation. Unnecessary repetitions of the text and vocal displays of virtuosity were disliked and to be avoided.[7] Heller also helped to organize cantors into professional associations, and he served as president of the Moravian cantors' association.

In 1905 and 1914, Heller published two volumes of cantorial music, entitled *Kol T'hilloh*,[8] containing music for Sabbath and for High Holiday worship services. Reviews of the these works praised them highly. A review of the first volume said that Heller's music combined a feeling of traditional Judaism with something that was entirely new. Its

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[5]Dates of Elsa's birth and death are given in *Kol T'hilloh* vol. 2, p. 263. An illustrated title page to סֵדֶר הַזְכָּרַת נְשָׁמוֹת dedicates this section of the service to Dr. Elsa (בְּרָכָה) Stern.

[6]Moritz Brunner, "Geschichte der Juden in Brünn," in *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Hugo Gold (Brno: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1929), 166.

[7]Stern, biographical notes.

[8]Josef Heller, *Kol T'hilloh* (קוֹל תְּהִלָּה), *Vierstimmige Chöre und Soli sowie Recitative für den israelitischen Gottesdienst mit und ohne Begleitung der Orgel*, 2 vols. (Brno: Carl Winiker, 1905 & 1914)..

real beauty, however, lay below the surface and could be found only through deep study.[9] The music in the second volume of *Kol T'hilloh* was described as rare and beautiful, displaying high artistry.[10] It is known that Heller also had published a "Jubelhymne" for Emperor Franz Joseph I's 70th birthday in 1900, a "Kaiser-Jubiläums-Hymne" for the 60th anniversary in 1908 of the Emperor's coronation, and other secular songs.[11]

Josef Heller was honored on January 2, 1915, the 25th anniversary of his tenure as Chief Cantor of Brno. The sanctuary was packed. Cantor Goldmann sang with choir and organ; he honored Heller with the third עֲלִיָּה to the reading of scripture; and he recited a special "מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ" for him. Rabbi Dr. Ludwig Levy uttered words of praise, and presented Heller with a silver goblet, a diamond ring, and a clock. In his address, Dr. Levy noted that Heller had offered funeral services to the poor, without compensation, during the years of his tenure in Brno.[12]

It should also be noted that Josef Heller continually pursued his personal education in Bible, Talmud, and modern Jewish literature, and he maintained a close friendship with Dr. Baruch Placzek, the Chief Rabbi of Moravia. In recognition of Heller's scholarship and outstanding performance as Chief Cantor, Dr. Placzek conferred upon him a rabbinic doctoral title (מוֹרֵנוּ), and the Burial Society (חברה קדישא) gave Heller an honorary membership.[13]

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[9]Albert Weill, from Dessau, a review of *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 1, in *Synagogen Componisten und Ihre Werke*, an annotated catalogue of synagogue music (Leipzig: M. W. Kaufmann, ca. 1910).

[10]Armin Wilkowitsch, *Oberkantor* in Eger, Hungary, a review (in German) of *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 2 (from the collection of Dr. Kurt Stern, n.p., n.d.).

[11]These hymns were offered for sale in *Synagogen Componisten*. Photocopies of the "Jubelhymne" and three secular art songs by Josef Heller are available from the Music Information Centre, Radnická, 10, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic.

[12]*Oesterreichischen Wochenschrift*, no. 2, 8 January 1915.

[13]Friedmann, *Lebensbilder berühmter Kantoren*.

Josef Heller was an ardent Zionist. He supported Zionist youth organizations and wrote rallying songs for them. But he often regretted the lack of religious spirit in these organizations. Heller sympathized with the Mizrachi movement, but maintained his individualism by not joining party activities. He was very sensitive to anti-Semitic activity in Europe, and recognized early that Germany's super-patriotism threatened world peace. He felt strongly that her anti-semitism was especially vicious and virulent, because it had the support of German intellectuals.[14] During the First World War, Heller served as a chaplain to the wounded in local hospitals.

Kurt Stern was born to Elsa in 1909. When Elsa died in childbirth, four years later, Kurt came to live with his grandparents. In 1923, Heller's wife died of cancer. Heller retired from his position in 1927, largely because his health had been deteriorating due to coronary heart disease. His replacement was Cantor Igno Mann from Dzialoszyce.[15] Heller moved to Vienna where his wife's family lived, and he and Kurt Stern moved into the home of Kurt's father,[16] Leopold,[17] who had remarried.

We know that despite poor health, Heller kept his voice in good shape. He conducted High Holiday services in Vienna in 1928, and on February 16, 1929, presented a concert of sacred and secular music with organ accompaniment in the "Small Hall" of Vienna's Music Association (*Kleinen Musikvereinsaal*). Reviews of this concert praised

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[14]Stern, biographical notes.

[15]Brunner, "Geschichte der Juden in Brünn," 172.

[16]Kurt Stern, "The Macrophage in Immunobiology: Explorations of Terra Incognita," in *The Immunologic Revolution: Facts and Witnesses* (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press, 1994).

[17]Kurt Stern and Max Schwager, "Dem Andenken Oberkantor Josef Heller, gestorben am 24. Mai 1936" ("Rememberances of Chief Cantor Josef Heller, deceased on May 24, 1936"), *Die Wahrheit* (Vienna), 1936.

Heller's powerful voice and mournful expressions.[18] On January 17, 1932, he returned to Brno to perform a concert of Hebrew music.

Josef Heller died from a heart attack in Vienna on May 24, 1936. He was buried on May 26th in the Jewish Central Cemetery of Vienna. A drawing of his tombstone is shown in the appendix.

[18]Josef Reitler, a review in the *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna, 1929); an unsigned review in *Die Wahrheit* (Vienna, 1929).

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN BRNO

Brno is the capital of the Historic Land of Moravia. Between 1849 and 1918, Moravia was an Austrian crown land. At the end of World War I, it became part of the newly-formed Czechoslovak Republic. Jewish history in Moravia goes back many centuries. Jews were formally invited into Brno in the 13th century, and their rights and property were protected by a charter in 1254. A century later, there were about 1,000 Jews living in their own quarter of Brno with a "Jews' Gate."[1] In 1454, however, after conflicts between the Catholic Church and Hussite reformers, the Jews were expelled from Brno and other royal cities. Some settled in the surrounding villages under the protection of local lords, while others left for Austria, Bohemia, Silesia, or Poland.[2] They served as court-Jews and as military purveyors, and later became cloth and wool merchants and tailors.[3]

Laws and anti-Jewish sentiments among the general population restricted the movement and activities of Jews. Individual Jews could pay for permission to attend the markets in Brno. There was a special inn for Jewish travelers to pass one, and only one, night. In 1706, the Jews were specifically prohibited from holding public religious services, but services in private homes were tolerated. There were fifty-two Jews living in Brno at

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[1]Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), s. v. "Brno," by Isaac Ze'ev Kahane.

[2]Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Middle Ages," part 5 in *A History of the Middle Ages*, ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson, trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 565.

[3]*Encyclopedia Judaica*, s. v. "Moravia," by Meir Lamed.

that time. In 1722, the chief representative of the Jews of Moravia was granted permission to live near the city gate. Rioting occurred in 1765, when two Jewish brothers were permitted to lease homes in Brno. In 1769, the authorities allowed a small Torah to be kept in a private home in Brno where religious services were held; but in 1812, the keeping of a Torah was taxed.[4]

The *Edict of Tolerance* issued by Emperor Joseph II in January 1782, although a mixed blessing for the Jewish community, helped to integrate the Jews into the general population. Jews were taxed less, but the use of Hebrew and Yiddish were forbidden in legal documents. There were fewer restrictions placed on Jewish movement and habitation, but the Jews were still formally banned from Brno and certain other cities until after the revolutions of 1848.

These revolutions brought a heightened degree of Jewish emancipation in Central Europe. The progress towards full legal equality for the Jews climaxed when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was created in 1867. But with emancipation and legal equality came the expectation that the Jewish community would integrate itself culturally, economically and socially into the rest of the population.

This was made difficult by the rise of European nationalism, because the Jews of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia—the Historic Lands—found themselves caught between the German and Czech cultures. German predominated at that time; it was the language of commerce, government and education. By 1848, the Jews were Germanized: they spoke German or *Judendeutsch*, a jargon of German, Czech, and Hebrew. With education, the jargon disappeared. In Brno, many Jews spoke German at home, but Czech at the market,

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[4]Ibid., s. v. "Brno" by Isaac Ze'ev Kahane.

with servants, or with Czech friends.[5] People of Czech culture resented this use of German, and people of German culture never fully accepted the Jews as equals.[6]

The community that Heller served had its formal beginnings in the 1850's. The first order of business included the establishment of a Jewish cemetery, the hiring of a rabbi, and the building of a synagogue. A Jewish cemetery was consecrated in 1852. Moritz Stössel, a religious school teacher, served as שליח ציבור for the Jewish community from 1850 to 1857. In 1860, Dr. Baruch Placzek became the rabbi of Brno's Jewish community, serving in that capacity until he was succeeded in 1905 by Dr. Ludwig Levy. From 1884 until his death in 1922, Dr. Placzek also served as Chief Rabbi of Moravia, the *Landesrabbiner*.

Modernity meant that the new Jewish community would be liberal in its religious practice. The *Tempel*, where Josef Heller would eventually serve, was built in 1855 on a small side-street just outside the city borders. It was a beautiful and monumental building, as impressive as the main buildings of this capital city. It had 359 square meters of floor space, a women's gallery and an organ. The organ was added at the insistence of the younger members of the Jewish community, who convinced the others that an organ would make services more festive.

The style of service in most of the synagogues within the Historic Lands followed the liberal customs of the "Vienna Temple." These services were far different from the Reform service we have today in the United States. It was a kind of modernized

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[5]Fred Hahn, "The Jews Among the Nations in Bohemia and Moravia," in *Religion and Nationalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Dennis J. Dunn (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1987).

[6]Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, "The Jews Between Czechs and Germans in the Historic Lands, 1848-1918," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968; New York: Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1968), 21-71.

orthodoxy, there being no organized movement of liberal Judaism like that found in Germany at the time. Prayer was entirely in Hebrew. Men kept their heads covered, and wore their prayer shawls folded around their shoulders. Men and women sat in separate sections of the sanctuary except at wedding ceremonies, civic assemblies, memorial services, or services for שִׂמְחַת תּוֹרָה. The service was a shortened version of the traditional Ashkenzi ritual "according to the custom of Poland, Bohemia and Moravia." It was conducted in a dignified manner in line with Western European standards of culture. Excellent cantors sang with organ and mixed choir accompaniment, and scholarly sermons were preached in Czech or German. These sermons plus the translations of the weekly Torah and Haftarah readings were the main source of adult Jewish education.[7]

Salomon Schwarz became Chief Cantor of Brno in 1858. At that time, the temple service was officiated by him, a second cantor, a bass singer, and a 12-boy choir.[8] By the time of Heller's tenure as Chief Cantor, 1890-1927, there must have been a mixed choir of at least four or eight singers, according to his music. The music's *bel canto* melodies, mixed choir and organ pieces with Western harmonies reflect modern standards of taste. There are no examples of congregational singing: traditional responses are performed by the organ and choir.

The Jewish population in Brno grew during the 19th century, from the time that Jews were permitted to resettle there. The Jews of Brno numbered 134 in the year 1834;

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[7]Hugo Stransky, "The Religious Life in the Historic Lands," in *Jews of Czechoslovakia*, 330-357; Kurt Stern, biographical notes, unpublished, 1946. Stransky, a rabbi and historian, commented that: "Brno ... had little Jewish traditional life or even historical consciousness," as a result of the four hundred years in which Jews were excluded from the city.

[8]Moritz Brunner, "Geschichte der Juden in Brünn," in *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Hugo Gold (Brno: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1929), 158-159.

2,230 in 1859; 4,505 in 1869; 7,809 in 1890 (when Heller arrived); and 10,202 (6.9% of the total population) in 1930.[9] These values are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

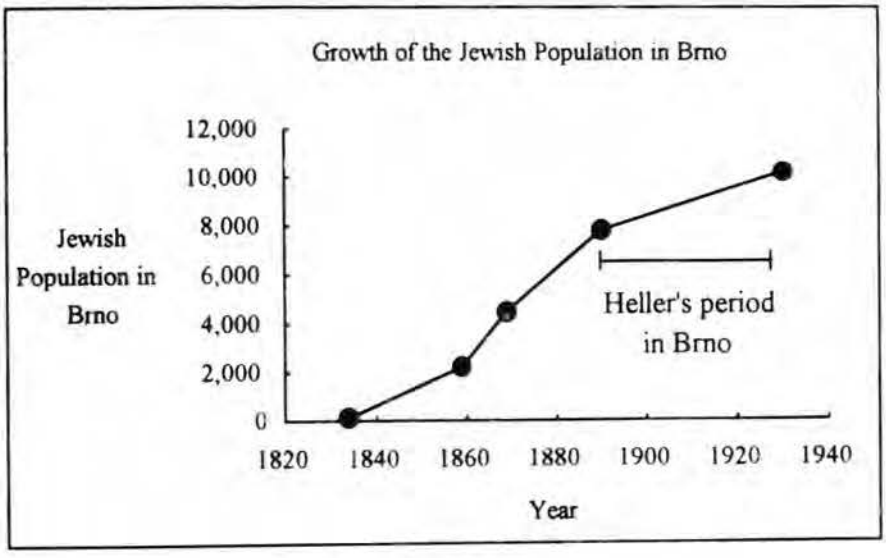

Figure 2

These last two statistics tell us that the Jewish population grew thirty-one percent during the period of Heller's tenure as Chief Cantor. Brno's growing Jewish community built in 1869 the *Tempel in der Neutorgasse* to serve its more conservative members, and in 1883 they built the *Polnischer Tempel*, with 72 seats for men and 38 gallery seats for women, to serve Brno's community of Eastern European Jews.[10] The *Tempel* was enlarged by thirty-eight percent in 1886, and in 1906 the Jewish community converted a large building in the center of Brno into the *Neuer Tempel*.

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[9]Kahane, "Brno."

[10]Brunner, "Geschichte der Juden in Brünn," 165-166.

AN EXAMINATION OF *KOL T'HILLOH*

In the prefaces to the volumes of *Kol T'hilloh*, Heller describes his music in the following manner: "...I wish to pour the old *Chazzanut* [חַזָּנוּת] into a mold which is commensurate with the spirit of modern times and with the form of synagogue service of today;"[1] "...to eliminate everything un-Jewish, to build upon the rock of the precious tradition of the old and true *Chazzanut*, in accordance with modern esthetic forms of art."[2] This is the essence of Heller's goal, and I believe that to a great extent he has achieved it. I will try to show that Heller's music is thoroughly modern and innovative, yet solidly grounded in traditional חַזָּנוּת, and esthetically pleasing.

Before we begin our examination of *Kol T'hilloh*, we should discuss several criteria for evaluating Jewish liturgical music. The first criterion, which would apply to any vocal music, is its overall esthetic quality. Is the melody line pleasing to hear and to sing? Does the meter, rhythm, tempo, and harmonic structure enhance the melody. Is the music inventive or is it banal? Second, we must examine the way the composer treats the text. Are the words accentuated in song as they would be in speech? How does the composer use tone density, the number of tones per syllable? Does the music try to interpret the text? Is there word painting? Third, we ask whether the music is authentic to Jewish tradition. Since the music is meant to be used in a Jewish worship service, we might

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[1]Josef Heller, *Kol T'hilloh* (קוֹל תְּהִלָּה), *Vierstimmige Chöre und Soli sowie Recitative für den israelitischen Gottesdienst mit und ohne Begleitung der Orgel*, 2 vols. (Brno: Carl Winiker, 1905 & 1914), preface to vol.1, translated by Kurt Stern.

[2]Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, preface to vol.2, translated by Kurt Stern.

expect to find the use of traditional melodies and prayer modes. These elements link the music with the text and the occasion for which it was written. Fourth, we examine whether the music respects the sacredness of the text. Does it contribute to the feeling or intention (כַּוָּנָה) traditionally associated with the text? Fifth, and finally, we should ask how this music is to be sung: Is it (a) for "performance," emphasizing and drawing attention to the musical skills of the performers, (b) for "prayer," drawing attention to the text and to the worship experience, (c) for "congregational singing," or (d) for "background music" to accompany something else occurring in the sanctuary?[3]

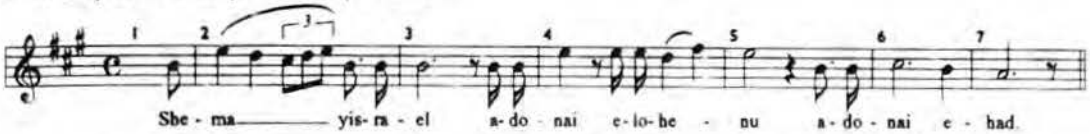
"שְׁמַע"

Heller's settings for the "שְׁמַע" and "אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵנוּ" in the Torah service, Nos. 103-106 in *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 1, show the way he has merged traditional חֲזָנוּת with organ accompaniment and choral embellishments to fashion a more modern musical style. Here we have a sequence of recitative, choral response, recitative, and choral response. The choral response, a repetition of the words sung by the cantor, replaces the traditional response of the congregation. Figure 3 shows Heller's recitative and choral settings for the שְׁמַע. Below Heller's settings is a recitative notated by Abraham Baer in his 1877 collection of traditional synagogue tunes. The final system in Figure 3 reproduces three

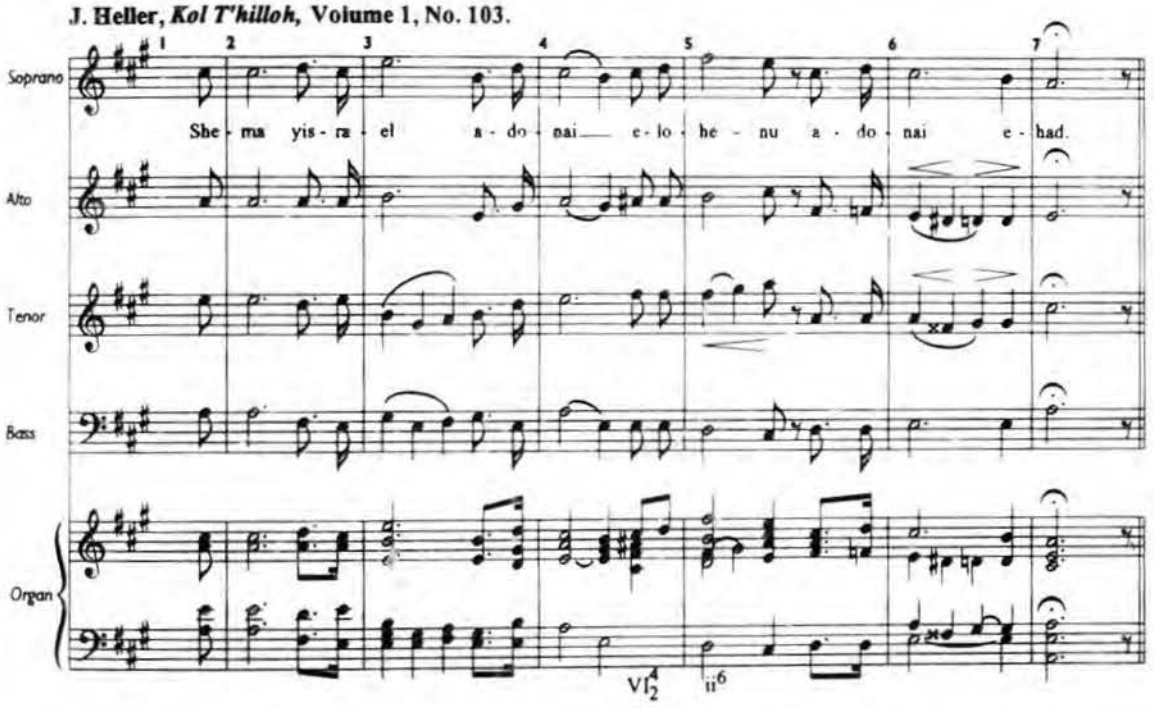
[3]Some of these ideas were suggested to me by Dr. Herman Berlinski.

"Shema Yisrael," Shabbat Torah Service

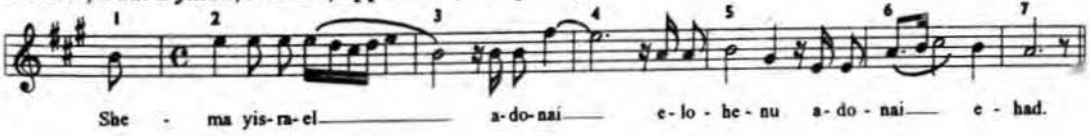
J. Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 1, No. 103.



J. Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 1, No. 103.



A. Baer, *Baal T'fillah*, No. 584, upper line (transposed).



Torah Cantillation Neumes for the High Holidays

A. Baer, *Baal T'fillah*, No. 107, 3rd Weise (transposed).

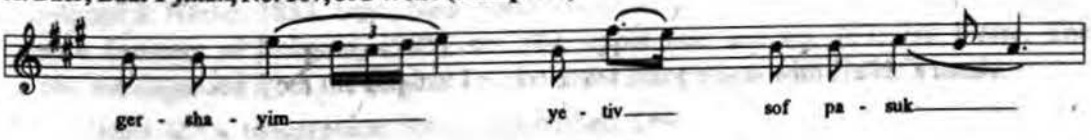


Figure 3

cantillation neumes transcribed by Baer for chanting Torah during the High Holidays.[4] It can be seen from the figure that Heller's recitative closely resembles Baer's. Moreover, the motives in both Baer's and Heller's recitatives resemble the neumes for גַּרְשַׁיִם, יְתִיב, and סוֹף פָּסוּק in one particular Ashkenazi tradition. The musical turn in measure 2 of each melody resembles the neume of גַּרְשַׁיִם. From the middle of measure 3 to the middle of measure 4 in Baer's recitative, the neume of יְתִיב is expressed. Heller's recitative from the middle of measure 3 to the middle of measure 5 interposes a few extra notes into this motive, but we can still recognize יְתִיב. Finally, both Heller and Baer conclude their recitatives with the neume of סוֹף פָּסוּק. Dr. Kurt Stern wrote that Heller considered his recitative for the שְׁמַע to be "one of the oldest authentically Jewish tunes."[5] This analysis supports Heller's opinion.

The soprano lines of Heller's choral arrangements for "שְׁמַע" and "אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵנוּ" show no trace of these cantillation motives, yet these choral settings resemble and complement his recitatives. Both use the diatonic scale in A major from a′ to f♯ ″. The difference in the style between recitative and choral settings is achieved by emphasizing the 2nd and 5th scale degrees (b′ and e″) in the former, and the 3rd scale degree (c♯ ″) in the latter. The 3rd tone in the scale is important for Western harmony. Heller has harmonized the "שְׁמַע" in a classical four-part style. His use of a VI_2^4 to ii^6 chord progression between the 4th and 5th measures, indicated below the second system in Figure 3, is an unexpected and lovely touch, as is the chromatic movement of the inner voices in the penultimate measure.

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[4]Abraham Baer, *Baal T'fillah* (בַּעַל תְּפִלָּה), *oder "Der practische Vorbeter,"* 2nd edition, reprinted in Out of Print Classics Series of Synagogue Music no. 1 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1883; repr., New York: Sacred Music Press, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1985), no. 584, upper line, and no. 107, 3rd *Weise*. The music is transposed from the original key for easier comparison with Heller's music.

[5]Kurt Stern, biographical notes, unpublished, 1946.

This arrangement of "שְׁמַע," although brief, typifies the role of most of Heller's choral arrangements in *Kol T'hilloh*. They complement the cantorial singing, with the choir performing what would have been congregational participation in a more traditional service. Although the choir was not the central element of Heller's music, during קַבָּלַת שַׁבָּת, the Torah and מוּסָף services for the Sabbath, the מוּסָף service for Rosh Hashanah, and the Kol Nidre service, the choral element stood out in a grand style. Heller's choir must have been eight or more in number, for there are numerous instances where the voices — soprano, alto, tenor, and bass — divide in two.

"יְיָ מָלָךְ"

Psalm 93, "יְיָ מָלָךְ," is recited at the conclusion of קַבָּלַת שַׁבָּת services. Among Ashkenazi Jews, there are two musical traditions for this portion of the liturgy. One tradition uses a minor mode, called מָגֵן אָבוֹת; the other uses a major mode, called יְיָ מָלָךְ. Heller uses the major mode in recitative No. 25 of *Kol T'hilloh*, volume 1. It is shown in Figure 4. We shall compare this to a recitative of Cantor Adolph Katchko,[6] shown in Figure 5. Katchko, a former teacher at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, wrote three volumes of highly esteemed cantorial music.[7]

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[6]Adolph Katchko, *A Thesaurus of Cantorial Liturgy* (אוצר החזנות), vol. 1, (New York: Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music, 1986).

[7]In the preface to Katchko's *Thesaurus*, musicologist Prof. Eric Werner wrote that this music "could become one of the pedagogic pillars of American *Chazanut*."

Adonai malach

J. Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 1, No. 25.

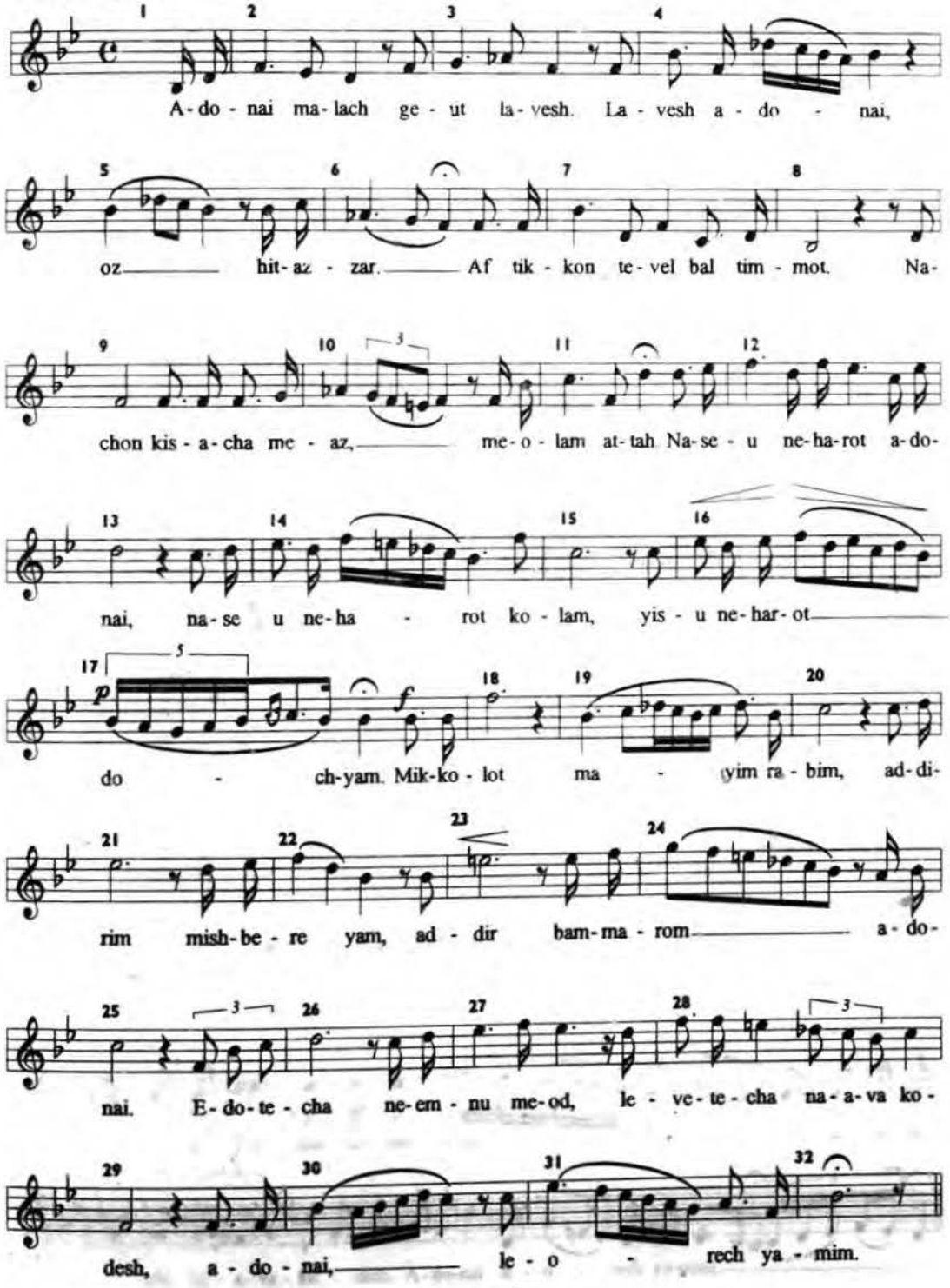

Figure 4

Adonai malach

A. Katchko, *A Thesaurus of Cantorial Liturgy,* Volume 1.

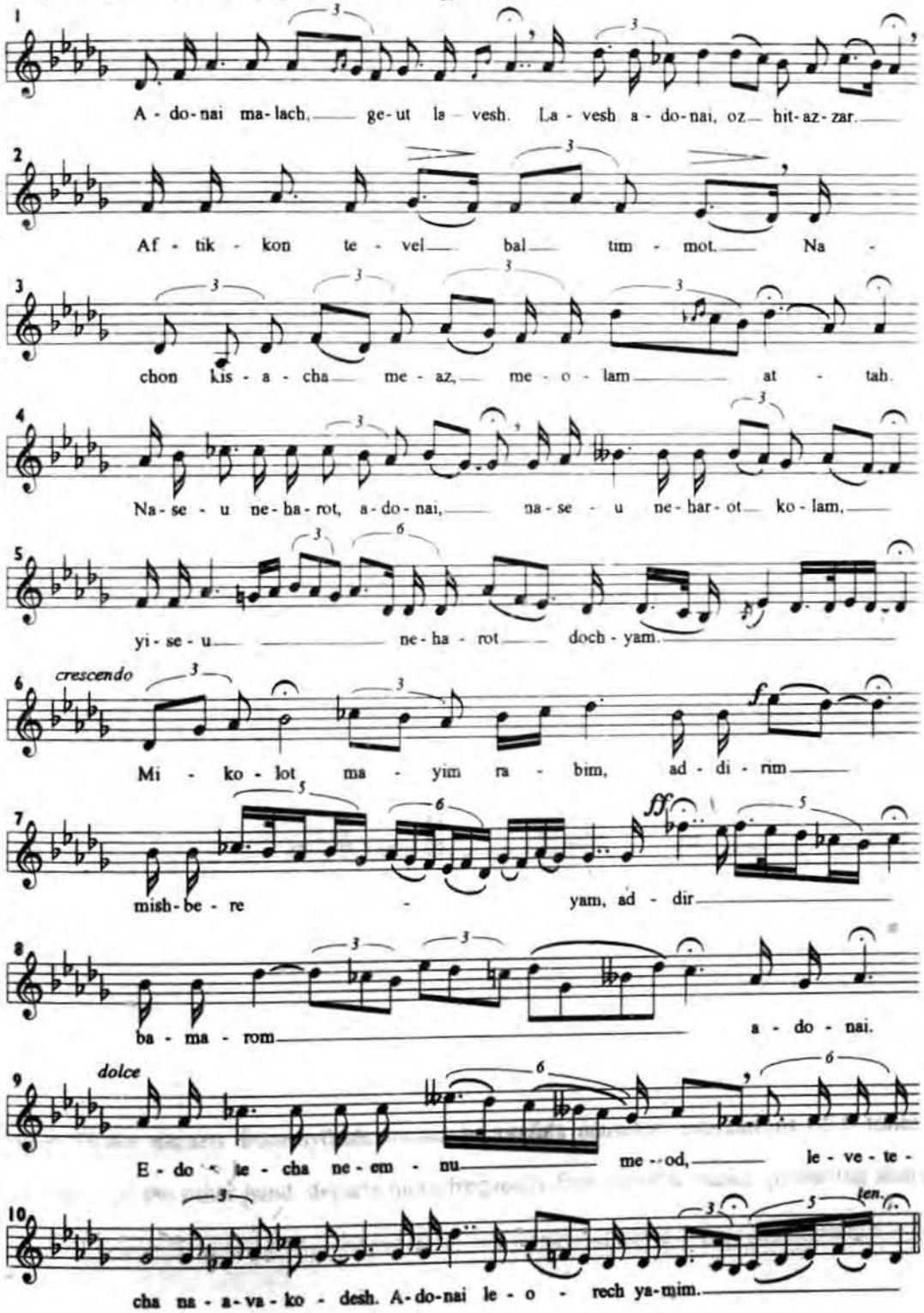

Figure 5

One is struck, at first, by the differences in meter between these two works. Heller's is written in a metric style, while Katchko's is written without bar lines, and thus appears to be non-metered. But Heller's work is meant to be performed in a style as free of meter as Katchko's; the meter is only a concession to the notation of Western music.

A second obvious difference between the two works is in the use of melisma. If we examine the number of tones, T, used to express each syllable, we find that Heller's music is almost entirely syllabic: out of 110 syllables, 98 are associated with one tone. Katchko's music associates only 83 of 110 syllables with one tone. The remaining syllables in Heller's and Katchko's music are associated with 2 to 15 tones, and their distribution is shown in Figure 6.

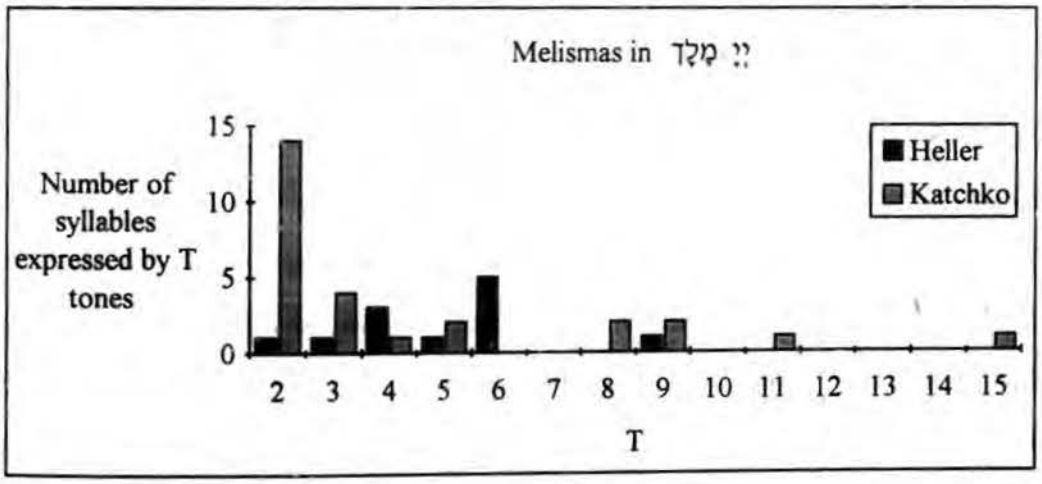

Figure 6

When Heller departs from syllabic music, he prefers neumatic expressions of 6 tones. Katchko, on the other hand, departs more frequently from syllabic music, preferring short

neumatic expressions of 2 tones; occasionally (but much more frequently than Heller) he emphasizes the text with a long melisma.

Let us examine the ways Heller and Katchko treat the text of Psalm 93. Both settings present the complete text with no repetitions. In terms of prosody, Heller puts the musical stress on the syllables that would normally be stressed when the words are spoken, except at the word עֵדוֹתֶיךָ in measures 25-26. The stress here should be מִפְּעָיִל, that is, upon the penultimate syllable, but Heller's music stresses the last syllable. Did Heller not know the correct stress, or did he not care in this case? Evidence from other recitatives in this Friday evening service tell us that Heller knew where the correct stress lay. In his recitative "אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵיאֱ רְצֵה," for example, Heller places the correct stress on every word.[8] Thus, we must conclude that in this instance in Psalm 93 he did not care. Katchko's prosody is perfect.

We turn our attention now to Heller's and Katchko's use of the יְיָ מָלָךְ mode and to the overall musical structure of these pieces. This traditional mode is built on the notes of the diatonic major scale with lowered 7th and 10th degrees.[9] Heller's setting of Psalm 93 is constructed of four sections: (a) measures 1-8, (b) measures 8-17, (c) measures 17-25, and (d) measures 25-32. In the first section, the entire range of the mode, from degrees 1 through 10, is expressed using standard musical phrases within the mode.[10] Heller modulates up one octave in measures 8-11, and introduces the taste of the Ukrainian-Dorian mode,[11] by means of an e♮′ (the augmented 4th degree) in measure 10.

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[8]Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 1, no. 91, p. 62.

[9]Baruch Joseph Cohon, "The Structure of the Synagogue Prayer-Chant," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 3 (1950): 17-32.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Joseph A. Levine, *Synagogue Song in America*, (Crown Point, Ind.: White Cliffs Media Co., 1989), 112-113.

Chromatic inflections of the 3rd and 4th scale degrees, give a Ukrainian-Dorian flavor to descending runs in measures 14, 24, and 28. As pointed out earlier, the climax of the setting lies in measures 17-25, which concludes on the 2nd scale degree. In the final section, measures 26-32 signal a return to the *finalis*, an octave above the opening tone, by way of the 9th, 7th and 5th scale degrees of the יְ מָלָךְ mode.

Katchko uses the יְ מָלָךְ mode in a very similar manner. But in three respects his use differs from Heller's. First, Katchko does not express the lowered 10th degree of the יְ מָלָךְ "scale." The tone is present, in fact, but it is used as the subdominant of C♭ major, rather than as the lowered 10th degree of D♭ major. Second, Katchko modulates to the fourth degree of the scale at the words "מִקֹּלוֹת מַיִם רַבִּים," a common modulation in this mode.[12] Third, Katchko does not modulate up an octave, but returns to the opening tone in the final system of his setting. Heller's and Katchko's settings of Psalm 93 are both expressive of the יְ מָלָךְ mode, although each composer has offered a different interpretation of it.

The high point of Psalm 93 lies in measures 18-25 of Heller's piece, and in systems 6-8 of Katchko's. High pitch and dynamics plus a change in tonality are used to stress the words "אַדִּיר בַּמָּרוֹם יְהוָה." Katchko modulates up a 4th, whereas Heller sets off these measures by using the oriental-sounding Ukrainian-Dorian mode, distinguished by its minor 3rd and augmented 4th degrees.[13]

This psalm speaks of God's majesty, strength, and power. It declares that God's might is greater that the breakers of the sea. Both composers use word painting to emphasize this message, but Heller's is more effective. At measure 11, with the words "נָאוָה קֹדֶשׁ," Heller has modulated one octave above the opening tone by expressing a

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[12]Cohon, "Synagogue Prayer-Chant."

[13]Levine, *Synagogue Song*, 112-113.

natural 10th scale degree. He maintains this "higher-octave" modulation, through the end of the piece. The raised "voice" or "voices" of the waters are expressed by upward leaps of a 5th in measures 14 and 17-18. The "rivers," "breaking waves," and "waters" are illustrated with melismas in measures 14, 16, 17 and 19 on the words "נְהָרוֹת," "דְּכְיִם," and "מַיִם." Katchko's setting of this text, in systems 4-5, does not effectively use word painting except for the ornament on the word "דְּכְיִם." On the other hand, he does use word painting very expressively in systems 6-8 with upward leaps of a 4th and a minor 7th on the words אַדִּירִים and אַדִּיר, suggesting by the relative size of the leaps that the might of God is greater than the might of the sea. Heller, too, shows this relationship by an upward run of a minor 3rd on "אַדִּירִים," and a leap upward of an augmented 4th on "אַדִּיר." Heller, overall, word paints more convincingly than Katchko by placing leaps, runs, and turns on those words and syllables that most demand them.

Heller also structures his music according to the structure of the psalm's poetry. The psalm presents three parallel expressions for the might of the sea: נָשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת יָיְ,

נָשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת קוֹלָם,

יִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת דְּכְיָם.

Heller sets this text, in measures 11 to 17, with musical phrases that almost seem to be a sequence ending on the 3rd scale degree (measure 13), on the 2nd (measure 15), and on the *finalis* (measure 17) of the new "higher-octave" scale. Yet each musical phrase in the apparent sequence has a unique melismatic ornamentation that keeps the music interesting. Katchko also writes a musical sequence for this text, in system 4. But he uses a musical sequence only for the first two lines of text, coloring the second expression in this sequence by a chromatic inflection. In system 5, Katchko breaks the musical sequence to insert two long melismas on יִשְׂאוּ and דְּכְיָם. Although Heller's music is not as dramatic as Katchko's, it is more expressive of the poetry.

"אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל"

In the מוּסָף services for the High Holidays, the cantor stands before the open ark and recites "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל." It is a רְשׁוּת requesting divine help in finding the words to pray on behalf of the congregation. Dating from the ninth century, the text is traditionally sung in the קָרוֹבָה mode using "מִשֶּׁינוּ" musical motives. These motives are central elements in Heller's setting of "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל," No. 498 in *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 2. Heller sets the text as an accompanied solo, shown in Figure 7. We will examine how he has integrated and harmonized these traditional motives into a liturgical art song. We shall also compare Heller's setting to a later setting by Cantor Walter A. Davidson,[14] who taught for many years at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion; his setting is shown in Figure 8.

The traditional "מִשֶּׁינוּ" motives present in "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל." are labeled A and B in the figures. We also find these motives notated in recitative No. 1230 of Abraham Baer's *Baal T'fillah*, shown in Figure 9.[15] In this figure, motive A appears in measures 1-3, and motive B in measures 3-6. Heller's setting and Davidson's also open with these two motives (Figure 7, measures 2-10, and Figure 8, measures 2-8).

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[14]Walter A. Davidson, *Temple Music for the Holy Days* (ניגוני ימים נוראים), *for the Union Prayer Book Volume II, Revised and Enlarged for Cantor, Mixed Choir and Organ* (New York: Bloch, 1963), 96-97.

[15]Baer, *Baal T'fillah*, no. 1230, 1st or 2nd *Polnische Weise*. Baer notated two Polish versions on the same staff. It is not always clear which notes belong to which version. The notes most resembling the music of Heller and Davidson have been selected in Figure 9.

Ohila La-el

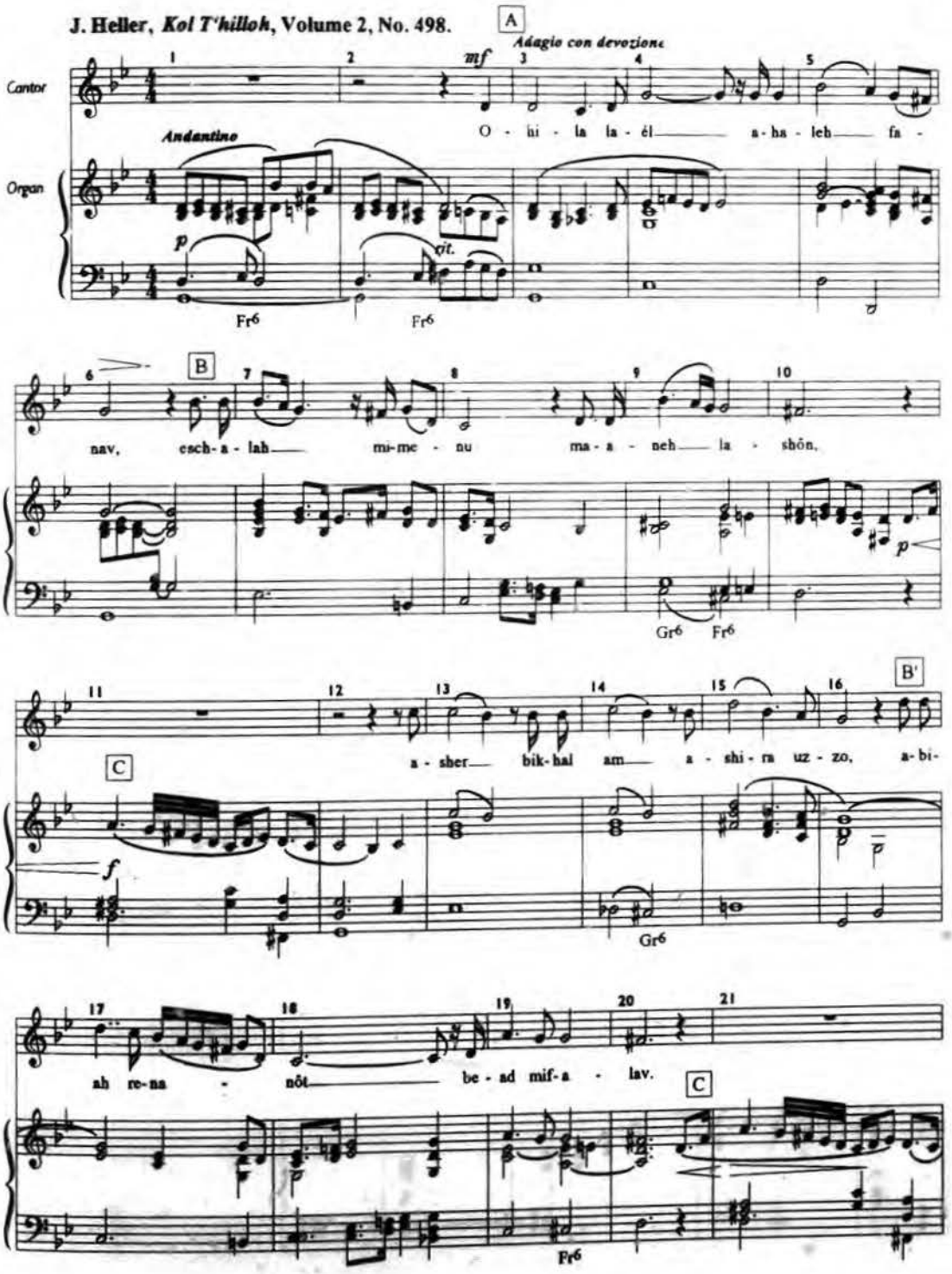

Figure 7

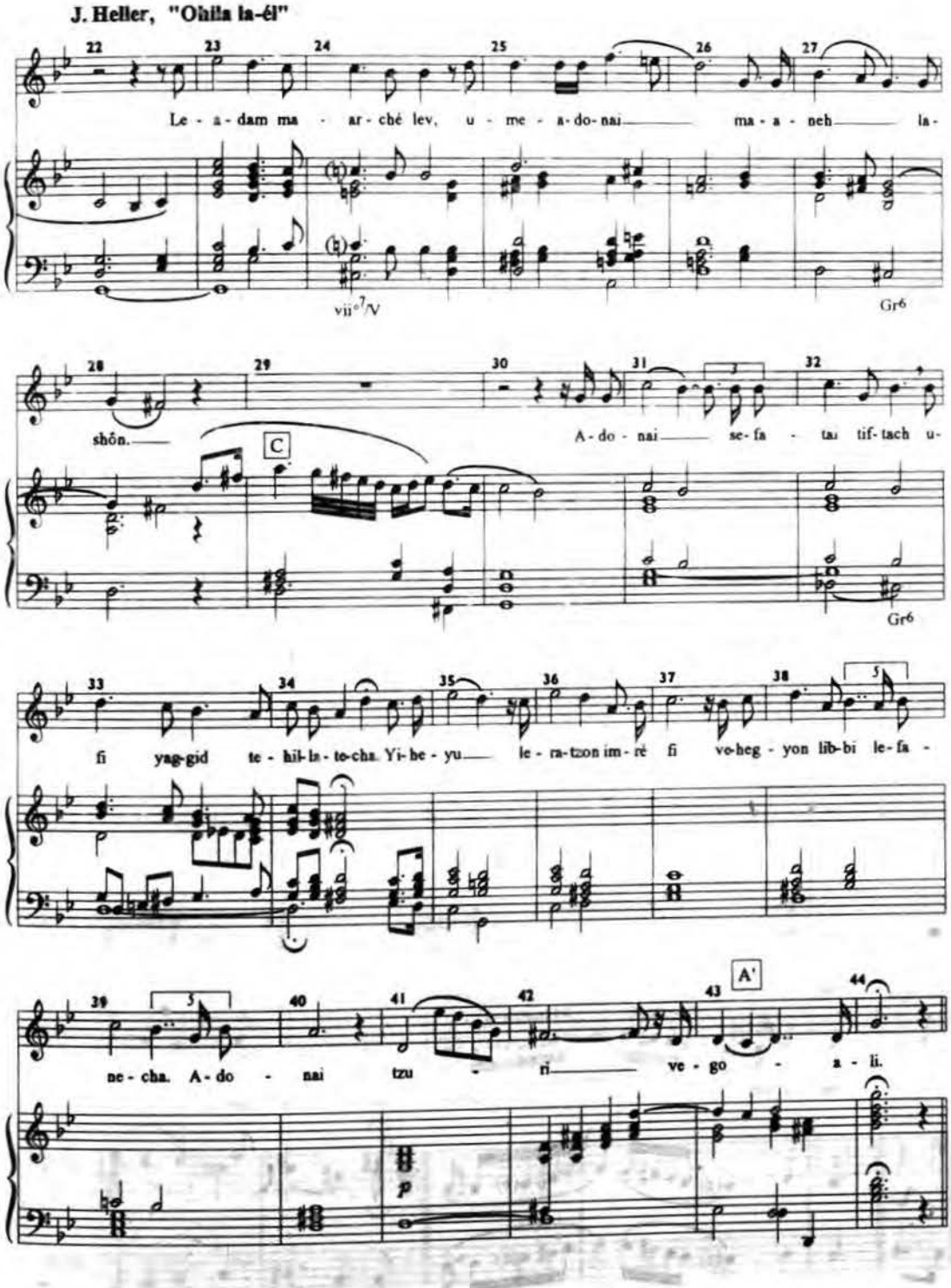

Figure 7, continued

Ohila La-ei

W. A. Davidson, *Temple Music for the Holy Days*, 96-97

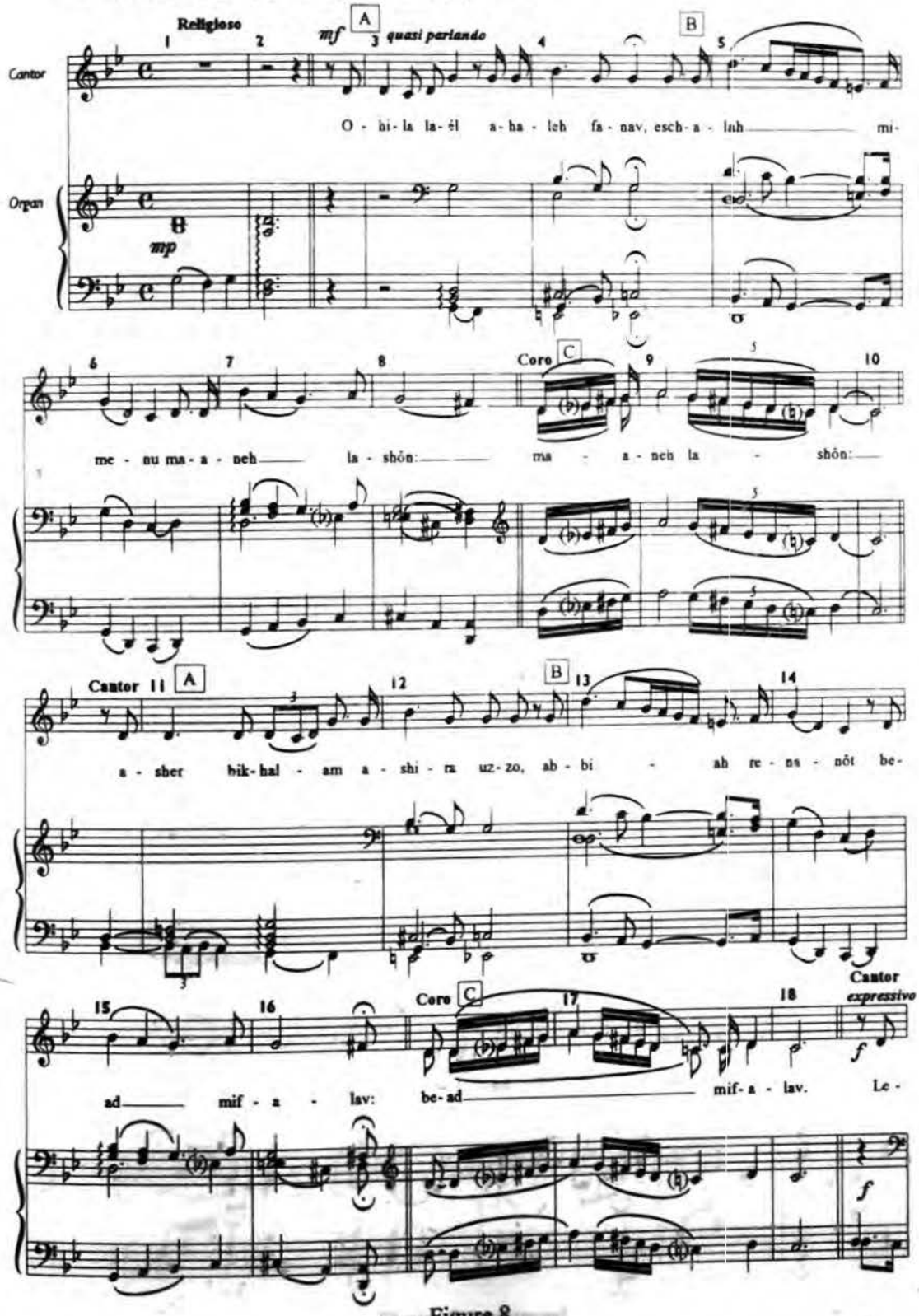

Figure 8

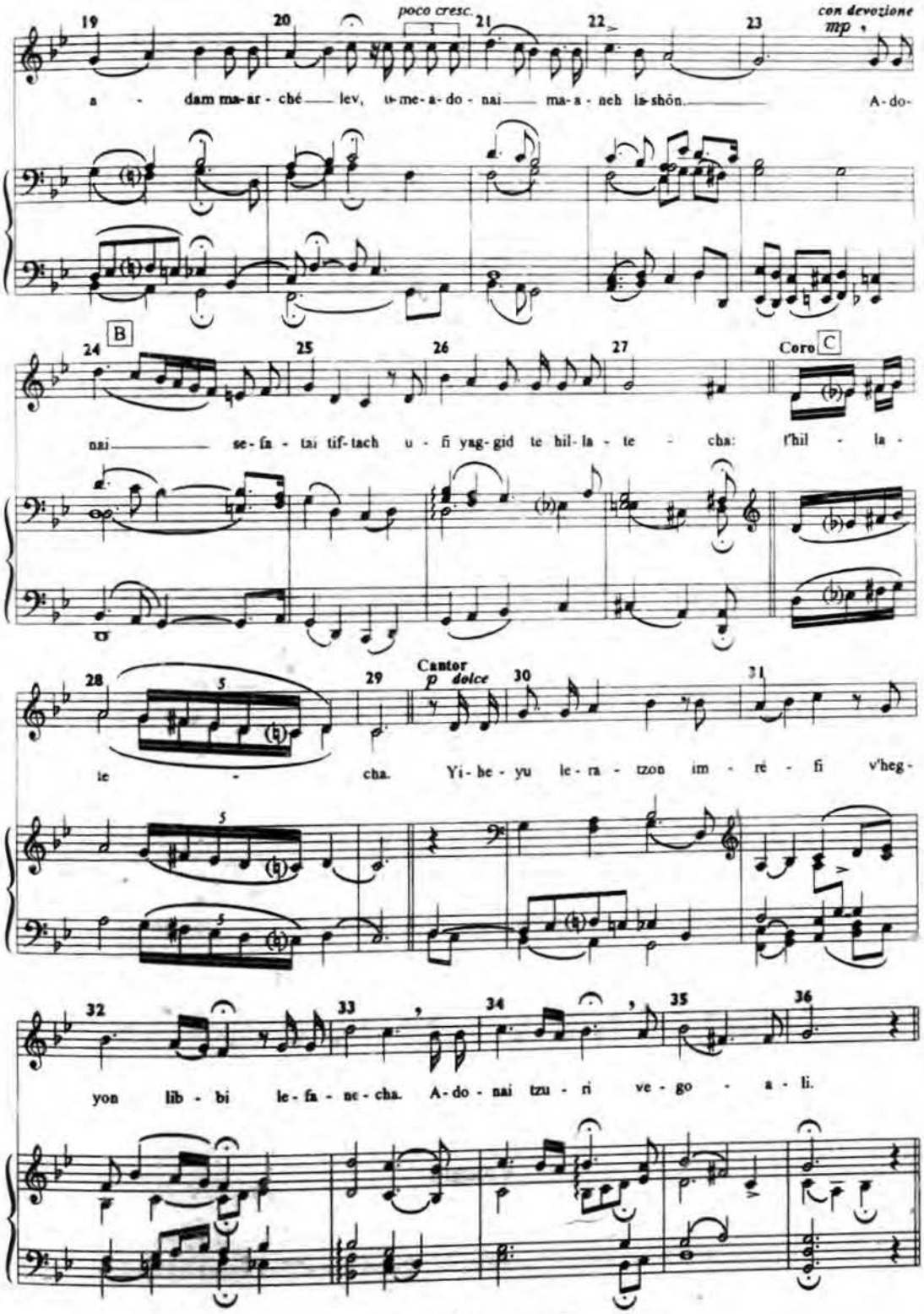

Figure 8, continued

Ohila La-el

A. Baer, *Baal T'fillah*, No. 1230, Polnische Weise

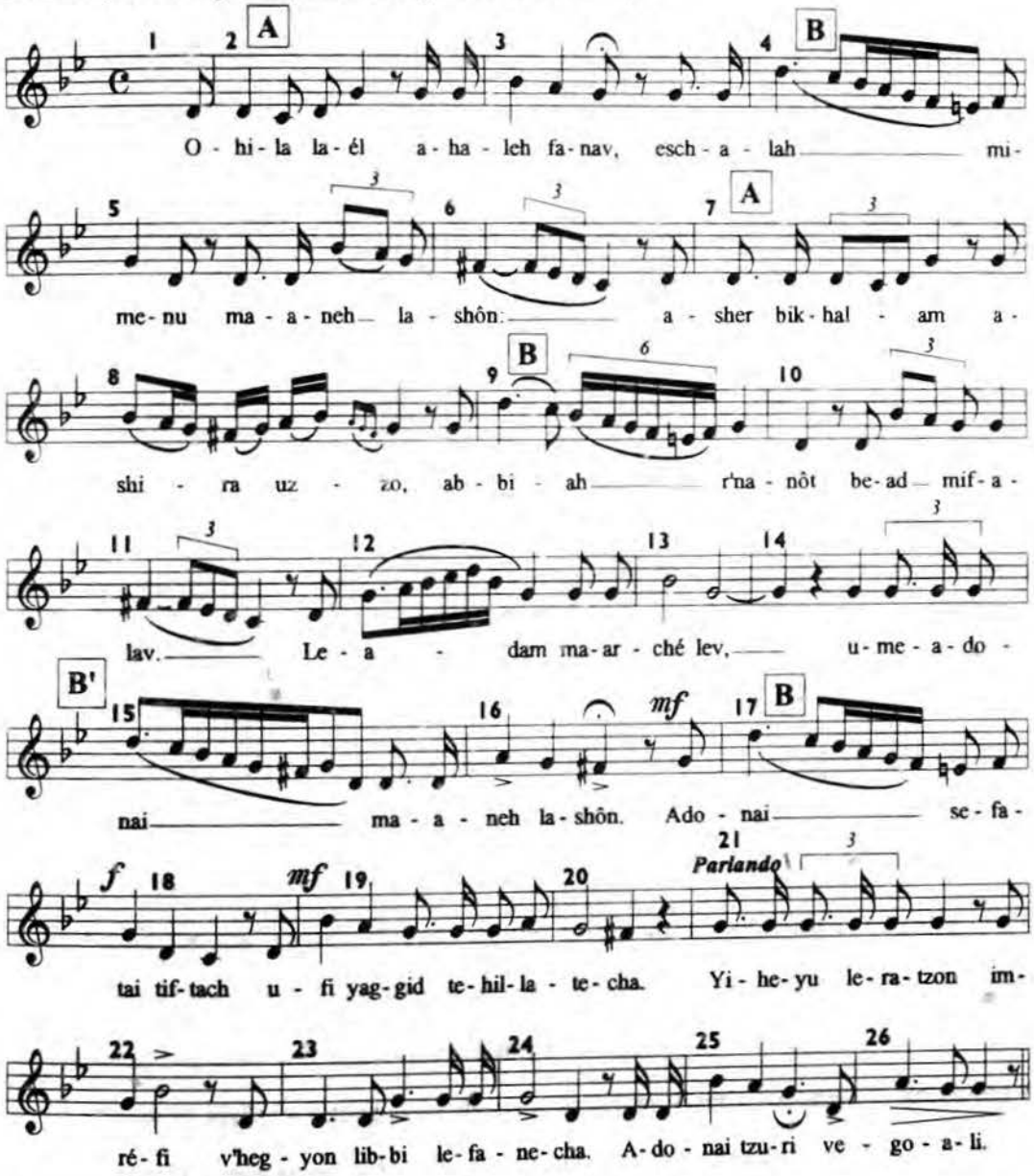

Figure 9

Heller, Davidson, and Baer have each set their music using the key of G minor, so it is fairly easy to see the similarities and differences by referring to the figures. The A motives of these composers are nearly identical, but in Heller's setting the note values are doubled. This achieves a broad, sustained vocal line. The B motives of Davidson and Baer are almost identical. They consist of an opening leap from the 1st to the 5th scale degrees, a stepwise descent back to the 1st scale degree, a turn, and a downward leap to the 5th scale degree. The turn and downward leap, g′-f′-e′-f′-g′— d′ (Figure 8, measures 5-6, and Figure 9, measures 4-5), were encountered by us earlier, in the reverse order d′— g′-f′-e′-f′-g′; this is the High Holiday neume for גְּרָשִׁים (Figure 3). The B motive that Heller has written is structurally the same as Baer's and Davidson's, but there is no opening leap and no turn, and the stepwise descent begins on the 3rd degree of the minor scale instead of the 5th. However, in measures 16-20, Heller repeats the motive adding a descent from the 5th degree (B′ in Figure 7, where the prime indicates the slight difference from his initial expression of the motive). This difference gives variety and drama to Heller's setting.

In addition to motives A and B, a third motive, C, is found in the settings of Heller and Davidson. C mimics a traditional response of the congregation to repeat the last words sung by the cantor.[16] This motive is not found in Baer's example. C is homophonically expressed by the organ in Heller's setting, and is monophonically expressed by the choir and organ in Davidson's setting.

Special to Heller's setting is its thematic structure. Baer's recitative is structured A B A B (Figure 9, measures 1-11), whereas Davidson's setting is structured A B C A B C (Figure 8, measures 2-18). Heller, however, avoids repetition by introducing new material in measures 12-16, a bridge that leads back to the motives B′ and C. A climactic section

[16]I am indebted to Cantor Israel Goldstein for pointing this out to me.

follows in measures 22-30, which dramatizes the idea that God reigns supreme over humankind: "human beings are able to prepare their mind for speech, but God enables the tongue to issue the correct response." This section, too, is composed of new musical material linked to traditional motives. The climax concludes with the final notes of the B motive (Figure 7, measures 26-28) followed by a heightened expression of C by the organ, one octave up. No such climax is found either in Davidson's or in Baer's strictly traditional settings. A final contrast between Heller's setting and the others is a concluding phrase that returns to the opening notes of motive A (Figure 7, measures 42-44).

With the melody line more or less confined to traditional motives in these settings of "אוּתְיִלָה לָאֵל," the accompaniments in Heller's and Davidson's settings assume a relatively greater role in expressing the meaning of the text. This is a personal supplication of the שְׁלִיחַ צִבּוּר uttered with apprehension, humility, and expectations of being answered by God. How can such feelings be stimulated by the harmonic structure of these pieces?

Both Heller's and Davidson's settings are written in the key of G minor. In Heller's setting, dissonances in the form of augmented 6th chords are found in several places. In the key of G minor, augmented 6ths are generally built on the notes E-flat and C-sharp, the latter being a chromatic inflection. "German" sixth chords (Gr^6), spelled $e\flat$ -g-$b\flat$ -$c\sharp'$, are found in measures 9, 14, 27 and 32, and "French" sixths (Fr^6), $e\flat$ -g-a-$c\sharp'$, are found in measures 1, 2, 9 and 19 (Figure 7). The dissonance between the E-flat and C-sharp is resolved by the E-flat moving down a half-step and the C-sharp moving up, both to D. The French sixth contains the additional dissonance between g and a, which is resolved by either note moving a half-step away from the other. Other chromatic inflections that make Heller's setting of "אוּתְיִלָה לָאֵל" interesting are an A-flat passing tone in measure 3, G major chords in measures 7 and 35, and a diminished $vii^{\circ 7}/V$ chord (with

a C-natural to B-flat suspension) in measure 24. This diminished chord helps to highlight the climax of the piece (measures 22-30, previously discussed). Such chromatic inflections give the traditional motives a fresh coloring, and fire them with tension in the form of dissonances that demand resolution.

The most important element in Davidson's harmony is a moving base, which descends — both diatonically and chromatically — from G to D in measures 3-5 (Figure 8), and ascends from G to C♯ in measures 7-8. One of the inner voices also descends along with the base. During repetition of the musical themes, this harmonization is repeated almost exactly. Indeed, stepwise movement of the base occurs on nearly every beat throughout this composition. It is like a beating heart, perhaps emphasizing the passing of time felt by the שְׁלִיחַ צִבּוּר in waiting for God's answer to this petition.

The expression of the text of "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל" is syllabic and neumatic in these three traditional compositions. The longest neumatic expression of the cantor's words occurs in Baer's notation; it is eight tones long. Because the melodies adhere to traditional motives, word painting is restricted. But there are a few places where the music particularly complements the text. On the words, "אֲשִׁירָה עָזּוֹ," Baer notates a turn, suggestive of song, and Heller's composition rises to the 5th scale degree, emphasizing God's power. On the words, "אַבִּיעָה רְנָנוֹת," Baer, Davidson and Heller each use the run in the B motive to suggest the pouring forth of song. Finally, in the climactic section of Heller's piece (measures 22-30, Figure 7), the melody expresses the dominance of God — יְיָ — over humankind — אָדָם.

The accentuation of syllables in Baer's and Davidson's compositions is entirely correct. But Heller takes liberties on the words "אַבִּיעָה רְנָנוֹת" in measures 16-18, "מַעֲרָכַי לָךְ" in measures 23-24, and "לְקַצּוֹ" in measures 35-36. It must be borne in mind, however,

that the text of "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל" does not appear to be the focus of Heller's setting. It is, rather, the giving of new life to the traditional musical motives by suggesting — through the harmonic structure — the mood or כַּוָּנָה of the petitioner

"לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין"

The poem "לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין" is found in the morning services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is a tribute to the ways God judges humankind. Ascribed to Elazar Ha-Kallir, it is an alphabetic acrostic in which each line ends with "דִּין." Heller's setting for this poem, Nos. 322-324 in Volume 2 of *Kol T'hilloh*, is shown in Figure 10. It follows a traditional antiphonal structure between the cantor and the choir or congregation. Both parts are without organ accompaniment. We shall compare this setting with the Lithuanian-Jerusalem tradition notated by Yehoshua L. Ne'eman. Ne'eman's setting, No. 141 in Volume 1 of נוסח לחזן,[17] is shown in Figure 11. Here, the antiphonal structure is between the cantor and the congregation.

[17]Yehoshua L. Ne'eman, *Nosah Lahazan* (נוסח לחזן): The Traditional Chant of the Synagogue According to Lithuanian-Jerusalem Musical Tradition, vol. 1, revised (Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Sacred Music, 1972), no. 141, pp. 84-86. In the figure, I have transcribed Ne'eman's peculiar musical notation into standard form.

Figure 10

Le-él orech din

J. Heller, *Kol T'hilloh*, Volume 2, Nos. 322-324

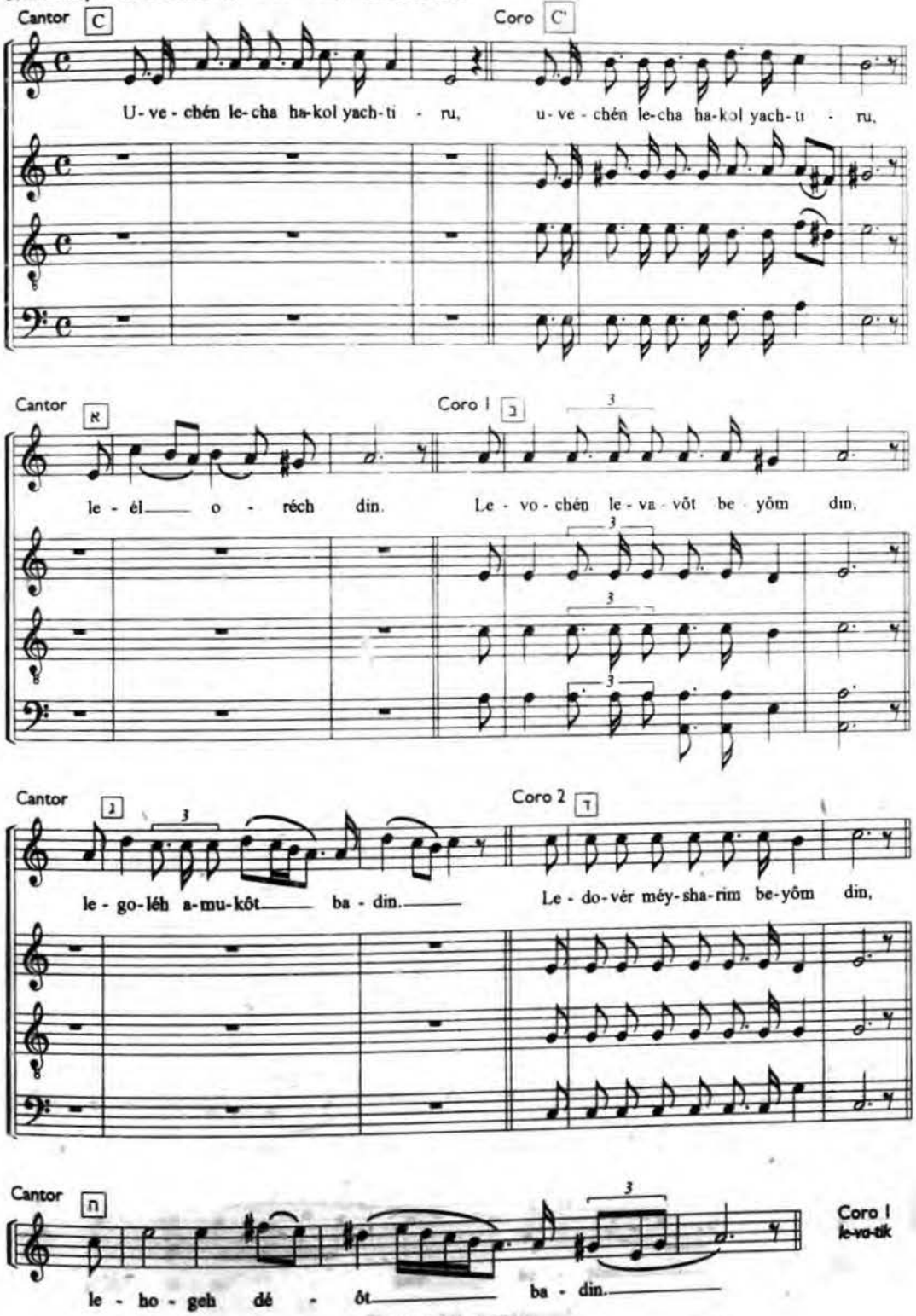

Figure 10

J. Heller, "Le-él orech din"

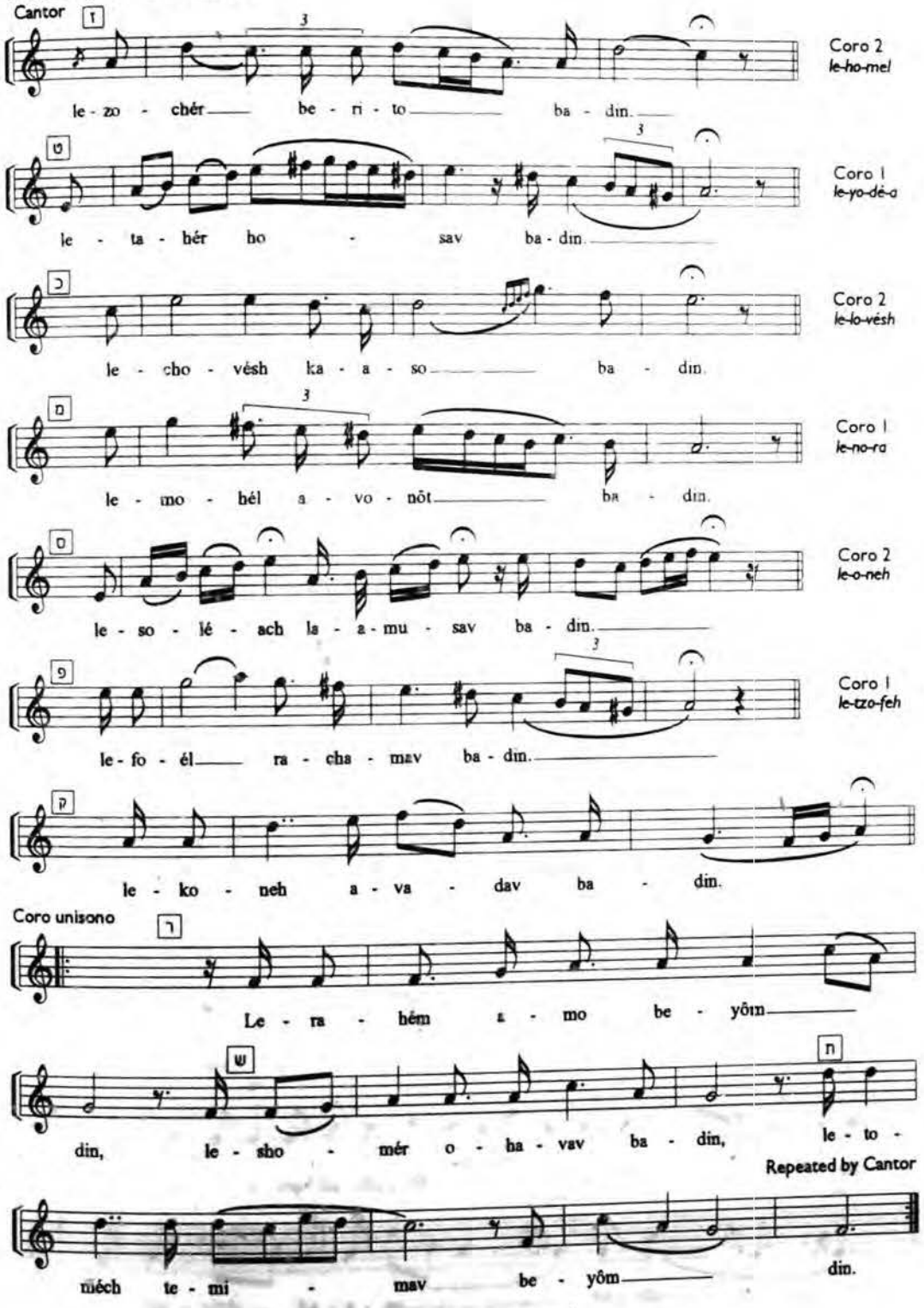

Figure 10, continued

Le-él orech din

Y. L. Ne'eman, *Nosah Lahazan*, No. 141

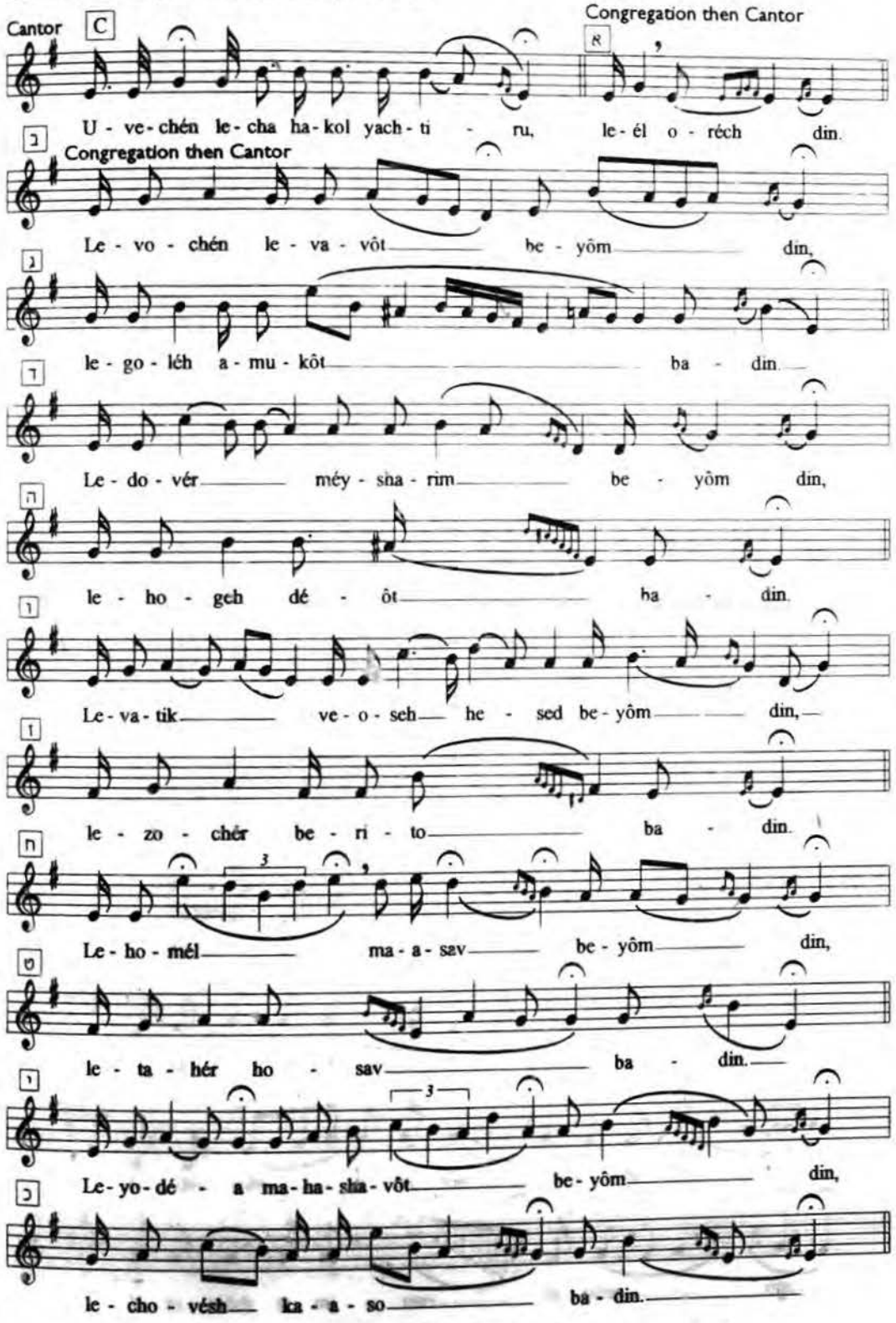

Figure 11

Y. L. Ne'eman, "Le-él orech din"

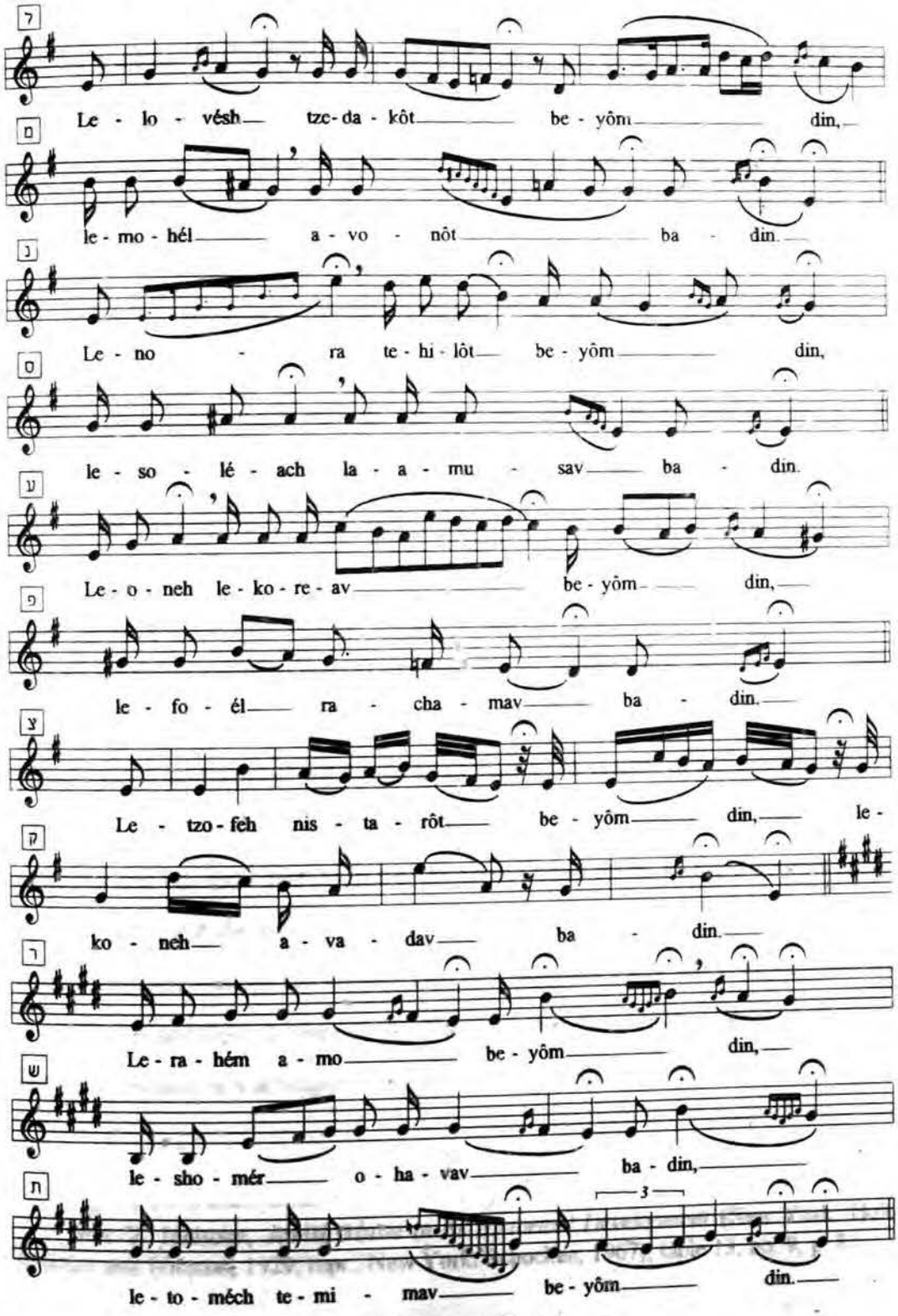

Figure 11, continued

Both settings begin with an opening call by the cantor to commence tribute to God. In Heller's setting, this call is repeated homophonically by the choir (C and C′ in Figure 10). Thereafter, the cantor and the choir recite alternate verses of the poem (א through ת, Figure 10) without repetition: א by the cantor, ב by the choir, ג by the cantor, ד by the choir, and so on through verse ק. The final three verses [ר, ש, ת] are sung as a unit by the choir, and then repeated as a unit by the cantor.

Ne'eman's recitative has a similar structure. The verses of the poem are grouped as follows: א, [ב, ג], [ד, ה], ... [צ, ק], [ר, ש, ת]. After the opening call by the cantor (C, Figure 11), the congregation recites verse א, and the cantor repeats; then it recites ב and ג, and the cantor repeats. This antiphonal pattern continues througn the recitation of the last group of verses [ר, ש, ת].

The music in "לְאֵל עוֹנֵךְ דִּין" is written in the "סְלִיחָה" mode.[18] The tonality of the סְלִיחָה mode is minor with an emphasis on the third scale degree. In Heller's setting, the opening call C and cantorial verse א establish a minor tonality on A. Verses ג and ז typify the סְלִיחָה mode, with their minor tonality and emphasis of the third scale degree, C. Verses כ and ס emphasize C still further by expressing the tonality of C major (the relative major of A minor). The cantorial verses in between — ח, ט, מ, and פ — are colored by the raised 4th and 6th scale degrees of the Ukrainian-Dorian mode. In sharp contrast to the varying tonality and chromatic coloring of the cantorial verses, the choir's verses alternate without variation between the Western keys of A harmonic minor and C major; these are called Coro 1 and Coro 2, respectively. The alternation between these Western choruses and modal recitatives is arranged so that the cantorial recitatives preceding Coro 1 end on

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[18]A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1929; repr., New York: Schocken, 1967), table 13, no. 9, p. 81.

the note A, and those preceding Coro 2 end on the note C or E, the third or fifth scale degree.

The final block of three verses is based on a traditional "מִשֵּׁינוּ" melody found in other High Holiday texts, such as "יְיָ מֶלֶךְ" in the morning service for Rosh Hashanah, "אַשְׁרֵי הָעָם" in the Shofar service, and "וְנִסְלַח" in the Kol Nidre service.[19] It has a major tonality, and Heller sets it in a new key, two scale degrees below A. Verse ק sets up this modulation by ending on the notes f′-g′-a′. The choir sings verses ר, ש, and ת monophonically, and then the cantor repeats. Heller's setting is a skillfully crafted blend of traditional music with formal Western harmony and order.

In Ne'eman's setting, the סְלִיחָה mode is established in the key of E. The tonality of E minor is firmly set in the opening call and in verse א. Blocks of two verses are recited first by the congregation, then by the cantor. The characteristic modal emphasis on the third scale degree, G, is achieved by highlighting the G major triad, and by ending the first verse of each block on G. The second verse of the block returns to E. Tonal variety is achieved in verses ג, ח, מ and ס by raising the 4th and 6th scale degrees to give the music a Ukrainian-Dorian coloring. Also, in verses ע and פ, the lowered 2nd and raised 3rd scale degrees gives the modal flavor of אַהֲבָה רַבָּה. The final three verses are set in the "יְיָ מֶלֶךְ" mode; modulation to the tonality of E major is by chromatic inflection.

Both Heller and Ne'eman are inventive with their music and offer rich variety, but the latter composer has twice as much opportunity to exploit the text. Both composers use word painting at various points. In verse כ, Heller's musical phrase helps to support the

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[19]Heller uses this traditional melody in the settings of these pieces in *Kol T'hilloh*, vol. 2, no. 319, p. 63; no. 410, p.107; and no. 561, p. 203.

idea of "holding back God's anger" the use of a half note on "לְכוֹבֵשׁ" gives the feeling of "holding back," and the upward run on the word "כַּעֲסוֹ" can be seen as the raising of one's voice in "anger." God's "compassion" is also expressed by the plaintive quality of the descending Ukrainian-Dorian scale in verse פ. Similarly, Ne'eman uses word painting in verses ג, נ, and ע. That God reveals "profound things—עֲמֻקוֹת" is expressed by the descending runs in ג. The "awesome—נוֹרָא" quality of God is expressed by an accentuated arpeggio in verse נ. In verse ע, we hear ourselves "calling to" or "pleading with" God in a melismatic embellishment of the word "קוֹרְאֵיו."

Both Heller and Ne'eman set the text of the poem syllabically and neumatically. The longest melisma has six tones in Heller's setting and eleven tones in Ne'eman's. Both composers take a few liberties with the accentuation of syllables, but neither setting has any egregious errors in accentuation.

Thus, we find that Heller's setting has much in common with the Lithuanian-Jerusalem tradition as recorded by Ne'eman. But Heller shortens the poem's recitation and Westernizes the choral-congregational part. Since we keep returning to the same two homophonic choral settings, and because every other cantorial verse is sung without chromatic embellishments, the infusion of Ukrainian-Dorian flavor in the other verses stands out especially strong, the examples of word painting are keenly perceived, and the entire setting of "לְאֵל עוֹרֵךְ דִּין" by Heller is rendered more familiar to Western ears than the one by Ne'eman.

CONCLUSION

We have barely begun to examine the synagogue music of Cantor Josef Heller. Yet our observations have clearly revealed that Heller possessed a profound knowledge and respect for חַזָּנוּת. He attempted to modernize and preserve traditional חַזָּנוּת by combining it with the harmonic elements of Western music. His music was written in a *bel canto* style for a cantor with a tenor or high baritone voice, for a mixed choir with four or eight voices, and for organ accompaniment.

Expression of the prayer texts was always the central element of Heller's music. He was good at word painting. He avoided repetition of the text. Although he occasionally took liberties with the accentuation of the text, he generally expressed the text the way it would be spoken. *Coloratura* passages were rare, and the voice was never used in a showy fashion. The organ not only supported the vocal line, but added an extra dimension to the music, as we saw in Heller's "אוֹחִילָה לָאֵל." The choir usually complemented the cantorial music. It replaced the traditional מְשׁוֹרְרִים, and it sang — in an esthetically elevated fashion — that which would have been sung or *davvened* by a traditional congregation.

It is a pity that *Kol T'hilloh* was never completed. We do not have Heller's music for the festivals. It is also unfortunate that *Kol T'hilloh* does not include simple tunes that would lend themselves to congregational singing. Heller's synagogue community probably did not care to engage in formal singing. In many other respects, however, Heller's music seems to be well-suited for today's style of Reform Judaism, with its renewed interest in

traditional musical modes and its need for well-written, organ-accompanied cantorial music.

APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

JOSEF HELLER (1864-1936)

I have always regretted the fact that I never persuaded my grandfather to write some autobiographical sketch. When I now try to write these notes, I regret again that I did not collect the material for them while it was still possible. Therefore this attempt will be fragmentary in scope, uncertain in many details and, possibly, even inaccurate in others. But at the same time the ten years that have passed since my late grandfather departed from this world have not dimmed one bit the vividness of my recollections but rather have added to the spell cast by his unique personality. This was not confined to my formative years but extended far beyond that and immeasurably contributed to all that I have or ever may achieve.

Josef Heller's personality is mirrored to me in three facets, each with its own cross-reflections: first, the grandfather in whose house I grew up after the death of my mother when I was four; [second,] the professional man - Cantor and composer; [and third,] the Jew and man whose influence on me was the deepest I have ever experienced.

Josef Heller was born in 1864 in the southern part of Hungary (Szatmar), which became a part Rumania after World War I. He was the oldest son of a tenant farmer. Hard luck had forced my great-grandfather to leave the land and engage in business. I recall the photograph my grandfather always had in his room of this tall, austere man. My grandfather never failed to mention that this picture of his father was taken surreptitiously while on a visit. His father adhering strictly to the letter of the tradition would not agree to have an "image" of himself made. My grandfather cherished the greatest affection for his father, and readily admitted to the decisive influence he had exerted upon his life in connection with his choice of occupation. The economic circumstances of the family brought it about that already the seven year old child was encouraged to contribute to its upkeep by making use of his natural musical talent. As was customary at the time, young boys with gifted voices made up the choir of many a traveling cantor, and this was my grandfather's first participation in the world of music. At the same time, he did not

neglect his education but laid the solid foundation for his Jewish knowledge by studying in renowned yeshivot. After finishing normal schooling, he went to one of the bigger towns of the province, Debreczen, and there he entered the Music Academy. He studied hard and by himself, in addition to the regular curriculum, mastered a great many subjects, such as literature and history, which at that time were far removed from the scope of an erstwhile *yeshiva bachur*. Nor did he abandon one iota of his orthodox way of life and adherence to its principles; this rare combination of orthodox and liberal worldliness, together with a strongly stressed attitude of moral and physical independence, Josef Heller acquired during his early youth and retained throughout his life. His music teachers took great interest in him, one of them providing him, after graduation, with a much coveted privilege - admission to the choir of the Royal Opera in Budapest, then known throughout Europe as one of the centers of operatic music.

This was quite a change for the eighteen year old boy, which might have caused others in similar positions—and actually did in many instances—to radically revolutionize their outlook and practice. Not so with Josef Heller. Even in this new life, with his place on the stage, its shifting scenery and garb of picturesque costume, he clung to his traditional ideas and ideals, notwithstanding mockery by his youthful and prankish colleagues. I remember one story he told me about the night when he returned to his dressing room after the performance of "Tannhäuser." Observing side glances and surreptitious grins on the faces of many of his friends, he soon knew the reason why: when he went to change his monk's robe for his daily garb, he noticed that his *talith katan*, the traditional fringed garment, worn under his coat, had some very odd attachments—a pair of pork sausages was dangling from its fringes! But it was not this, or other similar pranks, that caused my grandfather to give up, after a little more than a year, a promising stage career. He had just been offered small parts in opera when he announce to the director his decision to leave. The director tried to persuade him to change his mind. But he had made his decision. His father had come to the capital for the purpose of solemnly entreating him to do so. His main concern was the Jewish integrity of this son which he was fearful must be lost eventually by anyone connected with the theatrical world. A compromise resulted. While his father wished fervently for a rabbinical career for his son, he yielded and did not see his desire fulfilled. Instead, his son promised to devote himself to the cantorial profession. This meant for my grandfather the possibility at least to continue in an activity closely allied with music and the opportunity to cultivate his beautiful voice.

When he was twenty years old, he accepted his first cantorial appointment in a small, but well-reputed, community in central Hungary by the name of Kaposvár. He was one of the youngest "*Oberkantors*"—Chief Cantors—and his name became well known within a short time.

Soon after he started in his new position, a fateful event occurred which to this faithful student of the teachings of our Sages, confirmed one of their old sayings: "The Lord prepares the balm of healing

before he strikes a painful wound." My grandfather's mother, to whom he clung with most tender love, took sick. In a manner characteristic of his initiative, he decided that only the best would be good enough for my great-grandmother, and he took her to Vienna, which was at that time the Mecca of medicine of the whole world. Unfortunately, the most advanced art of healing was helpless to check the cancerous growth, even with the aid of one of the greatest surgeons of that day, Professor Billroth, a pioneer in the field who was called to the case. During the stay of my great-grandmother at the hospital of the University of Vienna, another problem had to be solved: that of providing her with food prepared according to the strict observance of the dietary laws. For this purpose, my grandfather arranged with Vienna's most reputed Kosher restaurant to have all food sent to the hospital. He himself ate there, too. It must have been not only love at first sight but also a tremendous mutual attraction and understanding for each other that brought it about that he and the oldest daughter of the restaurateur were formally engaged when the few weeks of the hospital stay terminated. Bride and groom had barely passed their teens when they were married shortly after. Thirty-six years of marriage were not long enough to include any leisure to repent their seeming haste. It was a most happy and congenial marriage. The deep understanding of my grandmother for her husband was of invaluable assistance to him and supported him in many bitter hours of his life. In particular, the new happiness softened the hard blow of the death of his mother a few months after their return to Hungary.

The young couple spent five happy years in the small town of Kaposvár. There, Elsa—my mother—was born. She was to remain their only child. Soon afterwards, the family was transplanted to entirely new surroundings. The reputation of the young cantor, his beautiful voice, his musical genius and Jewish wisdom brought offers from many places. At last he felt it was time to leave the narrow confines of the small Hungarian community for a wider field. In 1889 he accepted the position of Chief Cantor in Bruenn (Brno), the capital of Moravia, then a province of Austria, which after World War I became part of the Czechoslovak Republic.

It may strike one as a paradox that both positions—in Kaposvár and in Bruenn—with the latter one filled by him up to his retirement, were NOT in orthodox but in so-called reform communities. Parenthetically, it must be explained the "reform" had in these parts of Europe an entirely different connotation than in the United States. The reform synagogue in central Europe was much more comparable to the conservative one in the United States. Hebrew was the exclusive language of prayer. Men had heads covered. Even more traditionally than in the American conservative service, men and women sat separated from each other. European reform consisted mainly in the exclusion of certain parts of the liturgy, involving abbreviation of some prayers. And—this makes it again more closely related to American reform—organ and mixed choir were introduced into the service. True, some of these features

are in strict contradiction to traditional ritual and law. But here again the striking individualism and independence of my grandfather came to the fore. He had recognized early that the orthodox community relegated the cantor to a subordinate position, both professionally and socially. He never could have been satisfied with such a state of affairs. It must be inserted here that in Germany alone the situation was different, that is, the decorum of orthodox service and servants was on a higher plane. But at that time, my grandfather was guided by conditions in his immediate environment. On the other hand, he felt sufficient strength in himself to maintain not only his convictions and observances in strange surroundings, but also to imbue them with his own spirit. And in both respects he succeeded. He skillfully re-instituted by his own activity much of the ritual discarded by "reform" in the synagogue. In this he was helped greatly by a close friendship he enjoyed with the Chief Rabbi of Moravia who, although an outspoken adherent of reform ideas, yielded to the ideals of my grandfather. The high appreciation in which Chief Rabbi Dr. B. Placzek held the Jewish scholarship of Josef Heller is attested by the fact that he conferred on him the degree of "*Morenu*," the rabbinical doctor title. My grandfather's orthodoxy never wavered. His fighting spirit did not weaken with advancing years nor did he shy from castigating Jewish derelictions whenever he found them present.

For 38 years, close to a generation, Josef Heller filled the position of Chief Cantor (*Oberkantor*) in Bruenn (Brno). He could have occupied to mutual benefit, without doubt, equivalent positions in many larger communities, e.g., in either of the two capitals of the old monarchy, Vienna or Budapest, only a few hours of rail road travel from Bruenn. Actually, he had applied for one of the most sought-for positions Budapest, about the beginning of the century; had it not been for some "politics" of the too-familiar "*kehilla* type," the job would have been his by merit of qualifications and the public's preference. But, due to such extraneous factors, he "lost out" and never in the future even attempted another change. He remarked often, as a true adherent of the talmudic philosophy of "*Gam zu l'tova*"—this, too, is for the best—that he considered it a great boon NOT to have obtained the Budapest position. There he felt he would have been drawn into the "social whirl" of the metropolis, the spirit of which was so congenial to him and the many distractions there might have kept him from carrying out his work. In Bruenn, however, such dangers were practically non-existent. There, without any dissipation of energies, Josef Heller could embark on ambitious plans and bring them close to completion. Everyone who knew my grandfather, realized that he utilized every waking hour in the most beneficial way. Wasting of time or boredom was as foreign to him as baseball to an Eskimo.

What were the interests and activities that so completely filled his time?

The various aspects of his busy life flowed together into one broad glistening stream, as would be expected from a personality so well integrated. Nevertheless, it was possible to discern three main

contributories: (1) his profession; (2) his work in and for Jewishness; (3) his creative work in the field of music. In each of these fields, steady self-improvement and discipline were his motto. This was especially evident in his cantorial career. He was not satisfied with his natural gift of a beautiful voice and absolute musicality, but he ceaselessly polished those gems until they shone far beyond their original lustre. He treated his voice as a virtuoso treasures his most precious instrument. A characteristic illustration of this as well as of his tremendous will power may be found in the following fact: he was extremely fond cigars. Nevertheless, he abstained from tobacco for more than seven weeks each year—namely, from *Rosh Hodesh* (new Moon) of *Ellul*, the month preceding the New Year, until the end of the fall holiday season, in order to avoid exposure to the irritating effects of smoking. But more than such exterior manifestations, his every service revealingly demonstrated that, whenever he ascended to the *bimah*, he considered himself a messenger sent by his congregation and people to present supplications and thanks before the throne of the good Lord. This deep and sincere religiosity prevented him from falling into the trap of "prima donna-like stardom" as many other famous cantors did. His devotion was the same whether he was in the midst of a crowded and fashionable synagogue on the High Holy Days, or whether—as it often happened—he stood in an improvised minyan offering one the weekday prayers before simple men in a little town in Hungary.

The concept of the cantorship—*Chazzanut* in the true traditional sense—had regrettably all but vanished in his days from Central Europe. To reinstitute it was one of his chief aims, and for this purpose he organized in Bruenn a Cantorial School. From it there emanated a host of new members who became recognized and were an asset to their profession. In order to raise the standard of cantors, he insisted upon their following a curriculum representing quite an innovation at that time. Their social standing was secured by the necessity for a higher level of general education; the Jewish integrity was ensured by a thorough training Judaism. A general musical course and voice training was instrumental in keeping their services on a high and esthetic plane. Specifically, he taught them to abhor and to forsake certain abuses widely practiced, such as "performing" with their voices purely artistically, without regard to the content and intent of the prayers; "trapeze artists" was his derogatory designation for such malefactors who repeated endlessly the same phrase, when the "spirit" moved them to do so, or who subjugated the spirit of the Hebrew word to foreign melodies, which by necessity appeared a parody to him who was aware of the meaning of the prayer. He insisted also on full knowledge of grammar and pronunciation of the Hebrew text, so that music and words were harmoniously wedded to each other. For all this teaching, he used to great advantage, as a text book, his own compositions, of which I will tell more later.

Former pupils of Josef Heller occupied honored positions all over Europe and other countries. Many professional men—physicians, dentist, lawyers—had successfully gone through his school making use of their talents and knowledge before embarking on their careers.

Josef Heller's unwavering belief in social justice kept him on a never-ending crusade against the economic exploitation to which a great many cantors were subjected by unscrupulous "leaders" of communities. He was instrumental in the first banding together of cantors into professional organizations for the furtherance and protection of their interests and for the elevation of their position.

In truth, all these activities were only part of Josef Heller's paramount interest in life, that is, the promotion of Judaism to the all-embracing position which by right of the spirit of our tradition it should occupy. In correctly assuming that personal example is the most forceful method of propaganda, his own life was molded in strict adherence to the spirit and letter of Judaism. This in itself was no small feat. The conditions in Bruenn were most unfavorable for orthodox observance—kashrut, Sabbath observance, and the other main tenets of Jewish law were almost extinct. Continuous efforts, many privations and sacrifices of financial and social nature were the price my grandfather paid without reluctance toward this end. Fully convinced that ignorance is the most harmful factor in modern Jewish life, he combatted this condition with all his means. He himself devoted many hours of the day to unceasing study of bible, talmud and modern Jewish literature; he actively supported institutions of learning which gradually began to spring up; he assumed many of the duties and responsibilities incumbent on the rabbi, this making up for the shortcomings of some of his colleagues in the pulpit. Deeds, not words, resulted from his deep convictions. Most clearly, this was manifested by his generosity and charitable help toward all those who needed it. During World War I, he devoted almost every hour free from cantorial duties to relieving the need and sorrow of his people; he acted as chaplain, visiting Jewish soldiers in the hospitals of Bruenn and gave comfort and assistance to the refugees from the East.

Josef Heller, however, was no "Jewish isolationist." Professional and social duties brought him into close contact with the non-Jewish world. From them he won the highest respect and esteem in spite of, or possibly because of, his refusal to adopt any of the "protective coloring" chosen by so many of his contemporaries in order to conceal their Jewish background. No, my grandfather could not possibly join or even condone the assimilationist trend rampant in Central and Western Europe in the 19th century. Long before the designation had come into its official meaning, he was a Zionist, a natural outcome of his unshakable faith in the ultimate fulfillment of all Jewish ideals. When the first Zionist youth and student organizations came into being, he gave them his enthusiastic support, against the protest of the staid, respectable and timid assimilationist majority. For several of the organizations, he composed the rallying songs and he did what was in his power to infuse them at the same time with religious fervor, for him

indivisible from the reawakening of the Jewish people. He therefore regretted the lack of religious spirit in Zionism, apparent in future developments, but he never withdrew active support of all efforts connected with the up-building of the home land. By nature individualistic and hence not prone to political routine work, he did not participate in party activities, but his sympathies leaned toward the Mizrachi movement.

In all these respects, he may still have been one among a great many of our people who, thanks to Providence, rallied at that critical time to the flag of the eternal nation. However, I cannot help but attribute to him an almost unique foresight and perspicacity in connection with one specific political aspect. I am talking of his evaluation of Germany and the Germans. Anybody familiar with Europe of that time will testify to the fact that Jews of Germany, Austria, and Hungary did not yield to anybody in patriotism and devotion to their respective countries. Even in the United States, Jews of German extraction notoriously represented one of the most pro-German elements up to the entry of the United States into the first world war. My grandfather's attitude was in striking contrast to that of those super-patriots. Even before the outbreak of the war in 1914, he often expressed his opinion that Germany represented the most dreadful danger to world peace. And during the war, I recall how deeply impressed I, still a child, was by my grandfather's utterances expressed frequently with the fire of deep conviction: "I have one prayer which I am repeating day by day—Germany must not win the war; she must be defeated even if this means our personal destruction together with her. for a victorious Germany would mean the end of all that we as Jews and liberty-loving men cherish." It required courage, much of it, in addition to insight, to express such thoughts at that time. Germany for him represented the resurrected Amalek—the eternal enemy of God, of Israel and of true ideals of humanity. He often admitted that Germany was to be respected for her capabilities and contributions to technical advancement and progress in various fields of civilization. But the arrogance, the supercilious claim of superiority over all other nations, the adulation of militarism and its servants, all these were traits which caused him to detest those who bore them. And in regard to the Jewish problem, he was convinced that German anti-Semitism was of the most vicious type because it had the support of the most advanced intellectual circles. He also presented proof upon proof for the contention that it was the Germans who spread the virus of this hate propaganda all over the world.

All this, I want again to repeat, refers to the time of the first world war. In the fateful twenties and thirties of this century, it was clearly recognized that the military victors were in serious danger of losing the peace. My grandfather was among those who warned against the resurgence of the German peril. He took Nazism seriously from the inception and he was sure that it would inevitably embroil the entire world in a second, more horrible blood bath. Fortunately for him, he was spared from living to see with his own eyes the actual events which exceeded even his imagination.

If I have, with some measure of success, done justice to Josef Heller, the man, and the Jew, I have my serious doubts if I can accomplish this with regard to Josef Heller the musician. My knowledge in this field is indeed inadequate. On the other hand, my testimony is of small significance. His life work, the two volumes of *Kol T'hilloh*, speak for him. I will therefore refrain from evaluating this ambitious work which comes close to being a codification of the entire Jewish liturgy. I want to use only his own words to indicate the high goal he aimed to reach: "...I wish to pour the old *Chazzanut* (cantorial art) into a mold, which is commensurate with the spirit of modern times and with the form of synagogue service of today (Preface of Part 1, 1905)" and "...to eliminate everything un-Jewish, to build upon the rock of the precious tradition of the old and true *Chazzanut*, in accordance with modern esthetic forms of art (Part 2, 1914)."

His compositions were appreciated highly by experts in cantorial music. Likewise, they exerted a great attraction upon audiences wherever presented. True, his compositions had to contend with a pseudo-tradition, works of Sulzer and Lewandowski. While Heller did not deny the high musical value of many compositions of these authors, he pointed with justification to the often lacking Jewish basis of their work. As a matter of fact, it was openly known that Sulzer had enjoyed the advice and collaboration of his contemporary, Schubert, the great musical genius. However, Schubert was a complete stranger to Jewish music.

The work of Heller did not lack originality. It includes most beautiful compositions filled with the devotional element, so indispensable for liturgical music, and with appealing tonality of modern character. The fact that the composer himself was a virtuoso singer greatly enhanced their rendition. One firm conviction of my grandfather prevented him from immortalizing his own rendition of his compositions, that is, to record them. By contrast to others who made use of this advance of technology, he frowned on this practice and would not lend himself to it. He reasoned that once recordings of liturgical music were made, control was not in his or other hands as to where or under what circumstances they might be reproduced. This he regarded a profanation of the most sacred religious spirit which he could not condone. Thus the original rendition of his compositions and his beautiful voice survive only as a memory in the ears of those who were privileged to hear him—and who never, never can forget it.

The original compositions, however, represent only a fraction of his total work. Its outstanding feature can be seen in the elaborate recitative compositions which faithfully set down the traditional melodies in modern array, comprising the entire service rendered by the cantor. Hence *Kol T'hilloh* exhibits a unique quality. It can almost replace the prayer book since it includes all of the cantor's recitals and the congregation's responses. In particular, Josef Heller adhered to intelligent preservation of traditional "nussach" (sequence of tunes), which characterizes the various festive occasions of the year and individual prayers.

A word as to the use of the organ and mixed choir in Heller's compositions is in place here. He frequently stressed the fact that his work was equally applicable to orthodox and reform types of service. Naturally, for orthodox observance the organ and choir compositions were not intended. In most instances they are recorded also without these adjuvants. However, I believe my grandfather was justified in making the statement, which was borne out by his own service using organ and choir, that he utilized these musical instruments in a way far removed from the role they play in church music. He "Judaized" them or, as he often poignantly explained, in his compositions they played the role of "meshor'rim," the traditional male or boy choir underscoring the chazzan's renditions. This should in no way cause one to lose sight of the fact that he preferred unequivocally the unadulterated traditional mode of synagogue service. But he felt that if the innovation of organ and mixed choir were indispensable for wide circles of worshippers, then they must conform as far as possible to the Jewish spirit. His masterful hands succeeded well in applying this needed touch. Like Midas, the king of ancient times, who was said to have turned everything into gold by the touch of his hand, so Josef Heller imbued with unmistakable Jewish character objects of alien origin.

It is indeed unfortunate that Heller was not destined to fulfill his great ambition. Only two of the three planned volumes—the Sabbath Service and the High Holiday Service—were completed. The third—Service for the Three Major Holidays—remained unwritten. The strain of the war years (1914-1918) and its aftermath, and deteriorating health proved insurmountable obstacles. It is also regrettable that he did not record for posterity many of his investigations and theories on the development of Jewish music. From the little I have retained from his discourses, I mention of oft repeated opinion that traditional melodies reserved for the opening of the ark on Sabbath morning, especially the "Shema," represented one of the oldest authentically Jewish tunes. In particular, he was interested in the comparison of the melodies of Oriental Jews with the Western counterparts and he studied the remarkable resemblance between the Gregorian tunes of the early Church and Jewish liturgy.

His personal life was not of unmixed happiness. The heaviest blow fell on him shortly before the outbreak of World War I—the untimely death of his only daughter, my mother. When scarcely 25 years old, she lost her life when she should have given it to her second child. Five years after the war's end, when the outside world started to go back to normal conditions, he was again stricken—this time by the passing of his beloved wife after a short and bitter illness. His own health was seriously endangered for the last ten years of his life, due to coronary heart disease. Only the strictest self-discipline and adherence to the advice of his physicians, together with his sound constitution and iron will to live, helped him to get over most serious attacks.

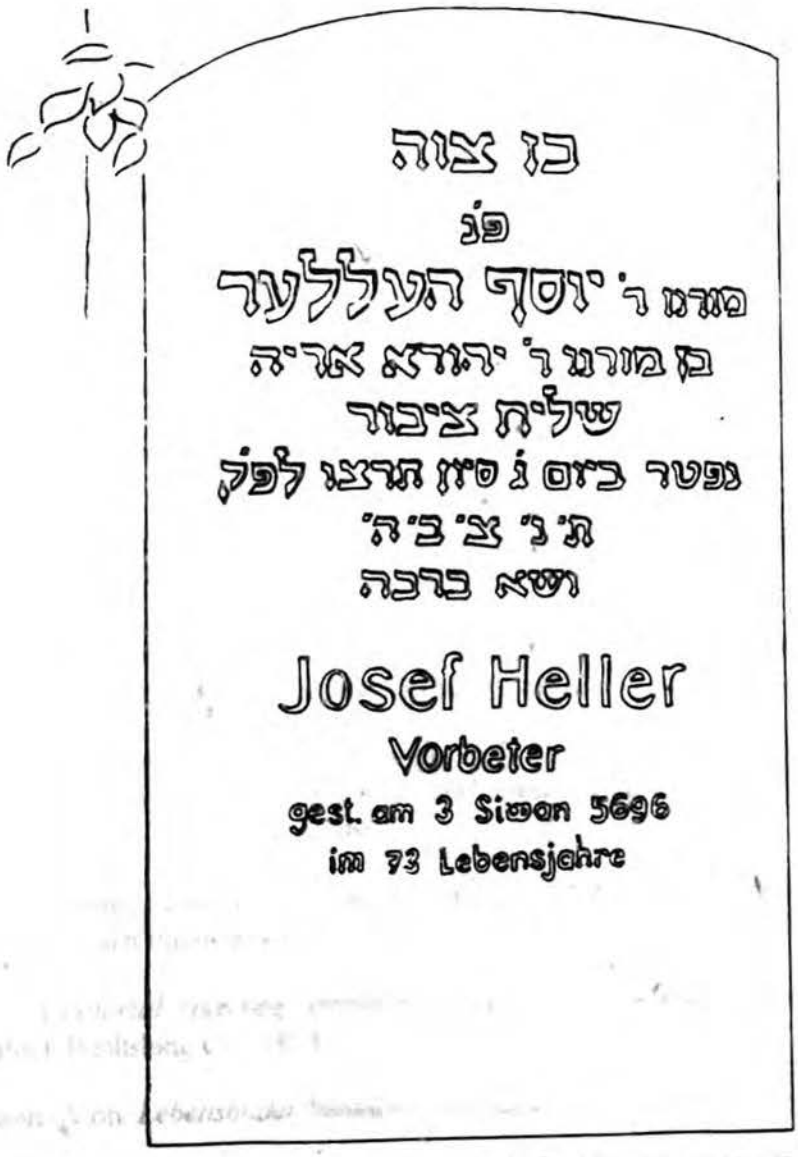
In 1927, he retired from his position in Bruenn. He moved to Vienna where most of his beloved wife's family lived and to which city he had always felt attracted, mainly because of the Jewish and art centers located there. He was in his middle sixties. His voice had lost little of its luster and his art mellowed with age. This was proven to the Jews of Vienna when, in 1928, he held High Holiday services in one of its largest assemblies. Once more he was acclaimed by music lovers of Vienna when he gave a concert of sacred and profane music in the town's largest concert hall in 1929.

He was forced to spend the following seven years free from any outside obligations because of his physical impairment. But his spirit remained indomitable. He participated in all Jewish and humanitarian activities open to him. He saw the clouds gathering on the political horizon and interpreted them correctly.

A severe heart attack forced him to bed rest for many weeks in November 1935. He recovered and resumed his carefully regulated way of life. May 28, 1936, was a beautiful spring day. He went for one of his customary walks. On the street he was overcome by a mortal attack and his noble heart ceased to beat. To all those who knew him, his memory is a blessing; his works an imperishable testimony to his talent and ideals; his soul is reunited with our Maker.

NOTE: These notes were written by Kurt Stern in 1946 in order to transmit the facts to his wife and children.

TOMBSTONE OF JOSEF HELLER



Traced by Claire-Lise Rosenfield from a photograph.

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