In Praise of *Hallel*

by Leon Sher

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Thesis Summary

In Praise of *Hallel* is a thesis submitted by Leon Sher in March of 2003 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Sacred Music Degree from the School of Sacred Music at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. After an introduction, the five self-descriptive chapter titles are: (1) What is *Hallel*? (2) The History of *Hallel*, (3) The Music of *Hallel*, (4) Samples of *Hallel* Settings, and (5) Conclusion.

The goal of this project is to reawaken Reform Jews to the beauty and significance of the *Hallel* liturgy and to assist Reform clergy and congregants in enhancing the *Hallel* experience in Reform worship services by beginning a process of education about the text, its history, and its musical possibilities. If successful, we will be singing the praises of *Hallel* as we sing praises to God.

To

My dad, Stanley William Sher, *z'l*

My sister, Wendy Iris Sher, *z'l*

and to

Beth, Jessica and Julie

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to the following people who have helped me in one way or another with this project and with my other cantorial studies. To Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman for all of his support, help, and encouragement as my thesis advisor. He has been my teacher and friend since we met nearly three decades ago. I treasure our relationship. To Cantor Robert Solomon and Professor Bonia Shur for sharing their music and thoughts with me and for making themselves so available to me. Three cantors stand out as role models for me among the many others who have also helped me complete my studies. They are Cantors Benjie Ellen Schiller, Faith Steinsnyder, and Jacob Ben-Zion Mendelson. Their generosity of time and talent, insight and wisdom, encouragement and support has been boundless and inspiring. I pray that I may follow their examples. Countless thanks go to my beloved family without whose patience and love and understanding I never would have made it through all of my training and the completion of all the tasks required of me. Most recently, to my daughter, Julie, for her technical computer assistance in putting together this document, and to my daughter, Jessica, whose good musical judgment and flute expertise helped me create the arrangements and transcriptions of Safam's *Hallel* music, which was such a significant part of my Master's project. Finally, I owe more thanks than I can express to my wife, Elizabeth, for all this and more. In her, I have found my woman of valor.

Introduction

Hallel psalms are traditionally used to add special prayers of praise and festivity at appropriate times during the Jewish yearly cycle. These psalms of divine praise have served as a high point for Judaism's most significant observances for centuries. Through them, we express our gratitude and joy for God's providence and concern as reflected in our divine deliverance in the past, and we express our faith in the future.

But *Hallel* often receives less attention in Reform worship than it does in traditional synagogues. The low level of importance attributed to *Hallel* is demonstrated in Reform prayer books. Evidence suggests that *Hallel* in Reform synagogues is most often recited in an extremely abbreviated form, using a random collection of tunes for selected verses that are particularly accessible for the congregation. The role of *Hallel* may be diminished in Reform synagogues due to a lack of familiarity with almost all of its aspects: the history, the music, and even the text itself.

Reform worship services could be greatly enhanced by the addition of *Hallel* presented in a manner that speaks to today's congregants. The inclusion of meaningful *Hallel* liturgy would then lead to a greater appreciation of the special occasions when it is recited. Rendering *Hallel* accessible and meaningful in Reform worship might best be accomplished by combining easily accessible folk melodies with readings, choral works, and spoken presentations. Congregants could learn to appreciate this liturgy even more if they were provided with explanations of musical motifs taken from holiday melodies and *nusach*, cantillation of appropriate sacred books, and an exposure to the artistry of word-painting in composition and interpretation during performance. Calling attention to these elements through speaking as well as musical demonstration would bring new life and

relevance to the *Hallel* recitation, and thus to the festivals on which it is recited. My goal is to reawaken Reform Jews to the beauty and significance of the *Hallel* liturgy.

In order to assist Reform clergy and congregants in enhancing the *Hallel* experience in Reform worship services, they must first understand what they might have been missing. Thus, we turn our attention first to the question of what *Hallel* is.

1. What is *Hallel*?

Hallel is a Hebrew word meaning "praise" and is also the term used to identify groups of psalms used in Jewish liturgy to praise God. While they may have changed throughout history, three groups of psalms are commonly accepted today as constituting a *Hallel*.

- *Hallel she-b'chol yom*, the Daily *Hallel*, consists of Psalms 145-150.
- *Hallel Ha-Gadol*, the Great *Hallel*, is Psalm 136.
- *Hallel Ha-mits-ri*, the so-called Egyptian *Hallel*, consists of Psalms 113-118.

The *Hallel* most familiar to traditionally observant worshippers is *Hallel she-b'chol yom*, which is part of the daily liturgy. The Talmud (B. *Shab.* 118b) and the responsa of Natronai Gaon (9th century) ascribe the name *Hallel* to Psalms 145-150, the central part of the *p'sukey d'zimrah* from the daily morning liturgy. The Talmud quotes the second century Tanna, Rabbi Yose ben Halafta, as saying: "May my lot be among those who complete *Hallel* every day."[1] Psalms 145-150 were the end of the Psalter and their recitation therefore served to "complete" the *Hallel*. A daily *Hallel* of one form or another therefore dates back at least to *Mishnaic* times (roughly 200 C.E.). Ismar Elbogen (1874-1943) infers from the statement of Yose that the practice of reciting Psalms 145-150 in the weekday service was not yet universal in the middle of the second century. It was the preferred practice, Elbogen concludes, but not yet obligatory.[2]

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[1] B. *Shab.* 118b; *Soferim* 17:11

[2] Ismar Elbogen. *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America), p.73.

Each *Hallel* recitation is preceded and followed by a blessing. Nowadays (in the Ashkenazi rite) in the case of *Hallel she-b'chol yom*, the first blessing is *baruch she-amar* ("Blessed is the One who spoke") and the later blessing is *yish-tabach* ("May Your name be praised"). On *Shabbat* and festivals, *nishmat kol chai* ("the soul of every living being") follows the daily *Hallel*. Both *y'hal'lucha* ("All Your works will praise You") and *nishmat kol chai* are identified already in the Talmud *Bavli*, and it is probable that *yish-tabach* too goes back that far. They are all alternative blessings used in antiquity to conclude a *Hallel*. The Talmud identifies them all as instances of *Birkat HaShir* ("Blessing of the Song").[3] Any blessing following the recitation of *Hallel* is therefore called a *Birkat HaShir*. The very title "Blessing of the Song," rather than something like "Blessing of Praise," is a strong indication that *Hallel* was intended to be sung and not simply read.

A second *Hallel* is *Hallel Ha-Gadol*, the Great *Hallel*. The Talmud prescribes Psalm 136 or Psalm 23 as the Great *Hallel*.[4] Nowadays, Psalm 136 has become the universal *Hallel Ha-Gadol*, though on occasion we also see Psalm 23 as an addition in this role.

Hallel Ha-Gadol is recited on *Shabbat* morning, and also during the later part of the Passover *seder* in accordance with the Talmud.[5] Psalm 136 has an unusual form among psalms. It is a litany composed of twenty-six verses and a recurring refrain: *Ki l'olam chas-do* ("God's mercy endures forever"). The twenty-six verses have been said

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[3] *Pes.* 118a

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

to correspond to the twenty-six generations between the creation of the world and the giving of the Torah at Sinai.[6] The number of verses also equals the numerical value of the tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God. Perhaps one of these interesting observations led to calling Psalm 136 the Great *Hallel*. Or, perhaps these appealing annotations were applied after the fact to help explain the name it already had.

A third *Hallel* is the liturgical collection of Psalms 113-118. This rubric is called *Hallel Ha-mits-ri*, the Egyptian *Hallel*, probably because of the reference to the Exodus from Egypt in Psalm 114:1 ("When Israel went out from Egypt"). *Hallel Ha-mits-ri* is traditionally recited in the synagogue after the *Amidah* of the morning service on the three major festivals (*Sukkot, Pesach,* and *Shavuot*) and also on *Chanukkah*. From the second day of *Pesach* (from the third day outside of the land of Israel), these psalms are recited with verses 1-11 of Psalms 115 and 116 omitted. This shortened version is known as Half *Hallel* and so the complete version is also known as the Full *Hallel*. The Half *Hallel* is also included in the liturgy of *Rosh Chodesh*, the celebration of each new Hebrew month. Nowadays the Full *Hallel* is also recited on *Yom Ha-ats-ma-ut*, Israel's Independence Day, in most Israeli synagogues and in many synagogues outside of Israel as well. As we saw above, *Hallel* is typically preceded and followed by a benediction. But since *Hallel* was not recited during *Rosh Chodesh* in ancient Israel, a difference of opinion remains concerning whether or not a blessing should precede and follow this recitation then as well as during *Yom Ha-ats-ma-ut*.

In summary then: the full *Hallel Ha-mits-ri* is recited on the three festivals *(Shalosh R'galim)*, on *Chanukkah*, and on *Yom Ha-ats-ma-ut*; the abbreviated Half *Hallel*

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[6] *Ibid.*

is recited on the later days of *Pesach* and on *Rosh Chodesh*. Our focus will be on this Egyptian *Hallel*. We now turn to its history.

2. The History of *Hallel*

Two classic articles about the history of *Hallel* are recognized by scholars. One, by Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991) of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City, was published in the *Hebrew Union College Annual* of 1951. The other, by Solomon Zeitlin (1886-1977) of Dropsie College in Philadelphia, was published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* in 1963, a journal he personally edited for much of his illustrious career.

Louis Finkelstein

Louis Finkelstein was born into an Orthodox family in Cincinnati. He earned a doctorate at Columbia University in 1918 and his rabbinical ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary the following year. In addition to teaching at the seminary, he became its provost in 1937, its president in 1940, and its chancellor in 1951. Finkelstein is widely recognized for his scholarship. We will turn first to his article, "The Origin of the Hallel."

Dr. Finkelstein defines the Complete *Hallel* as Psalms 113-118, as we have already seen. We also saw that it is recited in the synagogue on the mornings of *Shavuot, Sukkot, Chanukkah,* and the first day of Passover (the first two days outside of "Palestine"). But he observes that two other forms of this *Hallel* have been passed down through Jewish liturgy.

Finkelstein identifies a second form of the *Hallel* as the one used in the home *seder* on the evening of Passover. This form, he explains, divides the recitation into two parts. Psalms 113 and 114 are recited prior to the Grace after the meal; the remaining

Psalms are recited following the Grace after the meal. Because this divided *Hallel* recitation takes place only in the home on Passover, Finkelstein calls this "The Passover *Hallel*."

Finkelstein's third form of the *Hallel* is the one used today at the service of the New Moon in the synagogue and on the last six days of Passover. This *Hallel*, as we saw, is similar to the complete *Hallel*, except that it lacks verses 1-11 of both Psalms 115 and 116. Finkelstein recalls the first reference to this *Hallel* is the story of the great third century C.E. Amora, Rav.[7] He relates the story in this way.

> When he returned home to Babylonia, after a long sojourn in Palestine, he remarked on the curious custom of the Babylonian Jews to recite the Hallel on the New Moons. In Palestine, the Hallel was not recited on those days. He was about to take steps to suppress this deviation from the Palestinian custom which he assumed represented the only authentic tradition, when he noticed that the Babylonian Jews omitted in their Hallel of the New Moons the sections mentioned. He inferred from this fact that the custom had arisen through no confusion or ignorance, but had been deliberately established by early scholars. He therefore permitted it to service; as it has until today.[8]

In response to this story of its origin, Finkelstein calls this "the Babylonian *Hallel*."

The remainder, and bulk, of Finkelstein's article dates the origin of each *Hallel* form he describes. He begins by dating the Complete *Hallel*. "Clearly," he writes, "the custom of reciting the Complete Hallel on Hanukkah originated with the establishment of the festival itself as a feast of re-dedication of the Temple."[9] Noting the lack of attention paid to *Chanukkah* in the Talmud, Finkelstein concludes, "If therefore the Hallel is sung

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[7] B. *Taanit* 28a.

[8] Louis Finkelstein. "The Origin of the Hallel" in *Hebrew Union College Annual, volume 23, part 2, 1950-1951*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.), 320.

[9] Finkelstein, 231.

on Hanukkah, we may justly ascribe the origin of the custom to the time of the dedication of the Temple itself."[10] This refers to the custom of reciting the Complete *Hallel* on *Chanukkah*, specifically. Finkelstein recognizes the implication that the recitation of the *Hallel* must then have already been an established custom by the time of the Maccabean victory.

Based on the "theological views expressed so forcibly in Psalm 115," Finkelstein ascribes the authorship of this Psalm and its development as a pilgrim song to the middle of the third century B.C.E. He explains:

> ...this Psalm contains one of the most forceful negations of the Hasidean-Pharisaic concept of immortality to be found in Scripture. The verses, "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; and the earth hath He given to the children of men. The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into the netherworld, (Ps. 115.16-17)" are apparently intended to reject the growing belief that man's spirit on death ascends to heaven, and that the dead do praise the Lord. Such a vigorous denial of the Hasidean-Pharisaic view would be quite out of accord with the Prophetic age, when the issue had not yet arisen. It belongs rather to the period when the new Hasidean theology was crystallizing, and the priesthood of Jerusalem was taking measures to prevent its spread.[11]

Finkelstein therefore concludes that Psalm 115 developed some time between the middle of the third century B.C.E. and 164 C.E.

Over half of Finkelstein's article is devoted specifically to the Passover *Hallel*, the divided form that is part of the home Passover *seder*. As we said, Psalms 113-114 are recited before the Grace after the meal and Psalms 115-118 are recited after the Grace. Finkelstein points out the appropriate nature of the division: Psalm 114 is the only part of *Hallel* that includes reference to the Exodus from Egypt and was composed specifically

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[10] *Ibid.*, 321.

[11] *Ibid.*, 322.

to extol the miracle of that great departure from slavery to freedom by the Israelite people. Psalm 113, Finkelstein suggests, is an introduction to Psalm 114. The other Psalms of *Hallel* are pilgrim songs created for various other occasions included in the *seder* after the meal, as were other popular songs and hymns.

Finkelstein recalls that the Passover celebration of ancient times began with a meal consisting of the paschal lamb and other foods that recall and teach about the Exodus. Following the meal and the teaching of the story to the assembled children, all those present participated in the singing of Psalms 113 and 114 in honor of Passover. Then the Grace was recited and the doors of the home were opened for an informal community sing-a-long that included common songs and hymns as well as the psalms that follow the ones just recited before the Grace.

Finkelstein dates the practice of reciting Psalms 113 and 114 at the Passover *seder* earlier than the existence of *Hallel* as a liturgical unit. He states:

> It is clear that when the recital of Pss. 113-114 was introduced to the service of the Passover evening, there was no Hallel in the later sense of the term. No one associated Pss. 113-114 with the pilgrim paeans belonging to other festivals. There would have been no thought of introducing the latter into the Passover Haggadah itself; and there probably was no thought of singing the former on other occasions than the Passover eve.[12]

Further evidence of the early practice, Finkelstein maintains, is the argument in the *Mishnah*[13] between the schools of Hillel and Shammai about whether to recite both Psalms 113 and 114 at the Passover evening service or only Psalm 113. Followers of Hillel recited both; followers of Shammai recited only Psalm 113. Both camps,

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[12] *Ibid.*, 324.

[13] *Pes.* 10.6.

Finkelstein believes, recited Psalms 115-118 after the meal's Grace.[14] If the followers of Shammai recited only one psalm, why choose Psalm 113, which has nothing to do with the Exodus, and not Psalm 114, which has everything to do with the Exodus? Finkelstein explains:

> Now, it is obvious that the recital of Ps. 113 alone at the Passover service makes no sense. The Psalm in which the Exodus is celebrated is not Ps. 113 but Ps. 114. If the Shammaites wanted to recite only one of the Psalms, we should therefore expect them to choose Ps. 114. Their choice of Ps. 113 is, to say the least, extraordinary. The Shammaites justified their custom on the ground that the Exodus had not occurred at night, and therefore it would be improper to sing the song of jubilation over it at that time. The Hillelites quite properly replied to this argument that, following its reasoning, there should be no expression of gratitude for the Exodus at the evening service at all; and that as the Exodus occurred only on the following day, there would never be occasion for thanks to God for it in the evening or even the morning service. (Tosefta Pesahim 10.9, ed. Zuckermandel, p. 173.)
>
> Quite aside from this logical argument of the Hillelites, it is obvious that the issue raised by the Shammaites is essentially a quibble. Obviously, the whole celebration on the Passover eve commemorates the Exodus which occurred only on the following day; why then should not the Psalm commemorating this event be recited at the service? Furthermore, if Ps. 114 is omitted, what place has Ps. 113 in this service? Ps. 113 has no relation to the Passover at all, except as introduction to Ps. 114. Without that Psalm, the question remains why choose Ps. 113 rather than any other psalm of thanksgiving.
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> The fact that the Shammaites recited Ps. 113 in their Passover ritual thus offers clear evidence that at some earlier date Ps. 114 had also been included with it; and that the Hillelite custom was the older.[15]

Finkelstein explains that the Shammaite custom of omitting Psalm 114 preserved the tradition of the Temple priesthood, as did, he suggests, much of Shammaite custom. The priesthood thought it prudent, he maintains, to omit Psalm 114 when Israel was under Egyptian domination in the third century B.C.E. The psalm celebrates redemption

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[14] *Ibid.*, 10.7.

[15] Finkelstein, 325.

from Egyptian rule and contains phrases that would be offensive to their rulers of that time.

Finkelstein points out that while linguistic considerations such as this and others that resulted in changes to the Passover service may seem petty today, they were of paramount importance at the time those changes were made. The lessons learned in preparation for oral recitation of the Passover psalms and hymns played an important role in the attitude of a people that did not have access to printed materials as we do today. "It was important because the selections and poems recited on the Passover constituted what we would call effective adult education. The passages were recited again and again, the poems were sung and repeated throughout the country; and inevitably the ideas they conveyed became part and parcel of the people's thought."[16] It is no wonder, Finkelstein suggests, that a ruling power would demand that the liturgy of its subjects confirm its own claims and not undermine them.

What shall we make of Finkelstein's discussion of *Hallel* and its dates of origin? On the surface, his arguments seem reasonable and well supported, but there are problems.

The Rabbis did not like the Hasmoneans or *Chanukkah*. As Finkelstein himself notes, *Mishnah* makes no mention of lighting the *Chanukkah* lights except to discuss responsibility for damage they may cause. This is all the more telling when we consider that an entire treatise, *Megillah*, is devoted to the holiday of Purim. Judah the Maccabee, a Hasmonean, is not mentioned once in all of the Talmud. None of the four books of the Maccabees became part of the biblical canon. The Rabbis replaced the miracle of the

[16] *Ibid.*, 327.

Maccabean military victory with the well-known, often repeated story of the miracle of the oil that burned eight times longer than was expected. But the Rabbis were stuck with *Chanukkah*, so they attempted to shift the focus from the Hasmonean victory to a miracle solely of God's making. It seems terribly unlikely that the Rabbis would have added the *Hallel* to the celebration of *Chanukkah*. It is much more likely that they inherited the practice.

In summary, Finkelstein dates this *Hallel* as early as he does, by observing the section that is so anti-priestly, in opposition to immortality. He feels it must be Sadducean and not Pharisaic. He dates it after the Hasideans, when the Sadducees are still strong and before the Pharisees and Hasmoneans. So he dates it between the third century B.C.E. and 164 C.E.

One need not diminish Finkelstein's scholarly reputation by suggesting that in this case, anyway, his dates for *Hallel* are pure conjecture. Finkelstein knows that in third century B.C.E. Israel was caught between two major powers, Egypt and Syria, so he imagines that the priests who depended on the Egyptian overlords omitted Psalm 114 from their rite.

Solomon Zeitlin

Finkelstein provides a lengthy historical analysis, which is sometimes convincing though some conjectures are not as well-supported, at least within this article, and leave us wondering. Just over a decade later, Solomon Zeitlin's article, *The Hallel: A Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Liturgy*, was published. He too examines, as his title suggests, the history of the *Hallel*. Much of his article aligns with

Finkelstein's, but there are obvious points of contention as if written to refute some of Finkelstein's proposals.

Finkelstein says it is "well known" that "the festival of Hanukkah and the Maccabean episode with which it was associated lost much of their prominence in the synagogue in the later Hasmonean age … The reason for the lessened respect for the holiday and the occasion which led to its establishment was the disappointment of the Pharisaic scholars with the later Hasmoneans, who became Sadducees."[17] To the contrary, Zeitlin argues: "The view that the sages were hostile to the Hasmonean family is unfounded. There was no general hostility against them. It is true that the Pharisees were hostile to some of the Hasmoneans, like Jannaeus Alexander, but not the entire family."[18] He notes that Mattathias, the head of the family, was held in reverence.

Finkelstein asserts that the singing of *Hallel* dates back to the actual dedication of the Temple in 164 B.C.E.[19] Zeitlin contends: "When Judah, the son of Mattathias, and his brothers succeeded in purifying the Temple and rededicated it to the God of Israel they undoubtedly chanted many hymns. [But…] We do not know whether they chanted the Hallel."[20]

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[17] Finkelstein, 321.

[18] Solomon Zeitlin. "The Hallel: A Historical Study of the Canonization of the Hebrew Liturgy" in *The Jewish Quarterly Review, volume 53, 1962-1963*, edited by Abraham A. Neuman and Solomon Zeitlin. (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1963), 23-24.

[19] Finkelstein, 321.

[20] Zeitlin, 24.

Finkelstein explains that the use of *Hallel* at the rededication, the first *Chanukkah*, implies that it was already an established ritual prior to the Maccabean victory. Zeitlin seems to agree, saying that the chapters of *Hallel* were composed before the Maccabean revolt; they are much older than the Hasmonean period. He comes to this conclusion because the *Hallel* calls the Temple "House of *Yahweh*," a term that was not used in the Hellenistic period, and because "*Yahweh*" is used and not "*Adonai*." But while Zeitlin believes the *Hallel* may predate the Maccabean revolt, he feels it may have come about as late as the revolt, saying that it "developed between the middle of the third century B.C.E. and the year 164 B.C.E. This view is confirmed by other studies."[21]

This is all very interesting, but *Hallel* is what *Hallel* is, we now have what we now have. Little or no dispute exists today over what constitutes *Hallel*. We will look now at examples of how it is recited.

[21] Finkelstein, 322-323.

3. The Music of *Hallel*

Background

The Jewish Encyclopedia is the oldest scholarly source consulted in preparing the current work, having been published in 1904. Its authors state that we cannot know anything about the musical tradition of how the *Hallel* was intoned.

> All trace is lost of the chants to which the Hallel was intoned before a comparatively modern date. In consequence there is no general tradition: every composer of synagogue music offers his own setting. In the medieval period the folk-song of the day was reproduced in the Hallel, where the contemporary expression of joyousness always supplanted the older cantillatory intonations, as Ps. cxvii. and cxviii., at least, were approached.[22]

The same article goes on to say that a "rich store" of traditional melodies "often of marked beauty" has been passed down for generations. Many of these are still used for the recitation of *Hallel* in synagogues today. The authors assert that the *Hallel* was rarely chanted at length. Instead, it was read in a "rapid undertone." Portions however took on definite forms, which were simple and plaintive. One "good traditional example" they offer is seen in Appendix A, which they say "is believed to be of French origin and to date from the ninth century."[23] The opening musical figure reminds us of the melody of *Hatikvah*, Israel's national anthem.

Example by Charles Davidson

Charles Davidson (b. 1929) has been the cantor of Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania since 1966, is professor of *nusach* and liturgy at the Jewish

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[22] *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1904, s.v. "Hallel," by Cyrus Adler, Lewis N. Dembitz, and Francis L. Cohen. Vol. 6, p. 177.

[23] *Ibid.*

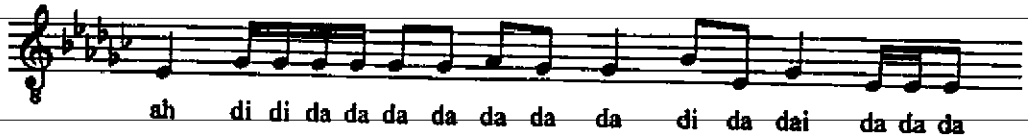
Theological Seminary of America in New York, and a respected composer of Jewish music. He created a *Hallel Service* specifically to celebrate *Yom Ha-ats-ma-ut*, Israel's Independence Day. Sections of this music are found in Appendix B. He uses several of the musical ideas discussed above. Its primary repeated basic musical motif strongly resembles *Hatikvah* – appropriate to celebrate Israel. Portions of this service specify that the cantor and congregation "continue in undertone," as is traditionally customary. Other sections call for "davening" or for the cantor to "improvise freely." When his composition reaches Psalm 117, Cantor Davidson uses the exact melody shown in the first three lines of Appendix A. He identifies this melody however as "sephardi tune for *Tal-Geshem*." For Psalm 118:1-4, he introduces a melody which he labels "from a Yemenite tune for *Yigdal*." In this way, Cantor Davidson has employed both of the musical ideas mentioned above: simple tunes and undertone *davening*. The basic tune used throughout is simple and repetitious and evokes sentiment appropriate to the occasion for which it is intended. He also employs other traditional melodies.

Nusach

Cantor Noah Schall (b. 1929) is among the most respected musical scholars of traditional *nusach* ("chanting system"). His long and impressive list of credentials, experience, and positions held earn him this respect.

Schall teaches that there are only two *nus-cha-ot* ("chanting systems") that are traditionally used to intone *Hallel*. He notes that *Hallel Ha-mits-ri* is divided into two parts by the *seder* meal. He explains that Psalms 113 and 114 are recited before the meal and remind us of being in Egypt when we were slaves to Pharaoh. "So that's why

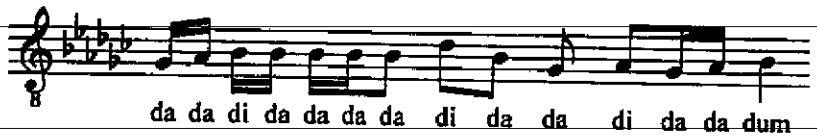
sometimes you find some crying intonations. It reminds us of a certain history: we were slaves; there were lousy times; they mistreated us."[24] Schall demonstrates the following short, simple motif in a minor mode.



He has suggested that is the only authentic way to intone these first psalms of *Hallel Ha-mits-ri*.[25]

Good musicians know that the notes written on a page can only suggest what the music should sound like and are not a perfect representation of what is actually heard. This is certainly true with the art of *chazzanut* ("cantorial music") as Cantor Schall demonstrates. The singer must employ interpretation and utilize the voice in such a way as to reveal the emotion suggested by the text just as we all do during normal speech. The minor motif depicted here is suitable for that interpretation.

Schall demonstrates a second motif in "the Jewish major" key, the *Adonai Malach* mode, for use with the second half of the Egyptian *Hallel*.



This motif, like the first, is very basic and short. But it is "peppier," to use Schall's description. The later psalms are more about praising God after the Exodus and call for this more uplifting music. Again, artistry in expressing the words remains important.

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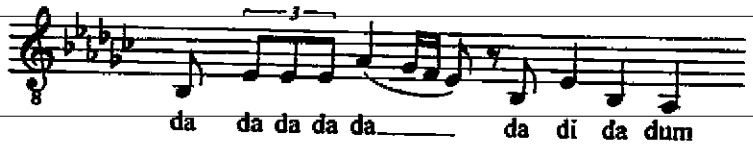
[24] Noah Schall interview by author. Minidisk audio recording. (New York: March 5, 2003). A complete interview transcript may be found in Appendix C.

[25] In a previous conversation with the author. (February 5, 2003)

The melodic motifs of cantorial chanting are characterized by particular opening and closing phrases, with intermediary phrases.[26] Schall provides these opening and closing phrases. Improvisation of a cantorial nature or in a simple manner makes up the intermediary phrases, which he also demonstrates. He suggests using the Ukrainian Dorian mode – the very distinctively Jewish sounding mode – "when you run out of [melodic] material." Cantor Schall suggests "the three, standard, possible endings." Two of them flow naturally from the associated opening phrase. The third is the very common descending closing chant from Festival *nusach*:



Contemporary Traditional Practice

In today's traditionally observant synagogue, *Hallel* is recited once a month and on the other special days as discussed above. The entire recitation may take less than ten minutes, but its presentation can be an art employing standard chants of *nusach*, quiet private *davening*, and perhaps a congregational tune for a small section or two of the psalms. It is possible that the modes suggested by Schall are used in traditional synagogues. Certainly, use of the modes he suggests – minor *Magen Avot*, and the "Jewish major" *Adonai Malach* – is clear to a trained cantor or knowledgeable *sh'liach tsibur* (prayer leader, literally "community messenger").

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[26] Andrew Bernard. *The Sound of Sacred Time: A Basic Textbook to Teach the Synagogue Modes*. (New York: Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, Master's Thesis, 1998).

The "classic" traditional form of *Hallel* recitation is presented in *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*. The cantor recites the blessing preceding the *Hallel*. The congregation responds with "*Amen.*" They then repeat the blessing and continue with Psalm 113. After a moment to give the congregation an opportunity to finish, the cantor recites the final three verses, 7-9, aloud. Again the congregation continues with Psalm 114 privately until the cantor recites the final verses, 5-8, aloud. An instruction then appears in the prayer book before Psalm 115 indicating that the first 11 verses are omitted on the last six days of Passover and on *Rosh Chodesh* ("new month" celebration). If recited, the cantor concludes with verses 9-11. Otherwise, the congregation continues with verses 12-18 and the cantor concludes with verses 16-18. Another reminder appears to instruct the omission of verses 1-11 of Psalm 116 on the appropriate days as before. If recited, the cantor concludes with verses 9-11. The congregation continues with verses 12-19 with the cantor concluding by intoning verses 17-19. The instruction for Psalm 117, the shortest chapter in the *Hallel* with only two verses, is that the congregation recites it first followed by the cantor.

The pattern of traditional recitation for Psalm 118 is more complicated. The first verses are recited by the cantor. Each verse ends with the refrain *Ki l'olam chasdo* ("His kindness endures forever"), which the congregation recites. The worshippers continue from verse 5. The cantor continues aloud with verses 19 and 20. The next four verses, 21-24, are each recited twice. The two parts of verse 25 are recited one at a time, first by the cantor and then repeated by the congregation.

The final four verses of the *Hallel* are Psalm 118 verses 26-29. They are recited responsively. That is, the cantor intones each verse one at a time followed by the

congregation repeating it. The congregation then concludes with the *y'hal'lu-cha* ("All Your works shall praise You") paragraph. The cantor chants the final two sentences and the worshippers respond with "Amen."

That concludes the recitation of the *Hallel* according to the traditional *ArtScroll Siddur*. We turn now to some musical compositions for *Hallel*.

4. Samples of *Hallel* Settings

Musical composition is an art. In general, what inspires the composer, stimulates the originator, and motivates the innovator can be more varied than the composers themselves and more allusive than the texts involved. Creating melody for intoning the *Hallel* is no exception. An artistic creator may choose to forge new melodies. But the composer who approaches *Hallel* may also draw from the "rich store" of tunes and melodic patterns of *nusach* and cantillation of sacred books that link the composition to the appropriate time, evoking memories and feelings of the times when *Hallel* is recited.

Settings of *Hallel* abound, being given attention by many composers for use in both liturgical and performance settings. We shall examine a *Hallel* composition by each of three composers: Israel Alter, Abraham W. Binder, and Robert Solomon. We first turn our attention to a setting by Binder, thoroughly examining it in the contexts just stated and applying methods of detailed musical analysis as well.

Abraham W. Binder

B'tzes Yisroel (Psalm 114) – A Musical Analysis

Abraham W. Binder (1895-1967) composed a significant amount of music for the synagogue. Most of his music is not heard as frequently as one might guess, considering how influential he is thought to be by many scholars of Jewish music. Binder's music, while very Jewish in many ways, is often arranged in so clever and complex a way that it is not easily embraced by most people. We shall examine here Binder's setting of Psalm

114, *B'tzes Yisroel* using the methods and terminology of Douglass Green's *Form in Tonal Music*,[27] which provides tools for high-level, detailed musical analysis.

Binder's setting of this Psalm 114 appears in the *Cantorial Anthology* edited by Cantor Gershon Ephros.[28] It is a choir setting for soprano, alto, tenor and bass with organ accompaniment. The organ usually doubles the voice parts, though is occasionally different. Binder uses motifs from each of the three festivals in his setting and they are identified within this publication. An annotated copy of the music as well as a tabular summary of the analysis set forth in this chapter may be found in Appendix D..

The opening eight measures of the piece introduce a simple melody based on the familiar *akdamut* motif for *Shavuot*. We shall call these eight measures section A. The melody, heard alone, is simple and suggests what Douglass Green's standard method of musical analysis would call an interrupted harmonic movement. That is, both the melody and the implied harmony are interrupted. After its introduction, the melody begins again exactly as it started. The repetition reaches its conclusion in a way that suggests a full cadence. The simplest harmony implied by the melody would be I→V, I→ V-I. As is apparently common for Binder, however, the actual harmony employed is very different and much more interesting.

Despite the possible – I would say obvious –harmonization suggested above, Binder harmonizes this section quite differently. The first half, measures 1-4, are harmonized in a fairly straightforward manner beginning with the I chord and ending

[27] Douglass M. Green. *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis, second edition.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1979).

[28] *Cantorial Anthology*, ed. Gershon Ephros. Volume 3, *Sholosh R'golim*. (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1975), 178-184.

with a cadence from V of V to the V chord – a half cadence. Then, though the melody begins again as it did four measures earlier, the harmonization is dramatically different. The cadence in measure 8 ends on a Bb chord, which one might be tempted to identify as the I chord. But the accidentals in the harmony help the cadence in that measure to be V of V to the V chord of Eb, that is a Bb but not functioning as the tonic. The final Bb chord was preceded by an Eb in the 6-4 inversion and its dominant 7 chord, F7. All this sets up a cadence of $I^{6-4} \rightarrow V^7/V \rightarrow V$, with Bb being the V of Eb – the new key which follows. In this way, the harmony feels like Green's "progressive harmonic movement" because the phrase concludes with a dominant chord.[29] This is indicative of the kind of unexpected harmonization we shall see throughout this piece. The ear of the listener is continually on edge, nearly losing its way along a diverging path of harmony and keys.

The text used in section A serves as an introduction to what follows. Perhaps the statement contains weight and meaning. But what is to follow is more obviously on the order of the miraculous. The opening text states: "When Israel went out of Egypt, Jacob's household from a people of strange speech, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel God's dominion." Those are basically the facts, whatever one might make of them. The

[29] Dr. Kligman (b. 1962), associate professor of Jewish Musicology at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in New York who specializes in Sephardic liturgical music, has suggested that this is Green's "complete harmonic movement." But Green, on page 62, defines complete harmonic movement as "a move away from a tonic with a return to that tonic via a conclusive cadence." Although it is true that the final chord of this phrase is the same chord that was tonic at the beginning of the section, the listener does not hear this as a return to tonic; it sounds like a half cadence in a new key. For this reason, I prefer to label this section as a "progressive harmonic movement." Green defines that, on the same page, as "a move away from a tonic without an immediate return." That is the case here.

remaining text of the psalm deals with anomalies of nature that occur as celebratory reactions to that which has been stated.

I have labeled measures 9-11 as section T1, the first "transitional" section. Musically, these three measures merely form a bridge to the next section. The melody is the familiar *Adir Hu* motif from *Pesach*. Though most of this brief section is in unison, the harmony that appears in measures 9 and 10 foreshadows the harmony of the next section. The text of section T1 says: "The sea saw it and fled; the Jordan turned backwards." The melodic lines of these three measures contain no contrary motion. Each voice first moves upward and then flows back down. Our common labeling of this pitch movement as "up and down" could just as easily be termed "back and forth." Binder was likely employing word-painting in the melody to demonstrate and highlight the unnatural reversal of direction by the sea and the Jordan River. One can imagine the rush of water flowing in one direction and then the other as the natural order is reversed. The reversal of the melodic direction paints this picture with sound. Section T1 ends with a fermata, a momentary suspension of time, as if to allow the listener to catch a breath before the next even more startling miracle is revealed.

Section B is made up of the next eight measures, 12 to 19. Here the text tells of other dramatic abnormalities that happen as a result of the new relationship between God and Israel. "The mountains skipped [or danced] like rams, and the hills like lambs." This is even more dramatic than waters flowing backwards as the previous text describes. The eight measures of section B contain a melody that I call the "jumping" motif. The pattern consists primarily of two quick sixteenth notes jumping first up a fourth or fifth and then down a step. This repeats along with the text in the soprano and tenor voices,

melodically demonstrating the "skipping" mountains and the "leaping" hills. The alto voice contains much smaller melodic skips using stepwise movements, changing direction in each measure suggesting a rocking motion. The increased tempo of section B and the staccato markings of the inner voices suggest an almost dainty prancing of these mighty mountains and hills. The bass voice holds its ground with solid, longer tonic notes as if to maintain the weight of these earthly structures even as they frolic across the landscape.

Major thirds and lowered sevenths suggest the *Adoshem Malach* mode. This is the grand mode often used to suggest the supreme and mighty rule of God. This mode may have been selected to help depict the awesome spectacle described by the words of this section.

The eight measures of section B may be heard as two four-measure phrases. The mountains and hills dance a melodic *pas de deux* in measures 12-13, echoing one-another's "steps." Measures 14-15 rest – though somewhat uneasily – on the less grounded v minor chord. Measures 16-17 are identical to measures 12-13, but then the melodic choreography changes. Binder did not envision dancing mountains settling in a gentle pirouette. Measures 18-19 crescendo from that v minor chord to an unexpected, short, accented German VI chord, an Ab chord with a raised 6^{th} tone.

In the next small transitional section of measures 20-23, which I label T2, the composer plays tricks on our ears once again. The German VI Ab chord would typically have a tendency to move to a G chord and then resolve to a Cm. The first sound we hear in measure 20 is a single G note, suggesting the chord we expect. Within measures 20 and 21 however, the harmony is quickly established as an Eb chord rather than a G chord.

The short melodic motif of measure 20 – the descending third in the lower two voices – is answered in measure 21 with ascending thirds in the upper two voices. The alto notes in measure 21 suggest what Green calls variation by retrogression[30] in that they are precisely the same notes in reverse order as the bass and tenor notes of measure 20. Measure 21's alto line sandwiched between the tenor note and the moving soprano line a third higher does not stand out as a melodic retrograde variation of that which precedes it. However hidden though, the retrograde is present. This call and answer is repeated in measures 22 and 23, only this time it is a third higher than it appeared two measures earlier in what Green calls tonal imitation.[31]

Section T2 begins the rhetorical questioning asked in this and the next section, B^1. "What ails you, O sea, that you flee? Why, O Jordan, do you turn backwards?" This question concerning reversal is intoned with notes that reverse themselves. The notes of this section turn backward, reversing the initial downward jump of a third with the answering upward motion of a third. This pattern repeats for each of the two questions: first for the sea, then for the river.

Section T2 begins with the note we expect – the G – in the pattern of resolution we suggested earlier which would lead from the German VI Ab chord, to G and then finally to C. But, as we explained, the harmony quickly moved to an Eb instead of a G chord. The melody repeats the familiar *Pesach* motif found in section T1. In the imitation of measures 22 and 23, the harmony moves likewise from Bb to G – the full G major chord whose anticipation was established four measures earlier. But our ears have

[30] Green, 34.

[31] *Ibid.*, 38.

again been led down a meandering path of changing keys and momentary transpositions. Not until the downbeat of measure 24 when we hear a C note might we finally perceive the long delayed resolution of the earlier striking German VI Ab chord.

The eight measures of 24 through 31 make up what I have called section B^1. The label highlights the reflection of the text and "jumping" motifs found at the beginning of this section that were introduced earlier in section B. The mountain-jumping motif – quick ascending fifth and descending second – is introduced by the alto voice in the key of C (notes: g g d c). It is echoed by the tenor voice in the same key. This motif is presented by the soprano beginning in measure 25 as an intervallic sequence,[32] a fourth higher in the key of F (notes: c c g f). As in section B, the bass voice maintains the weightiness of mountains by remaining on the tonic pitches.

Textually, section B^1 continues the rhetorical question of T2. The previous section asked why the sea and the river reversed their courses. This continuation asks: "Why do you mountains skip like rams? Hills, why do you leap like lambs?" The questions of section B^1 use the same language as the original statements of section B, both in words and in musical motifs.

Harmonically, section B^1 continues the transitional nature of section T2. The harmony of B^1 remains as unsettled as that of T2. Section B^1 begins with the C note in measure 24 mentioned above, but the harmony or modality is not established by the major third until a measure later in 25. The intervallic sequence leads to a root note of F in measure 26 where again the modality is not established until a measure later when the major third appears in measure 27. The pickup notes to measure 28 begin a melodic

[32] *Ibid.*, 36.

motif that carries us for four measures alternating between the voices as a call and response. All of measures 20 through 31 – sections T2 and B^1 – have the sense of a fugue[33] with the melodies passing from one voice to another. The confusion of nature's spectacle comes to a climax musically in this recapitulation of the words now in the form of rhetorical questioning.

Why does the impossible happen: the waters reverse their direction, the mountains prance like deer? Section C – measures 32 through 37 – concludes the question and begins to imply the answer: God. The text says: "[Why do these things happen] … before God, O Earth, before the God of Jacob?" The music slows in this section and is identified as a *Sukkot* melody. The tempo marking suggests a slower pace and the notes are generally much longer than we've heard up until now. The sound is much broader and grand than before. The harmony however is no more certain than in the prior passage. The chords may be analyzed: (in Gm) $i \rightarrow vii^{o7}$, $i^6 \rightarrow ii^{o7}$, $i^6 \rightarrow iv$, i^6, $ii^{o7} \rightarrow V$. This harmony begins in a very unsettled way with no third in the chord, but teases the key of Gm while also suggesting Bb with the i^6 chords (which make Bb the lowest note). The half-cadence on V (a strongly voiced D chord) in measure 37 is a moment of relief, finally grounding us in the key of Gm.

Measure 38 at last begins answering the question and delivering the message of psalm 114, even though the language may still be part of the question. That is, previous text said: "What ails you, O sea, that you flee? Why, O Jordan, do you turn backwards? Why do you mountains skip like rams? Hills, why do you leap like lambs? From before God, O Earth, from before the God of Jacob?" God has been identified, but God is

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[33] *Ibid.*, 257ff.

further described in the subsequent words. The text continues: "Who turns the Rock into a pool of water, flint into flowing water." The first part of the questioning is rhetorical in that the answer is given here in the end of the question. God is the One who performs miracles and turns nature around. Only God can change what was into what will be. As God freed the Israelite nation from slavery and raised it up from out of Egypt, so too does nature demonstrate miraculous events. God caused all this to happen. If one is possible, so is the other.

Measures 38 through 45 are labeled A^1 because musically they are nearly identical to section A, measures 1 through 8, which employs the *Shavuot* motif. The only difference is the harmonization of measure 38. Binder has led our ears to their newest harmonic destination, the key of Gm. And in true Binder style, we are allowed to hear the beginning of measure 38 sound as if it were harmonized in Gm, though the harmony is actually ambiguous. We hear only Bb and D notes on the first beat of that measure. Measure 1 was clearly a Bb chord. Here, the downbeat is weakly harmonized with only the third interval found in both the Gm and Bb chords. After the half-cadence of measure 41, when the melody repeats, the harmony is clearly Bb. The melody and harmony of section A is repeated as the composition began, including its deceptive final cadence in measure 45 on Bb which is now not the tonic key. Instead the Bb is V of V, as it was in measure 8.

The final four measures of the piece – measures 46 through 49 – form the coda. The text repeats the words "flowing water, flowing water." The downward movement in the soprano and bass voices demonstrate the falling water. I therefore call this calculated use of melody the "waterfall" motif. After the Bb V of V on which measure 45 ended,

we gratefully continue with an Eb chord as expected. Yet Binder is not through with us yet. The Eb chords are all pickup, antecedent chords to those found on the strong beats 1 and 3. The chords on those strong beats of measures 46 and 47 are $A^{\varnothing 7}$ and A^{o7} until finally measure 48 lands solidly on an F^7 chord – the V of Bb. The $A^{\varnothing 7}$ and A^{o7} chords both share the same three notes in common with the F^7 chord. The note that differs between the two "A" chords is the G, which changes to a Gb, which emphasizes the movement to that long-awaited F^7 dominant chord.

With the progression from measure 48 to 49, a strong full cadence to Bb is finally realized. (Halleluyah!) As listeners, we have anticipated this moment since measure 8. In that way, the interrupted harmonic movement implied by the melody of section A has been expanded to encompass the entire composition. Binder used a melody at the start that implies an interrupted harmonic movement, yet harmonized it as a progressive harmonic movement repeatedly guiding us into unexpected keys. The extended harmonic interruption is ultimately resolved, but not until the very last two measures of the piece. This reflects the text that begins with a historical statement, continues with startling, unnatural events, and resolves in the end with the Ultimate answer.

Israel Alter

If Cantor Noah Schall is, as I have reported above, one of the most distinguished teachers of traditional *nusach*, Cantor Israel Alter (1901-1979) is one of its most important creators. The notion of creating *nusach* may sound like an oxymoron. But to a great extent, Alter did compose the music that many cantors today consider *Mi Sinai* ("from Sinai" meaning "the oldest, most authentic"). There seems to be confusion, even

debate, over whether Alter composed the music or merely notated the traditional *nusach* in the several Cantors Assembly publications whose covers contain the words: "by Cantor Israel Alter." Samuel Rosenbaum's words in the preface of *The High Holy Day Service* are most revealing. He writes:

> ...in 1966, we [Alter and Rosenbaum] had sat in another room daring to hope that the hazzanic expertise and artistry of the world-famous Israel Alter might be captured for all time between the covers of a book. We decided then that Alter would *compose* and the Cantors Assembly would publish the complete musical settings for hazzan for the Sabbath, Festivals and Holy Days.[34] (Emphasis added)

So, while it does seem clear that Alter's work is his own composition, there is equally little doubt that its entire form and nature may very well be called *nusach*. All we know for sure is that he employs many motifs that are very old and commonly used by all those who compose or notate music for the same occasions.

We shall examine a small but revealing selection from Alter's *Hallel* music. Following is the music for the blessing recited prior to *Hallel* which Alter includes in *The Sabbath Service* collection.[35] We shall look closely at just three small sections of this blessing.

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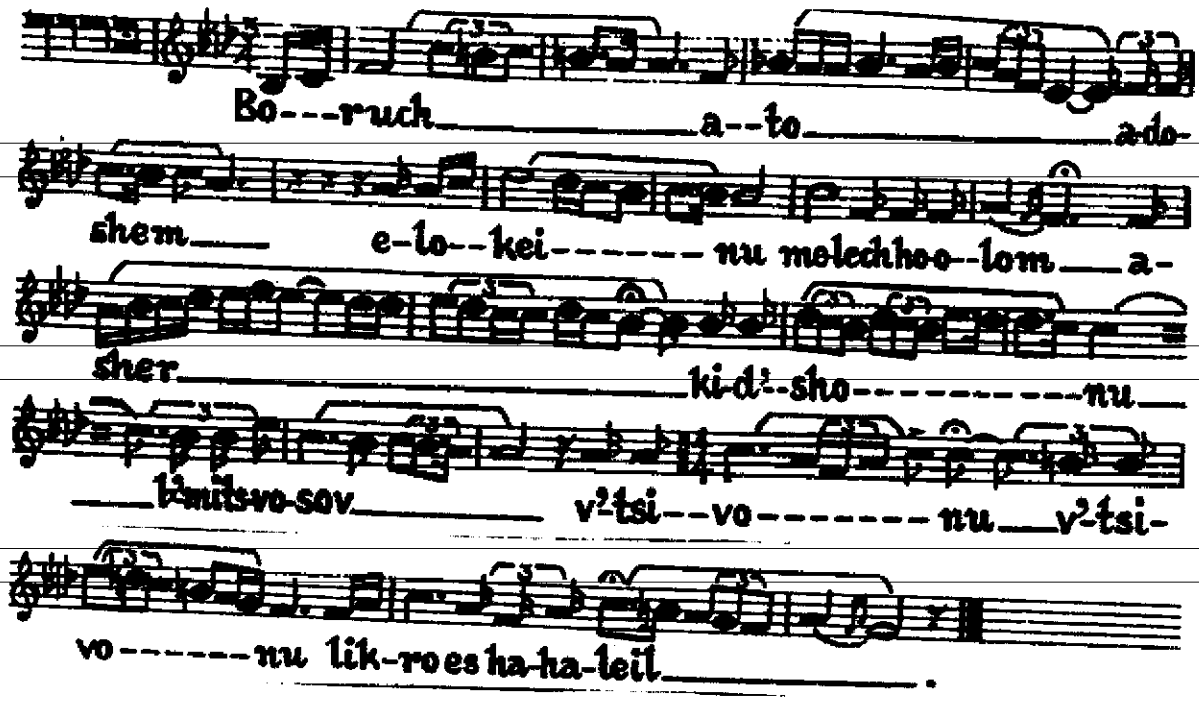
[34] Israel Alter. *The High Holy Day Service: The Complete Musical Liturgy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for The Hazzan.* (New York: Cantors Assembly, 1971), 4.

[35] Israel Alter. *The Sabbath Service: The Complete Musical Liturgy for The Hazzan.* (New York: Cantors Assembly, 1968, 1995), 43-44.



Cantor Jacob Ben-Zion Mendelson (b. 1946) – the cantor of Temple Israel Center of White Plains, New York – was a student of Alter and is now a disciple and teacher of his music at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. He points out the "genius" of Alter with tremendous excitement and enthusiasm. He observes that the opening three notes of Alter's *Hallel* blessing are the exact same pitches as the final three notes of the *Sim Shalom* ("Grant peace"), which would immediately precede this blessing. The notes form a seamless bridge from the *Amidah* to *Hallel*. The next figure of notes demonstrates use of the raised fourth tone of the scale. Emphasis on this unusual – what Mendelson calls "ethnic" sounding – interval is pervasive throughout Alter's Festival music and is, or becomes, indicative of the *Shalosh R'galim*. Final observations are about the final sequence of notes on the last syllable of the blessing. Notes descending from the fifth scale tone to the tonic is not uncommon, but inclusion of the raised fourth in the descent gives it that unique, "ethnic" flavor.

I choose to comment on these three particular aspects of Alter's *Hallel* blessing for two reasons. The first is that they highlight Alter's artistry in creating *nusach*, or perhaps in keeping it alive. The second is that another contemporary composer, whom we shall discuss next, bases some of his composition for *Hallel* on Alter's *nusach*.

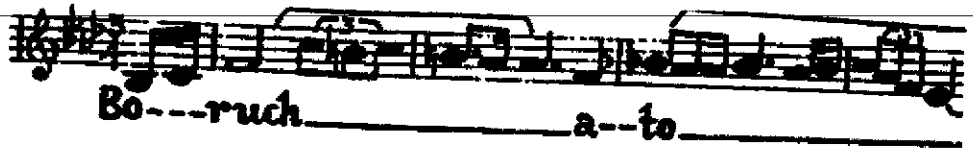
Robert Solomon

Cantor Robert Solomon (b. 1946) has served Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline, Massachusetts since 1991. Conservatory trained, Orthodox raised, and certified as a cantor in both the Reform and Conservative movements, Solomon is internationally known as a composer of Jewish choral works and synagogue music. He is also well known as a singer and songwriter with the popular Jewish music group Safam. Safam's recording, *Sons of Safam*, includes musical settings, mostly by Solomon, for almost all of *Hallel*. We shall look at two small sections of this work to see how it draws from "tradition" but is firmly planted in modernity as well.

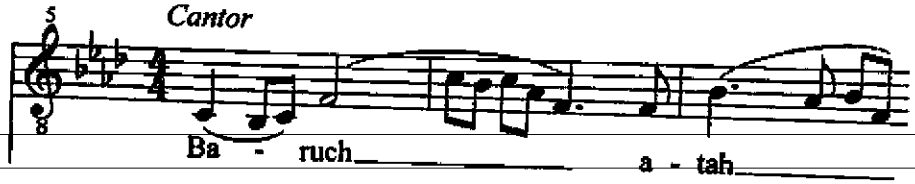
Safam's *Hallel* begins with the opening blessing. In sharing insights about the compositional process, Solomon states: "First of all we tried to stay within the framework of the traditional nusach for Hallel, beginning with the blessing which is based on the Israel Alter melody."[36] There are notable similarities and differences between the two compositions. Alter's melody includes no accompaniment, whereas the Solomon music does. Alter's harmonic scale includes the very Jewish sounding raised fourth tone, as discussed above. Perhaps fearing that this might be too jarring for contemporary western listeners, Solomon does not employ this distinctive harmony here, in the opening notes of

[36] Robert Solomon. E-mail correspondence with author, October 10, 2002.

the blessing as does Alter, though he does use it elsewhere. Notice the nearly identical opening phrase of the two melodies. Alter's blessing begins:



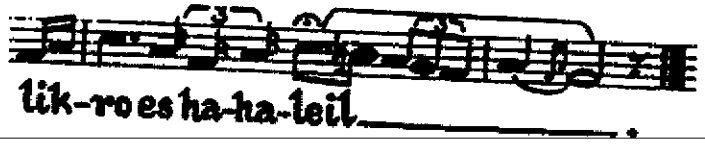
Solomon's blessing (transposed for easier comparison) begins:



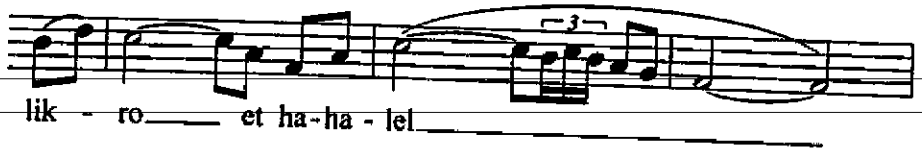
In this short section of music, we can see three small clusters of notes. After the opening C note of the Solomon *Baruch*, the next three notes are identical to those of Alter. Even the rhythms are nearly identical. The movement of Solomon's five notes following the half note F is also very similar to Alter's melody, which uses his characteristic raised fourth, but Solomon uses the notes of the common minor scale with the lowered fourth tone. Finally, the notes of Solomon's *atah* again closely resemble Alter's melody.

Let us now examine the similarities in the final part of each blessing, shown here.

The conclusion of Alter's blessing (key signature is Fm as above):



The conclusion of Solomon's blessing (key signature is Fm as above):

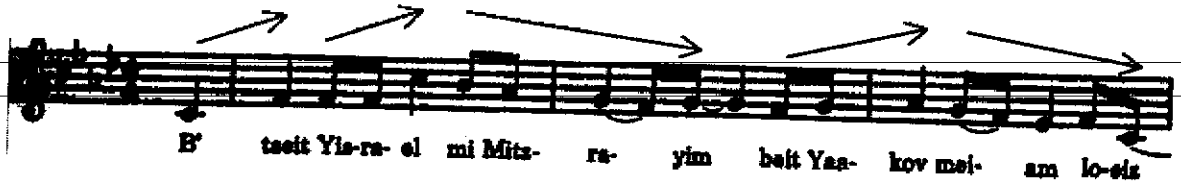


These two closing phrases are again nearly identical, the biggest difference being the fourth tone of the scale.

The Alter melody is intended to be sung rather freely, unaccompanied, and very expressively by the cantor. Solomon's melody, though somewhat cantorial in nature, is more rhythmic, accompanied by full harmonies on a keyboard (piano), and should also be sung expressively. Solomon has created a new melody employing the tradition of Alter but set in a way to appeal to contemporary musical sensibilities.

Almost all of Alter's *nusach* is "through composed." By that we mean composed from beginning to end, interpreting the text melodically as it proceeds forward with rarely ever a repeated musical phrase or anything resembling the repeat of an entire section. This is much like an art song, the art of cantorial recitative. On the contrary, Solomon's audience is accustomed to more regular forms and repeated verse and chorus patterns. But Solomon does demonstrate amazing sensitivity to the text, as we shall see now.

Looking just at the first line of Solomon's *B'tset Yisrael* reveals a magnificent example of word-painting. Following is the opening phrase of the piece.[37]



Arrows have been added here to highlight the ascending and descending of the melody. Notice without exception, the melody rises on each word with which we associate good feelings and falls on each word that carries a negative connotation. The notes go up on the following words: *B'tset* ("when leaving" referring to the Exodus) *Yisrael* ("the

[37] *Songs of Safam.* (36 Hamlin Road, Newton Centre, MA, Safam, 1983), 22.

Israelite nation" – the Jews) *beyt-Yaakov* ("the house of Jacob" – the Jews). And the notes go down on the following words: *mi-mits-ra-yim* ("from Egypt" or "the narrow place" where we were enslaved) *me-am lo-ez* ("from a despicable nation").

An instrumental section may be heard in the middle of Safam's recording of *B'tset Yisrael*. Cantor Solomon describes the word-painting of the two flute lines rolling over one-another in the following way. "The cascading flutes in the middle are a reflection of the 'sea turning back and the hills skipping like rams, etc.'" He called this "cascading flutes" during a telephone conversation with the author. The inspired artistry, hidden at first to the unacquainted listener, ultimately may inspire the informed worshipper.

5. Conclusion

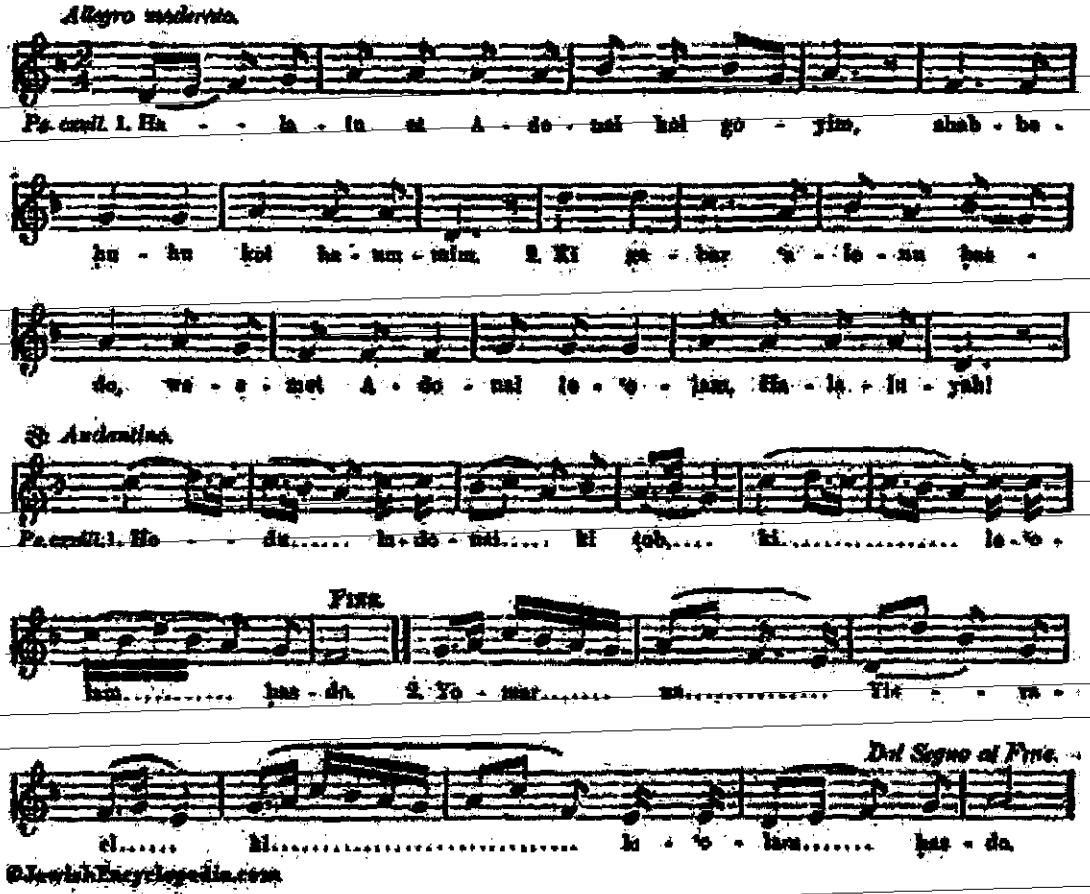
The *Hallel* can be a liturgical rubric met with anticipation for the richness it offers rather than dread of the additional prayers it constitutes if we gain an appreciation of what it is and how we might sing it. The more we learn about the *Hallel* as well as the music and chanting used in its recitation, the more meaningful and inspiring it may become.

Giving praise to the One who enables us to fulfill our dreams and for the blessings we are given every day of our lives is as fashionable, as appropriate, and as necessary today as it was in ancient times. Rendering this liturgy accessible will increase the likelihood that congregations will accept its inclusion. The words of praise are timeless. When paired with modern melodies and rhythms that speak to us in the musical language of our own day even while keeping alive traditions of our past, they resonate to the depths of our souls.

Our goal must be to educate our congregants and encourage them to accept what for some will be an innovation in worship. If successful, we will be singing the praises of *Hallel* as we sing praises to God.

Appendices

Appendix A – Musical Example: *Hallel* (Sephardic)



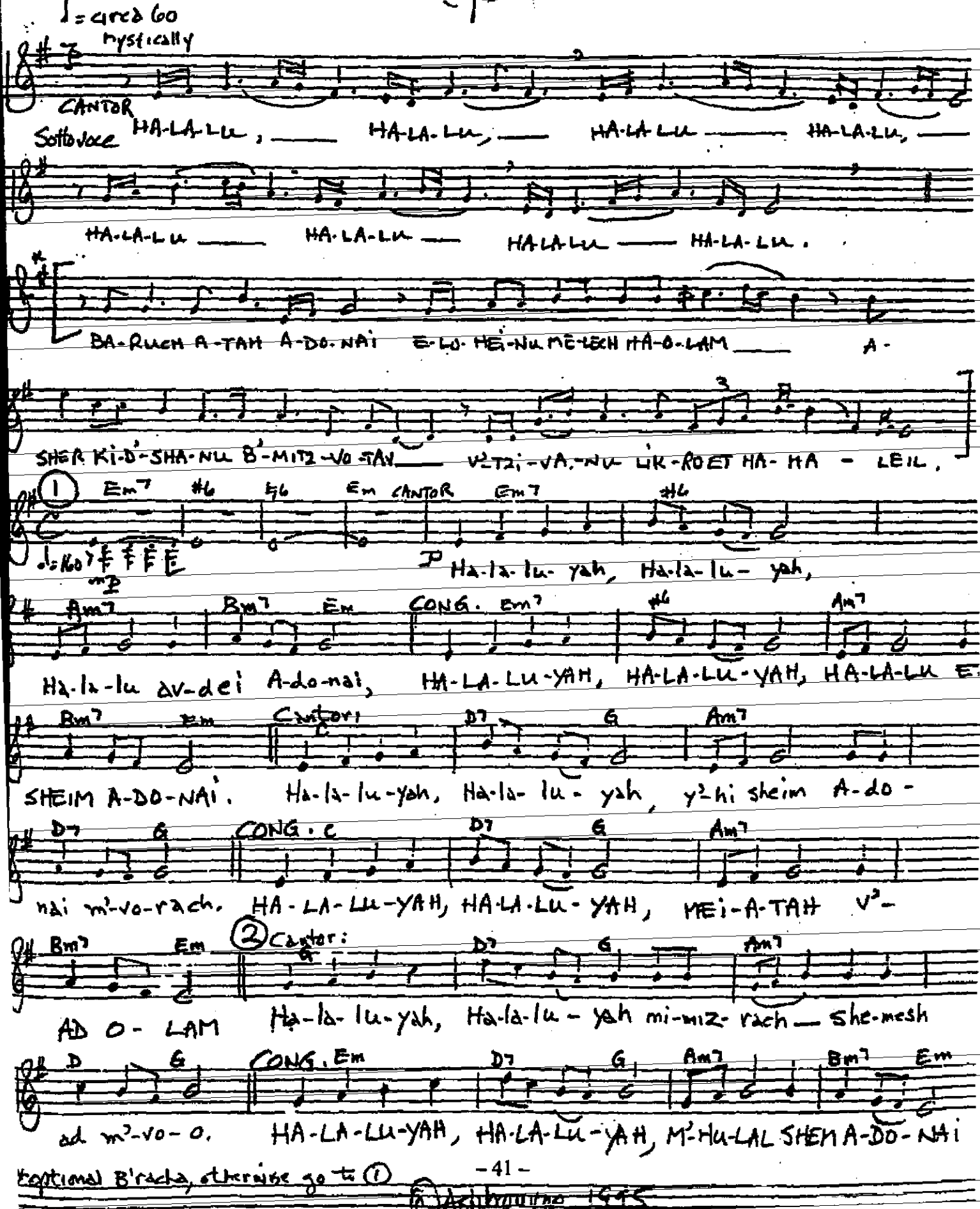
Appendix B – Excerpts from Charles Davidson's *Hallel* Service

Following are pages 1 and 8 from Charles Davidson's *Hallel* Service for *Yom Ha-ats-ma-ut*, Israel's Independence Day, discussed in Chapter 3.

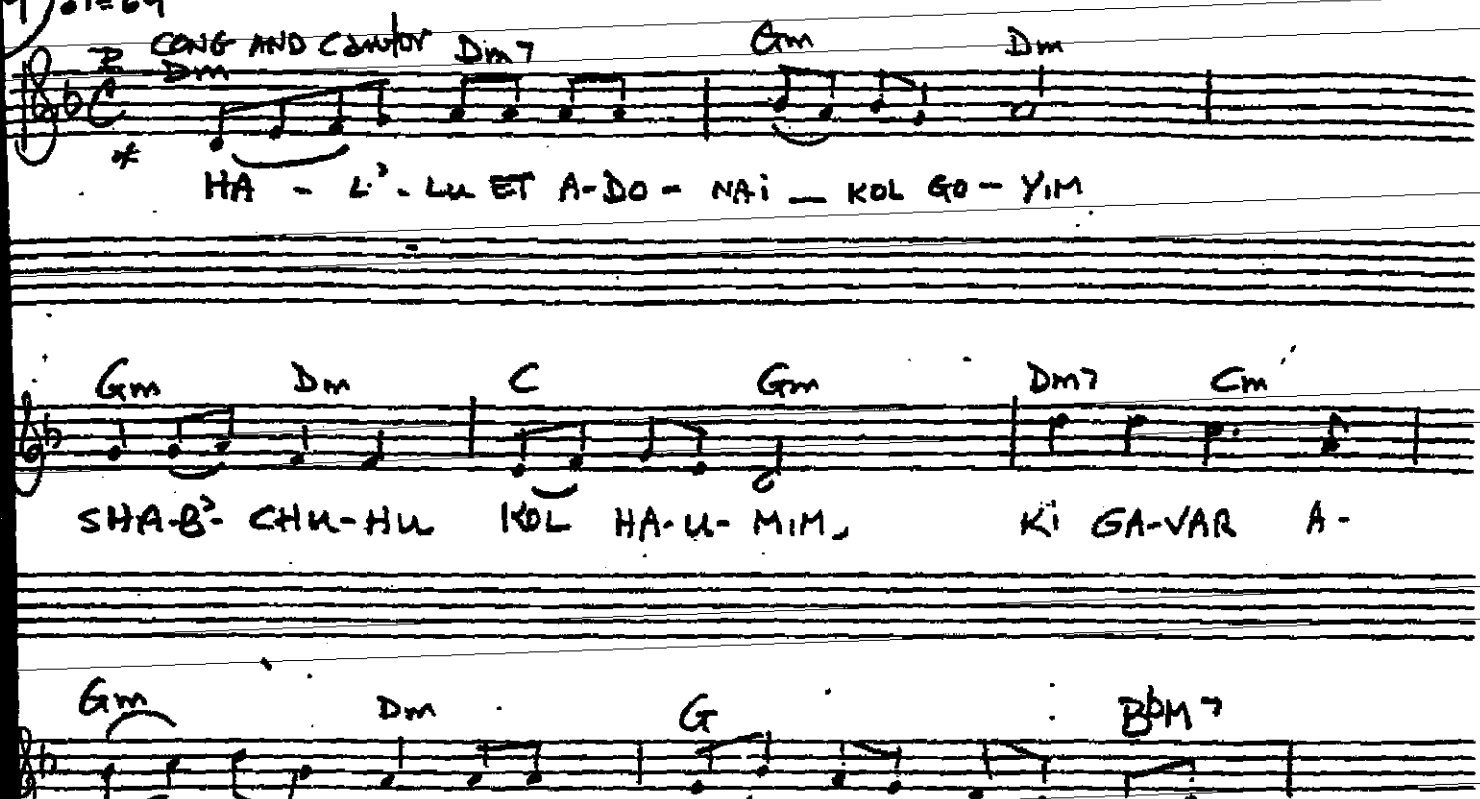
VOCAL SCORE

HALLEL SERVICE

~ I ~



9 ♩=69



*Sephardi Tune for Tal-Geshem

Appendix C – Interview with Noah Schall

Following is the transcript of an interview with Cantor Noah Schall conducted by Leon Sher in the fourth floor copy room of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion at One West Fourth Street, New York, NY, on March 5, 2003.

Sher: So, I've heard you say: "There's, there's [*sic*] only really two …"

Schall: In the first part of the *Hallel*. Until you break, … until the, uh, …until the, uh, *Hal'lu es ha-Shem kol goyim* ("Praise the Lord, all you nations" Psalm 117:1a).

Sher: Yah?

Schall: You gotta know the words inside. Or, …
Yes see, like, when you have a *seder*, there's a break there.

Sher: Right.

Schall: The part before …

Sher: Right.

Schall: the part afterward.

The part before is the *Hallel* … it's called *Hallel Ha-mits-ri*, the Egyptian *Hallel*.

Sher: Right.

Schall: So, the first part is telling you about when we were in Egypt, talking about the past. Before we were slaves to Pharaoh, now we have a new owner, we're slaves to *Ha-Shem* ("God"). [If] You don't like the word "slaves," use the word "servants." Same thing. So that's why sometimes you find some crying intonations. It reminds us of a certain history: we were slaves; there were lousy times; they mistreated us. The rest is the *Hallel* of the future. *Hal'lu es ha-Shem kol goyim* ("Praise the Lord, all you nations" Psalm 117:1a) is talking about when all the nations of the world shall praise *ha-Shem*, is when *moshiach* ("messiah") comes. So there the mood changes, and that's why, especially if *davening nusach sfard* ("praying in the Sephardic manner"), goes into major

Sher: For the second half?

Schall Yeah, from that part on. [He may mean from Psalm 117 and not from Psalm 115.] So there's two *nus-chos* ("chanting styles"). You end up, from there on can

be … continue either in the minor as before, or you can be in the, in the "Jewish major" as they call [it].

Sher: What do you mean by "Jewish major?"

Schall: *Ha-Shem Malach*

Sher: Oh, OK.

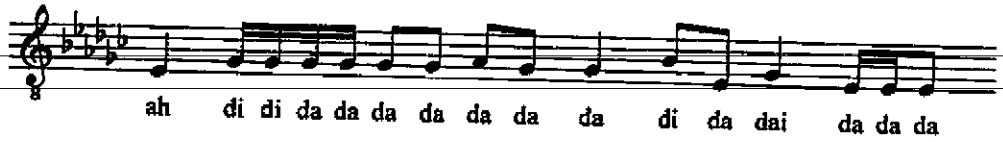
Schall: that's the Jewish major.

Sher: That's what I figured. [Would you] sing me the two, uh, *nusachot* …

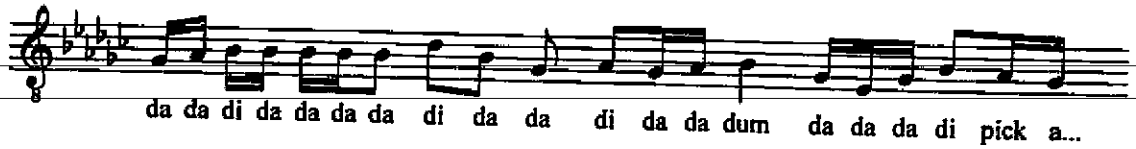
Schall: I'm not singing for you now …

Sher: The phrases you use.

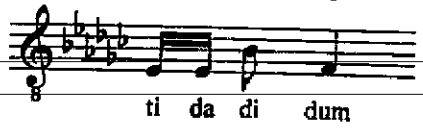
Schall: oh, the phrases? [sings…]



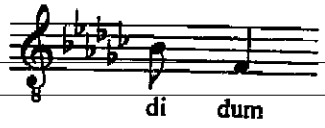
and now and then



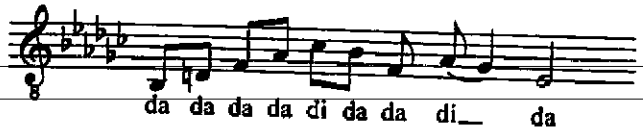
before, uh, the concluding...



Sher: (repeats to confirm the notes…)



Schall: anything you want …



That's the … that's about … the rest is all additions.

Sher: So those were the two phrases?

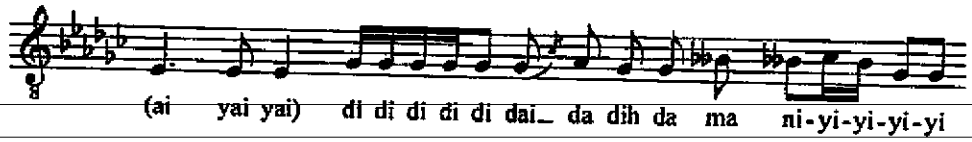
Schall: And, I said, when you get stuck in the middle, … how do you know which, when to use the major? What do you do? You look at the text.

Sher: Right.

Schall: So, if the text feels good, to, uh, peppier, so use the major (stuff) [word uncertain]. If it's a more of a *krecheng* (side) [word uncertain], use the one in minor.

Sher: What did you say the minor one was for, the first two Psalms?

Schall: [sings…]



You can even go into, uh, in the, uh, Hungarian Dorian, if you want.

Sher: Hungarian Dorian?

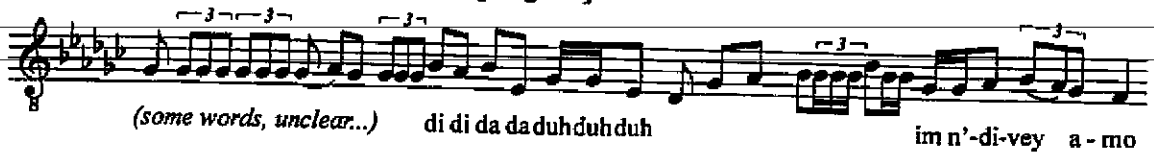
Schall: Yeah. Or Ukrainian Dorian?

Sher: Yeah, yeah. OK.

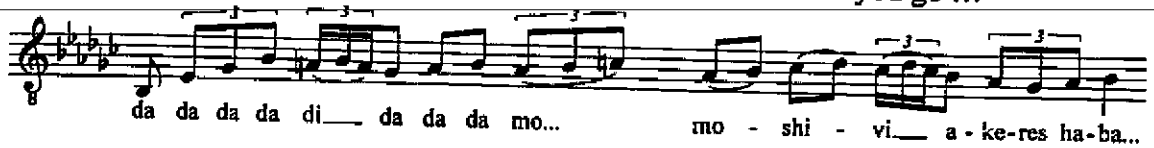
Schall: Or *Mi Sheberach* mode [word uncertain], *Av Harachamim shtey* [word uncertain]. It has about four names. That [you] usually use, uh, when you run out of material.

Sher: Huh.

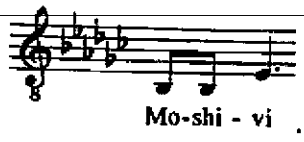
Schall: For instance, in this case, if you start [sings…]



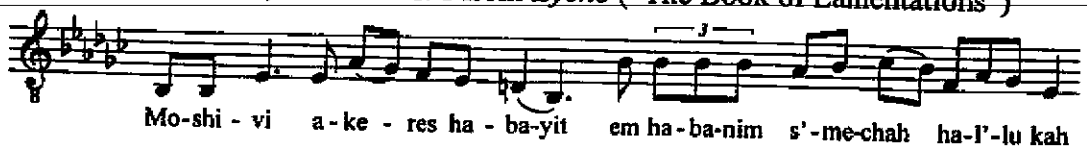
[Psalm 113:8b]
Let's say you ran out of material, and you wanted to elaborate. So you go …



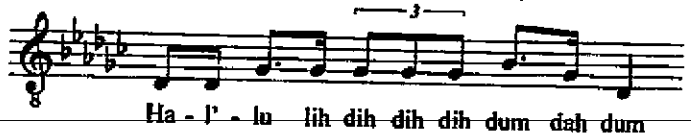
[Psalm 113:9a]
or if you wanted …



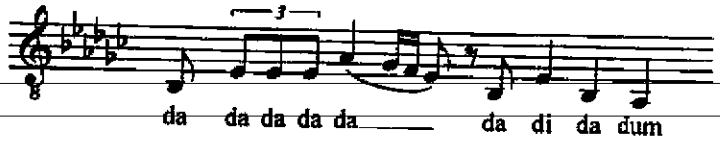
you can also use this, this tune. It's from *Eycho* ("The Book of Lamentations")



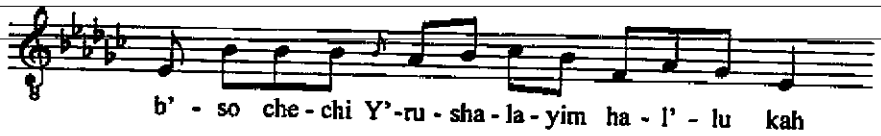
[Psalm 113:9]
Those are the three. And the major is major.



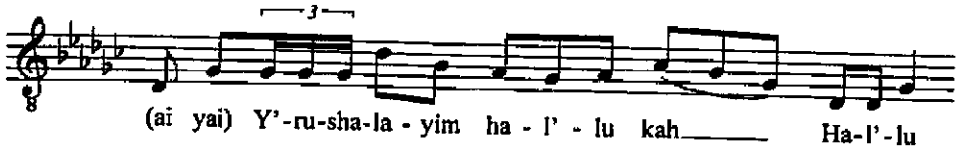
And, uh, if you want, any paragraph can also end in, uh, like in the *shmone esrey* ("18 blessings, the *Amidah*")



If you want. It's not a must.
So there's, ... the paragraph *hal'lu es ha-Shem kol goyim* has three possible endings. One in the minor...



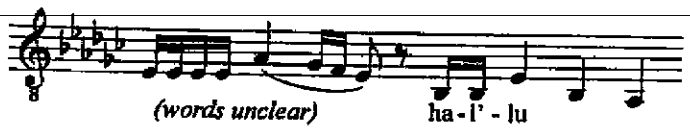
[Psalm 116:19b]
The way we went in the beginning.



[Psalm 116:19b – 117:1a]
Major.

Sher: Mm, hmm. ("Yes")

Shall: [sings...]



Those are the three, standard, possible endings.

Sher: Cool!

Schall: Very cool.

Sher: So, you got anything else to share while you're thinking of it?

Schall: No. And don't bother me now.

Sher: Thank you. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Schall: For what? I didn't add anything.

Sher: For sharing.

Schall: I didn't add anything. You gotta know where I'm up to [in photocopy work].

Sher: So, can I help you with anything or are you alright?

Schall: No, no, no. I'm mixed up as it is.

Sher: OK. OK. Thanks very much. Thank you.

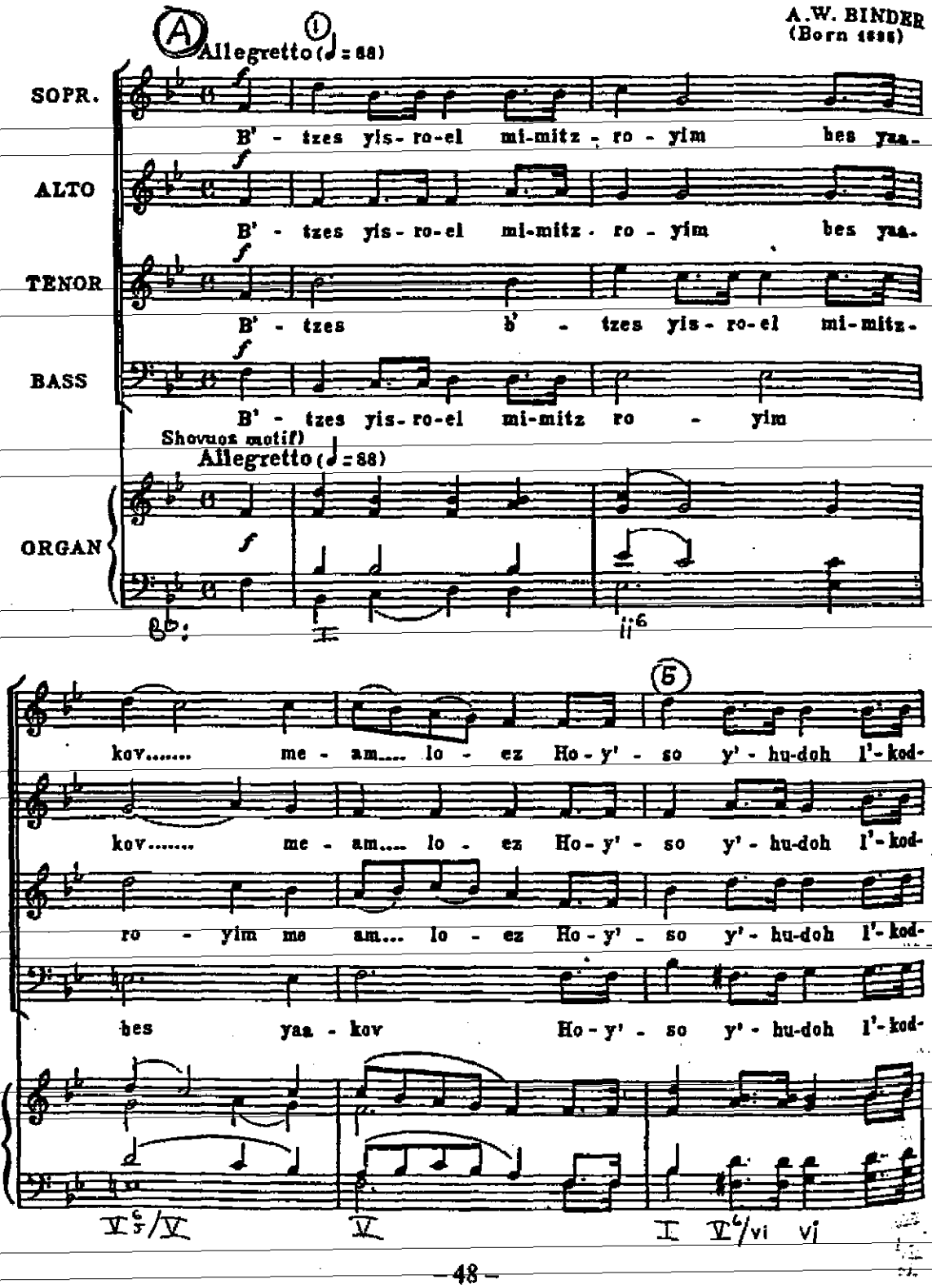
Schall: [If] you get some good ideas, tell me.

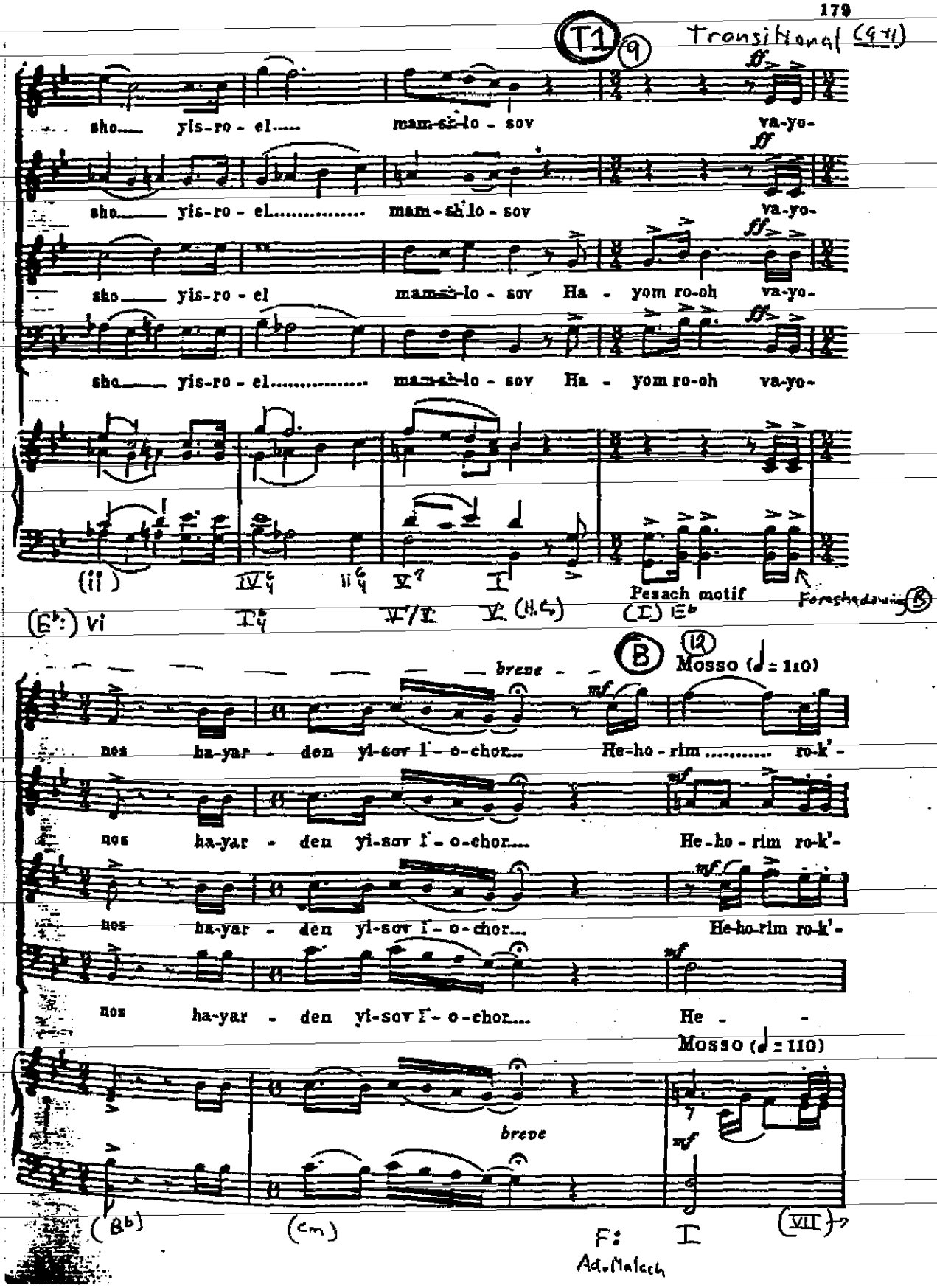
Sher: Uh! O.K.

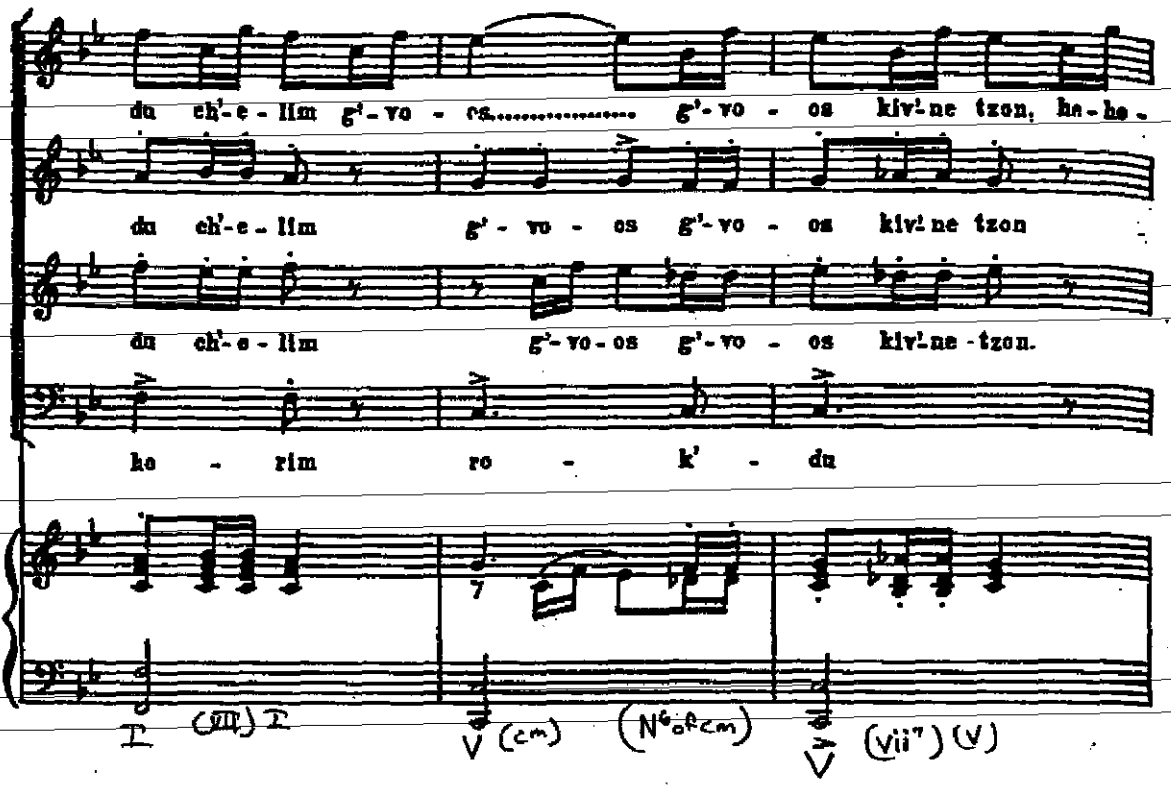
B'TZES YISROEL

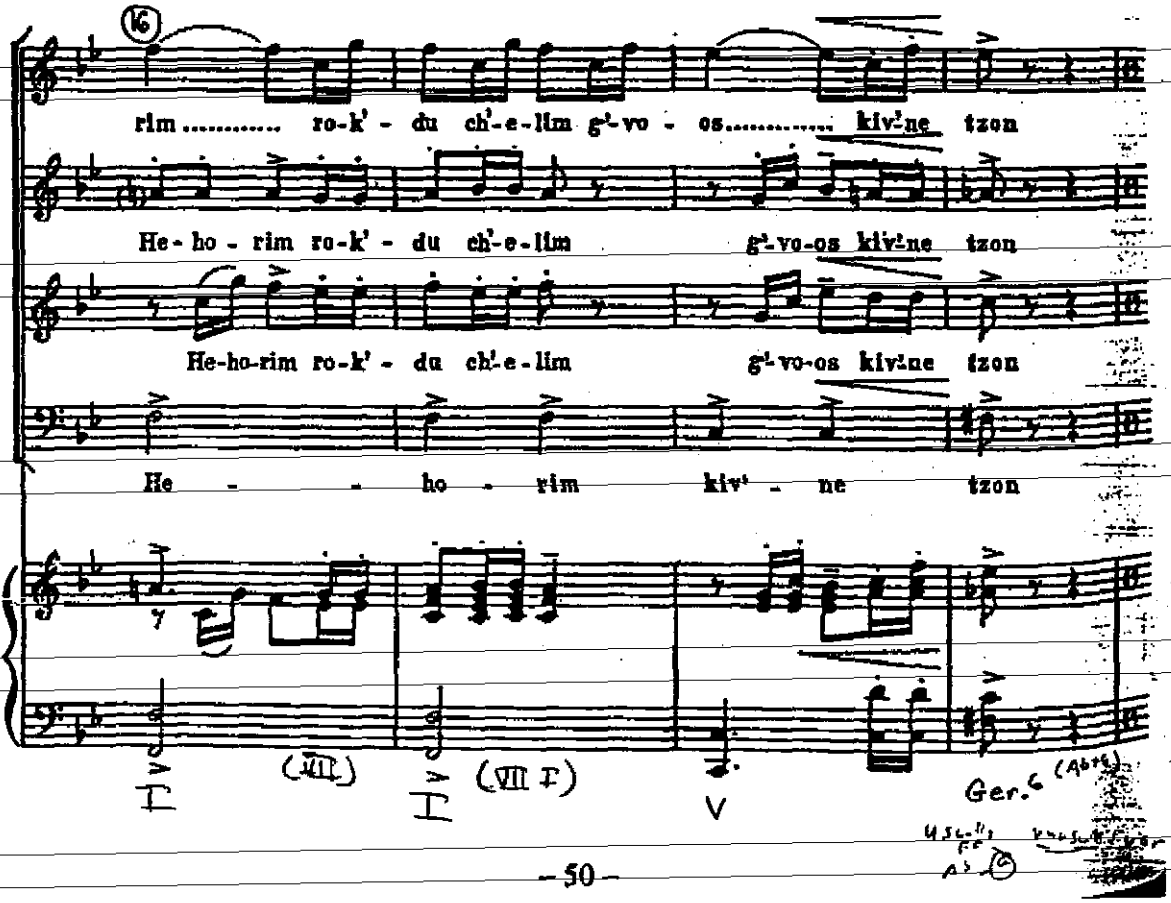
(Based on Three Festival Motives)

Psalm 114



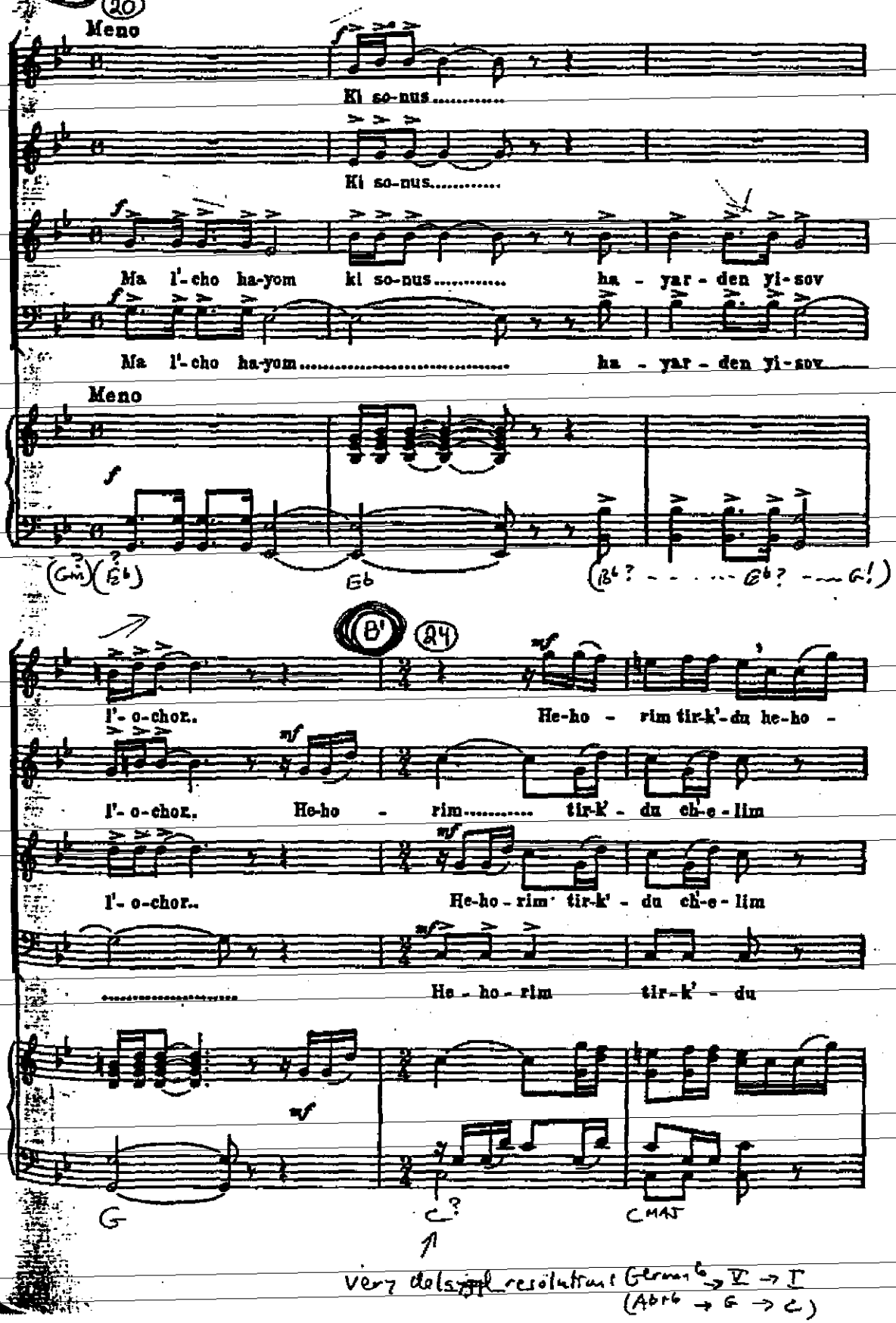

T1
9
Transitional (9+1)
sho___ yis-ro - el.....
mam-shi-lo - sov
va-yo-
sho___ yis-ro - el.....
mam-shi-lo - sov
va-yo-
sho___ yis-ro - el
mam-shi-lo - sov Ha - yom ro-oh
va-yo-
sho___ yis-ro - el.....
mam-shi-lo - sov Ha - yom ro-oh
va-yo-
(ii) IV6/4 ii6/4 V7 I
(E♭:) vi I6/4 V7/I V (II6/4)
Pesach motif
(I) E♭
Foreshadowing
B
12
Mosso (♩ = 110)
breve
nos ha-yar - den yi-sov l'- o-chor... He-ho - rim ..... ro-k'-
nos ha-yar - den yi-sov l'- o-chor... He-ho - rim ro-k'-
nos ha-yar - den yi-sov l'- o-chor... He-ho-rim ro-k'-
nos ha-yar - den yi-sov l'- o-chor... He - -
Mosso (♩ = 110)
breve
(B♭)
(cm)
F:
I
(VII)
Ad. Malach


du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os..... g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon, he-he-
du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon
du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os g'-vo-os kiv'ne-tzon.
ho-rim ro-k'-du
I (VII) I
V (cm) (N6 of cm)
V (vii°7) (V)

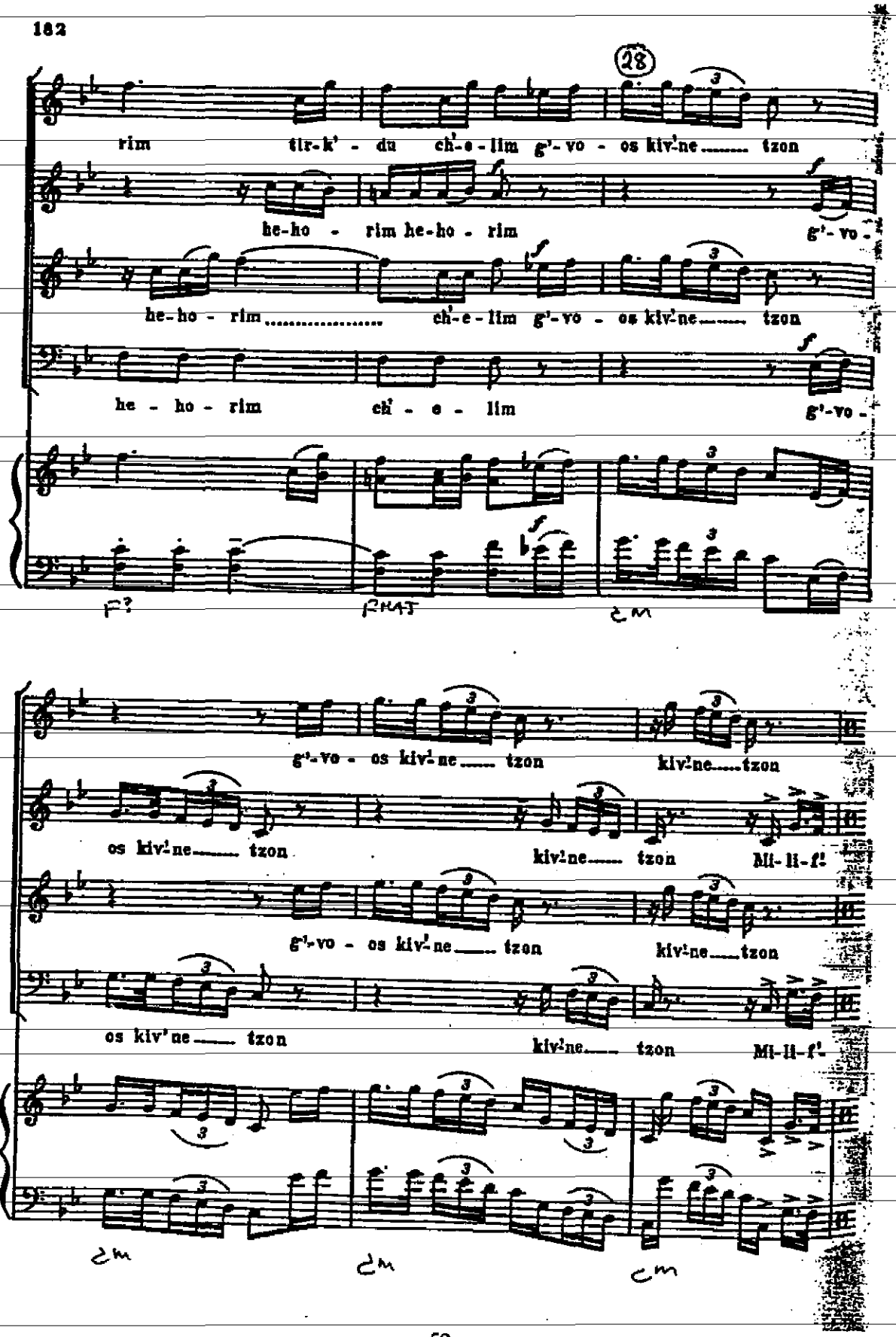

16
rim..... ro-k'-du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os..... kiv'ne tzon
He-ho-rim ro-k'-du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon
He-ho-rim ro-k'-du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon
He-ho-rim kiv'-ne tzon
I (VII) I (VII I)
V
Ger.6 (Abts)

Transitional (20–23)

T2 (20)



very dolce resolution: German $\flat 6 \rightarrow V \rightarrow I$
(Ab+6 → G → C)


28
rim tir-k'-du ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon
he-ho-rim he-ho-rim g'-vo-
he-ho-rim ch'-e-lim g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon
he-ho-rim ch'-e-lim g'-vo-
f?
CHAT
CM
g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon kiv'ne tzon
os kiv'ne tzon kiv'ne tzon Mi-li-f'
g'-vo-os kiv'ne tzon kiv'ne tzon
os kiv'ne tzon kiv'ne tzon Mi-li-f'
CM
CM
CM

(C) (32) trick transition (32-37)

Meno ♩= 72

(36)

o - don chu - li o - retz mi-lif'- ne e-lo-ah ya-a-

ne..... chu - li o - retz mi-lif'- ne e-lo-ah ya-a-

o - don chu - li o - retz mi-lif'- ne e-lo-ah ya-a-

ne..... chu - li o - retz mi-lif'- ne e-lo-ah ya-a-

Sukkos melody

Meno ♩= 72

ff F#07 Gm A#7 Gm or B♭ Cm Gm A#7

G? G? Gm: VII07 i6 iio7 i6 IV i6 iio7

(A') (35) ms 39-45 = ms. 2-8

f a tempo

kov Ha - hof - chi ha-tzur a-gam mo-yim cha-lo - mish l'

f a tempo

kov Ha - hof - chi ha-tzur a-gam mo - yim cha-lo - mish l' -

f a tempo

kov Ha - hof - chi ha-tzur a-gam mo-yim cha-lo - mish l' -

a tempo

f

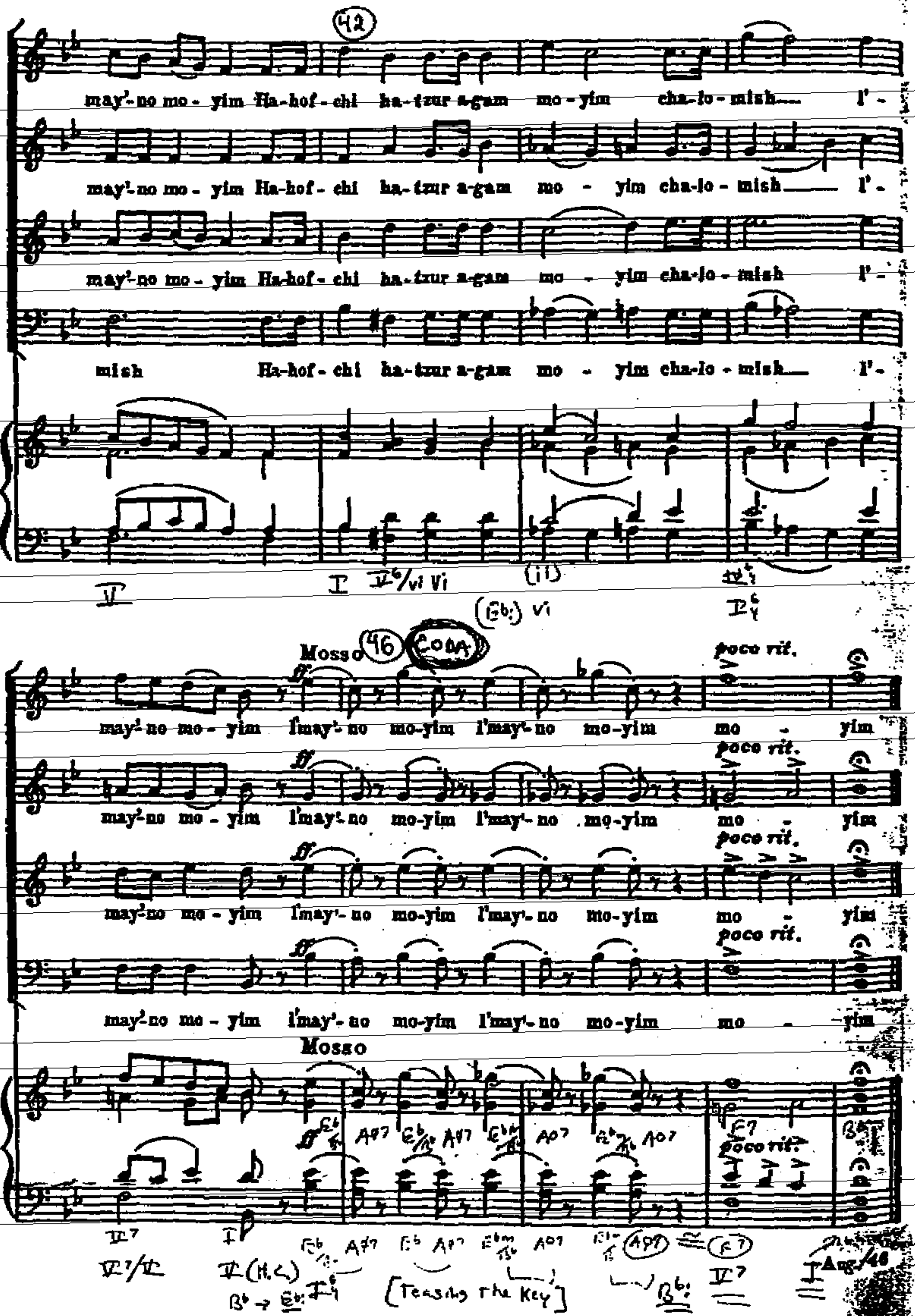
kov Ha - hof - chi ha-tzur a-gam mo - yim cha - lo -

f a tempo

Gm: V i III IV6 V5/V

B♭: I I II6

[Reharmonization of (A) in B♭ but feels like still Gm!]


may'-no mo - yim Ha-hof - chi ha - tzur a-gam mo - yim cha-lo - mish l' -
may'-no mo - yim Ha-hof - chi ha - tzur a-gam mo - yim cha-lo - mish l' -
may'-no mo - yim Ha-hof - chi ha - tzur a-gam mo - yim cha-lo - mish l' -
mish Ha-hof - chi ha - tzur a-gam mo - yim cha-lo - mish l' -
Mosso
poco rit.
may'-no mo - yim l'may'- no mo-yim l'may'- no mo-yim mo - yim
may'-no mo - yim l'may'- no mo-yim l'may'- no mo-yim mo - yim
may'-no mo - yim l'may'- no mo-yim l'may'- no mo-yim mo - yim
may'-no mo - yim l'may'- no mo-yim l'may'- no mo-yim mo - yim
Mosso
poco rit.

Section:	A	T1	B	T2	B^1	C	A^1	Coda
Measures:	1-8 (8)	9-11 (3)	12-19 (8)	20-23 (4)	24-31 (8)	32-37 (6)	38-45 (8)	46-49 (4)
Key:	Bb→Eb	Uncertain: Eb→ Bb→ Cm	F Adoshem Malach	Uncertain: Cm→ Eb→ G	Unsettled: C→ F→ Cm	Uncertain: G?→ Gm?	Bb→Eb	Eb→Bb
Harmony:	Ends in unexpected cadence with Bb as V chord	Mostly unison, brief harmony fore-shadows section B	Harmonization of "jumping" melody. Lowered 7's suggests Adoshem Malach mode. Ends with Ab Ger. VI chord.	Surprising chord changes. Word-paints surprise of nature.	Delayed resolution of German VI chord.	Unsettled, vague as God is introduced. Ends with V (D) chord.	As section A, but 1st chord uncertain, feels more like Gm.	Chords tease certainty of key. Long-awaited resolution to Bb.
Melody:	*Shavuot* motif	*Pesach* motif	"Jumping mountain" word-painting motif	*Pesach* motif repeated	"Jumping mountain" motif repeated as words	*Sukkot* melody	*Shavuot* motif repeated	"Water-fall" motif
Text:	When Israel went out of Egypt, Jacob's household from a people of strange speech, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel God's dominion.	The sea saw it and fled; the Jordan turned backwards.	The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like lambs. (Repeated)	What ails you, O sea, that you flee? Why, O Jordan, do you turn back-wards?	Why do you mountains skip like rams? Hills, why do you leap like lambs?	… From before God, O Earth, from before the God of Jacob?	Who turns the Rock into a pool of water, flint into flowing water. (Repeated)	(Repeat:) Flowing water, flowing water, water.

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