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Report on the Master of Sacred Music Written Project Submitted by

Gershon Silins

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Investiture

The Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity in the Cantorate of Lawrence Avery

At first glance, one expects Gershon Silins' thesis "The Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity in the Cantorate of Lawrence Avery" to be just another flattering paen by an enthusiastic student for an admired teacher. Instead, Silins has produced a well-organized, often interesting paper exploring the many facets that comprise the total evaluation of Lawrence Avery, the cantor, educator, musician and artist.

The biographical material has been culled from many interviews with Avery and those who know him. It is clear, concise and well documented; an interesting, often touching memoir, full of fascinating details and minutiae. Especially good is the analysis of Avery's pedagogy; the techniques, the style and methods of communicating with students. Silins shows how his teaching had great influence on many students who became successful cantors.

He speaks admiringly of Avery's compositions and elaborates on his duties as a cantor in New Rochelle for more than thirty-eight years. "Avery's unusual combination of voice, musicianship, religious grounding and performing enthusiasm have made him one of the finest cantors and singers I have ever heard."

In his final chapter, Silins speaks of the music problems that continue to confound the Reform Movement. In regard to "new-trend music," he makes the point that Avery's influence among Reform cantors has been an especially good one because he has always been an advocate of "participation, presentation and improvisation, well-balanced between Cantor and congregatin."

There is an appendix which includes an arrangement of Roitman's "Ahavat Olam" by Avery and "K'shoshana," a wedding song scored for tenor, flute and piano with an analysis by Lori Corrsin, a third-year student of the School of Sacred Music. Silins sang these two pieces at his Master's recital with great success, along with many other arrangements and compositions by Avery. The program was beautifully performed and very well received.

Being a "nogaya b'davar," I have found it somewhat difficult to be completely objective in my association with Silins' thesis. However, I am more than pleased with the results and it is with great pleasure that I recommend this thesis for acceptance toward the Master of Sacred Music degree.

Respectfully submitted,
Cantor Lawrence Avery
Referee

June, 1990

THE SYNTHESIS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN THE CANTORATE OF LAWRENCE AVERY

by

Gershon Silins

Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Sacred Music

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music
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Advisor: Lawrence Avery

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INTRODUCTION

On August 19, 1989, my wife and I went to Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle to hear Cantor Lawrence Avery chant Sabbath services. We arrived when he had reached Kulam Ahuvim or thereabouts. It was a real experience -- Avery is definitely one of the finest cantors and singers I have ever heard. There is a constant variation between chanting, "recitative" (as the more florid passages are called in chazzanut) and congregational melodies, so one's interest is always active. Because he knew we were there, he put in some things that were specially directed at us; for example, late in the Musaf service, he used part of the tune of Alter's HaShir Sh'haL'viim, which he knew I was familiar with. He also used a tune from Don Carlo by Verdi.

Avery's voice is a high, supple tenor -- his comfortable key is so much higher than the congregation's that those who sing along often do so an octave lower. At particular points, notably in the Torah Service, he used unprepared modulations, or very briefly prepared modulations, to enable the congregation and participants to sing along more easily. At all times, he was harmonically "in control;" there was never a moment of ambiguity about the key.

If there is one thing that particularly stands out in his work, it is his attention to the text. He quite

frequently brings out the dagesh in words, and one can almost always hear the mapik when it occurs.

For Avery, the whole act of singing is joyful, and the interplay of text and nusach is accompanied by a feeling of excitement. I did not get a sense so much of the drama of those texts that might be dramatically treated; it is more a matter of love and care for each word, letting the listener make the drama for himself.

Cantor Lawrence Avery combines musical erudition and artistry with a broad knowledge of nusach and cantillation. As a teacher of chazzanut at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Sacred Music, he has influenced a whole generation of Reform cantors and rabbis. This paper will explore these areas of his cantorate: his musical training and background, his cantorial training, his studies of cantorial music, his duties at Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle, New York, his teaching at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Sacred Music and his compositions of sacred music. It is based in part upon interviews with Cantor Avery himself and his students and colleagues.

Cantor Avery has been my teacher and coach at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and I have heard him perform a wide variety of music both in class and in concert. It has been a privilege to hear him and to study with him.

I.

Tradition is a concept fairly well established in relation to chazzanut. By and large, we have a conception of tradition in the various roles of the chazzan, in terms of his singing style, repertoire and compositions, and education. But the idea of modernity is a little more ambiguous in this context. It means something different in each of the roles of the cantor, and, of course, it has changed over the course of our times. As it will be used here, "modernity" means a willingness to incorporate aspects of secular musical culture, and secular society in general, in the role of the cantor. The Reform movement has been and continues to be open to such influences. It has sanctioned, over the years, non-Jewish soloists instead of cantors, organ-accompanied services, guitar-accompanied services, and musical styles from every religious and secular source. The more traditional streams of Judaism are less accepting. For example, many Orthodox authorities would frown even upon the presence of an opera singer on the bima. In that view, "it seems to be clear that although some opera stars do return to the pulpit on occaion to conduct services, they do so completely as entertainers; certainly they are no longer considered hazzanim."[1] It is hard to imagine where such

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[1] Leo Landman, The Cantor: An Historic Perspective, (New York: Yeshiva University, 1972) p. 113.

extreme points of view could come together. One such place is the cantorate of Lawrence Avery.

In the course of his cantorate, Lawrence Avery has synthesized qualities of tradition and modernity, and in doing so has attained a unique position as an orthodox[a] Jew who is the cantor of a Conservative synagogue, and who teaches at what has become a training institution primarily for Reform cantors. There he has had a profound influence on the course of the Reform cantorate, while continuing to have the respect of colleagues throughout the cantorial world, and the world of classical music as well.

The center and source of Avery's cantorate is his singing. Let us examine the singing styles of traditional chazzanut and see how Avery's singing relates to them.

Traditional cantorial music can be seen as having three main characteristic styles. One is the davening ("praying") style, used to deliver prayers rapidly and without excessive performance values; that is, the text is not differentiated, the tune is rudimentary, and there is little expression. The second, which I call the "sung" style, is a little more intentional, more melodic and with more attention paid to textual details; this style is used to bring out sections of

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[a] Avery is orthodox with a small "o". The orthodox Jewish community that he grew up in was not religiously competitive; people generally did not try to outdo one another in religious observance. For instance, Avery recalls that no one wore a kippa outdoors, or even a hat. The community was less "orthodox" in that sense than even the Modern Orthodox community is today.

the liturgy. The third, misleadingly called "recitative" by cantors, is much fuller in conception, and it uses all the interpretative and emotional tools available to the singer. Usually, the recitative style is used for emotionally intense textual material; it is also the opportunity for the cantor to show all his musical and expressive skills.

These three styles can be loosely but instructively compared with the three kinds of singing which make up eighteenth century Italian opera (e.g., Mozart.) Davening style is like the recitative secco ("dry recitative") which advances the plot. The "sung" style of cantorial music is similar to the recitativo accompagnato ("accompanied recitative",)[3] used for "rapid changes of emotion in the dialogue." The "recitative" in chazzanut is most like the arioso, a "type of melody which was neither so rhythmically free as the recitative nor so regular as the aria, but stood somewhere between the two."[4]

In addition to these styles are the congregational melodies which invite participation. Frequently, these

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[3] It should be noted that cantorial music is not accompanied by instruments in the worship service. But choral accompaniment often gives the same general impression as does the orchestral accompaniment in opera. When the music is part of a concert performance, it is accompanied. In any case, it is the vocal approach which is at issue here, not an actual accompaniment.

[4] Donald Jay Grout, A History of Western Music, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 313.

tunes have little to recommend them in musical terms except that they are known or easily learned by congregants.

Traditional cantorial singing style brings a certain vocal approach to each of these styles. At its best, it can be wonderful. But there is a tendency towards abuses in all these styles. The davening style can sometimes be mumbled or almost glossed over by traditional cantors, since the congregants have the text in front of them and should theoretically be following it. The "sung" style is often covered by cantorial ornamentation, to the point where the underlying tunes are obscured. And the "recitatives", in addition to being overly bedecked by obscuring ornaments, are often "belted out" in a quasi-operatic style that advances neither the prayer nor the musical values.

Avery brings to this music a meticulous concern for textual and musical values and a crystalline musical style. Saralee Avery, Cantor Avery's wife and a fine singer in her own right, remembers hearing him sing cantorial music very early in his career. "It occurred to me that while he was trained in chazzones as a traditional chazzan, you know, with all that that implied, with the dreydlach [intricate ornamentation] and whatever, his musical instinct led him to carry over into his davening the kind of clear musicality that one in many cases does not find in traditional chazzones. . . ."[6] Cantor Richard Botton, who studied with

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[6] Interview with Saralee Avery, January 19, 1990.

Avery at the School of Sacred Music, was influenced by Avery's singing while still a student. This influence came through Avery's singing itself, "by what he did in class. You have to understand that there are people who may not feel that his kind of chazzanut represents traditional chazzanut, there are traditional chazzanim who say that to me, you know, it's too -- musical, you know, there's not enough neshama ["soul"] there, but you listen to Larry Avery, you know that there's neshama there . . . if you listen to some of the Peerce recordings of chazzanut, you'll hear some of what Larry does."[6]

The way Avery approaches a piece of cantorial music can be seen in the way he teaches it. Here he is teaching a piece of David Roitman's, Ahavat Olam, to a group of cantors: "You have to hear the trill. . . . I really do not believe in the theory that says you go like a pianist in some of the embellishments we've seen here . . . I think you have to hear, this is a big thing with me, about being able to hear the notes, to imagine the notes before you do them. . . . [I]f you imagine them correctly, they're going to come out."[7] It is this attention to detail, imagining every note and executing it over and over until it is perfect, that gives Avery's singing its crystalline quality. Imagining

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[6] Interview with Richard Botton, January 22, 1990.

[7] Lecture given by Lawrence Avery at the 1988 Cantors Assembly Convention, The Concord Hotel, Kiamesha Lake, New York. [Transcribed from tape.]

the notes is only part of the story, of course; one has to be able to sing them. Avery's exceptional vocal and expressive gifts are what enable him to do what he does so well. In his teaching, one hears that each time Avery demonstrates something, that demonstration is somehow exceptional, a bit of fioritura or an embellishment perfectly executed, and frequently repeated, exactly as before, and each time sounding spontaneous and genuine. It is almost athletic, like an olympic figure skater practicing the same figure again and again.

In terms of repertoire, the traditional cantor in Europe generally acquired his material through apprenticeship as a meshorer accompanying a senior cantor, before striking out on his own. In America, things were different; it was possible to purchase an entire repertoire from a teacher, and this Avery did. But Avery's repertoire is much richer than any one source could supply. His sources include his father's nusach and tunes, Young Israel melodies, the repertoire purchased from Shimon Reizin, the repertoire learned while a student at the School of Sacred Music (largely that of Moshe Ganchoff, Israel Alter and Adolph Katchko,) and a variety of materials that came into the collection of the library of the School of Sacred Music. Avery took these sources and edited them to suit his own musical taste and skills and the realities of American congregational life.

Avery's nusach is basically what he learned from Reizin, refined and enriched by all the material he has encountered since then. For example, the School of Sacred Music uses a weekday nusach that was written down by Avery. Where is it from? "I never knew weekday nusach until I came to the School, and I studied it with Ephros himself. His sources were, if you analyze it carefully, Baer. . . . There was a morning service, an evening service; he never did a Mincha service. And then of course, when Volume V of the Cantorial Anthology came out, it was all in there. . . . I realized that was my only source, and when I took over the [administration of the] practicum, back in the old building, I scheduled a few practica of weekday nusach. . . . I transcribed [some material which may have come originally from Alter] and I edited it, I revised it, I put the whole thing together. Alter never did anything like that, and nobody else ever did anything like that. It's a nice Mincha, the one that . . . we use at the School."[*]

Avery has taught a generation of Reform cantors at the School of Sacred Music, bringing them his unique approach to cantorial music. Cantor Richard Botton recalls that Avery was very organized, that he used, for instance, nusach charts[°] showing pausal and concluding phrases, the Kaddish

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[*] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

[°] The charts were created by Baruch Cohon, who had been a student of A. Z. Idelsohn.

for various times. "He was an incredibly ordered human being, well disciplined, an exceedingly magnificent musician and singer, so as a result, he moved me to feel very positive about even traditional chazzanut, because he made it obvious that you could do traditional chazzanut and yet be a singer, that the two could meld."[10] For a student with a traditional background, Avery offered a sense of how to work on traditional material in terms of its musical values. The finished product "could only come once you worked through the music from the point of view of form, from the point of view of mastering the notes, and then going your own way, after that point."[11]

Though Avery's own practice is orthodox, his teaching at his Conservative synagogue has also carried a message of openness. One of his students who grew up in the Beth El community recalls that Avery, an observant Jew, was open to the Reform movement. "He would never look down. He always explained to me that he thought some of the finest students in the School were women, long before JTS [Jewish Theological Seminary] recognized women as cantors, he always trained the girls in the congregation. His ability to accept the Reform movement and to be involved, I think it enhanced all our educations and his congregants' experience;

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[10] Interview with Richard Botton, January 22, 1990.

[11] Interview with Israel Goldstein, January 22, 1990.

whether it was the music or the philosophy, we benefited from it."[12]

[12] Interview with Richard Katz, January 23, 1990.

II.

Avery Jacob Cohen was born on March 24, 1927, in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Louis Cohen and Rose Bienenstok Cohen. Both were American born, his father of Rumanian background and his mother of Galician background. As a child, he attended public school until the second grade, and then a yeshivah in Crown Heights. He entered the High School of Music and Art when he was thirteen and went to Juilliard after graduating from Music and Art. He joined the Navy in 1945, serving for about a year and a half. He was cantor in a synagogue in Rockaway Park for three years, starting in 1947, and during this time studied chazzanut with Shimon Reizen. He changed his name to Lawrence Avery in 1945. In 1950, while singing in the Juilliard opera theater, he met Saralee Liss, who was also singing in the Juilliard opera theater. They were married in 1951. In that year he became a student at the then three-year old School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and he also began serving as cantor of Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle, New York. The Averys have two children: Lisa Joy, born in 1957 and Adina Michal, born in 1961. While still a student at the School of Sacred Music, Avery began to be a teaching assistant, and upon completion of his studies, he continued to teach there. Avery continued to perform in opera and concerts during this

time, often in duet programs with his wife. Since then, his life has become more and more centered on his congregation and his teaching duties at the School of Sacred Music.

III.

Avery's earliest memory of music was singing at about four or five years of age. He remembers the excitement when his father put him on top of the Chevrolet coupe and he sang "Brother can you spare a dime?"[12] His father was a cantor by avocation who couldn't read a note, but had learned cantorial style by memorizing it from recordings. Avery's mother was a musician with good public school training. She had a habit of walking around singing songs in solfege. Avery recalls, "everybody in my father's family sang, everybody sang, they all loved singing, and my father made singing an avocation. My mother's family, no one was a professional musician, but her father was a, she said he was a chazzan. Either he was a ba'al tefillah for the High Holidays or he was a chazzan. He was a storekeeper, but he was a chazzan. And my mother sang, her sister sang, everybody sang."[13] Avery's voice developed at around age seven or eight, and he was asked to sing a lot. His father taught him how to harmonize in thirds as they walked to the synagogue. He could sing to "e" or "f", though he was an alto. When he was ten, a "good and dreadful" thing happened -- his parents thought that he could be another Bobby Breen.

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[12] Except where otherwise noted, for biograhical information, I am indebted to Lawrence Avery. Interviews of September 13 and 20, 1989, and February 18, 1990.

[13] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

(Bobby Breen had been a child star with a phenomenal reputation as a singer. He started out in a synagogue choir in Toronto at the age of seven, attracted the attention of musical connoisseurs and impressarios and made some films.)[14] Avery's parents took him out of school. For a year, he was dressed in cute outfits; he studied singing (with a retired Metropolitan Opera basso named Leon Rother,) drama, piano and Eurythmics. He learned a whole repertoire of songs and audition pieces including the Schubert Serenade, Die Forelle, and Viennese waltzes. Publicity photographs were taken and a recording was made. At the end of a year, the whole thing fizzled out. Avery was glad to get back to school. Later, at age eleven, he still had a foot in this world and he remembers taking the subway with Beverly Sills from Crown Heights to various children's shows that they both were in.

He had listened to opera from around the age of ten -- the Saturday broadcasts were a bone of contention with his father, who didn't want the radio turned on on Shabbat; the dispute was finally settled by leaving the radio on all Shabbat. He recalls hearing the broadcast of Bidu Sayao's debut in Manon.

His mother always encouraged his secular musical interests. When he was thirteen, she gave him the bar-

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[14] Nathan Stolnitz, Music in Jewish Life, Toronto, 1957, p. 45.

mitzvah gift of a seat at the Metropolitan Opera. (She later bought him another; Avery has kept those seats for forty-nine years.) He dreamed of an opera career.

When it was time to enter high school, Avery and his parents were left with two choices: Townsend Harris, which was a special school with requirements in math and science, or the High School of Music and Art. Avery didn't do particularly well on those science requirements, and so didn't get into Townsend Harris. He wanted to go to Music and Art. His father was against it, his mother approved; in the end, he went to Music & Art. He auditioned with a Bach 2-Part Invention and the Brahms Wiegenlied, and had no trouble getting in.

Music and Art was an enormous influence on him. It seemed like paradise. His friends' singing impressed him; they sang all sorts of wonderful songs. They had a chorus, and studied theory and voice. He sang in the senior chorus. At age fourteen he sang O du mein holder Abendstern, Eri tu, and Il balen, (all baritone arias, even though he sang tenor in the choir.) In four years, he learned repertoire in Italian, German and French. His ambition was to sing opera.

At the age of seventeen he sang the solo in George Kleinsinger's I Hear America Singing, which was cast by audition. This included a performance with the Goldman Band in Central Park and Avery received a review in the Herald Tribune -- ". . . fine young baritone."

During his high school years, Avery was a counsellor in "sleepaway" camps, where he accompanied shows and musical programs on the piano. He had learned to chord melodies both from his mother and while at school, but at camp he was forced to read a lot of music, to transpose, and to write out melodic lines and chord them.

Upon graduating from high school, he started private lessons with Grace Leslie at the Henry Street Settlement Music School. But he wanted to go to Juilliard, which upset Grace Leslie, who was insulted by this apparent dissatisfaction with her teaching. She insisted that he give a recital at Henry Street, to which about twelve people came, mostly family. Avery recalls that it was a big success. He applied to Juilliard and was accepted. His first voice teacher there was George Britton, who had had a mediocre career and had nothing to teach Avery.

Later, he began to study voice with Rene Maison, who had been a primo tenore at the Metropolitan Opera in the late 1930's. He encouraged Avery toward the use of mezzo-voce and the singing of light French repertoire, like "Le Reve" from Massanet's Manon. Avery took repertoire classes with Sergius Kagen, who had a great influence on him. Kagen, a pianist, had accompanied Marcella Sembrich and other fine singers. According to composer Robert Starer, who worked closely with him, Kagen's entire life was devoted to vocal music. Kagen helped Starer to understand how

language influences and shapes music; he was an important influence on a generation of accompanists and singers.[15] It meant a great deal when Avery was accepted into Kagen's studio, with the comment, "Maybe next year you'll try the Naumburg [competition]."

Kagen helped him by showing him why his singing lacked color and why the phrases didn't take shape. He taught him that "a lot of vocal technique was phony, and that many vocal problems could be solved through musical means, through musical paths, and that if one stopped thinking about the physical things that happen when you sing, and thought [instead] about the musical gestures, that things would happen."[16] Kagen also had many ideas about the singing of florid music. He felt that one had to know exactly what one was doing while singing florid music, that it could not be done "just by ear." He believed strongly in the power of the singer to imagine the musical results he wanted. For Avery, this idea has been very important, although it wasn't able to give him everything he wanted in his singing. "Mine has been a limited voice, limited in range and limited in volume, and no amount of wanting is going to give me a blazing B flat [like] Pavarotti. By the same token, these ideas of his have helped me to sing

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[15] Robert Starer, Continuo, (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 71, 76-77.

[16] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

beautifully on pitch. . . . The whole concept of visualizing, of thinking ahead, is terribly important, and when I'm doing that, I'm "on". Kagen was someone who said, you've got to think when you sing, but you don't think vocalism, you think the musical idea, you think the phrase, you think the gesture, you think the words. And that's what singing is all about."[17] Kagen encouraged Avery to use the "mixed voice" and helped him to find repertoire, like Faure and Debussy, that used it. "There's a song called "L'ombre des arbres" from Ariettes Oublies or one of those cycles -- great song -- that was my pay-off song at auditions."[18]

Kagen encouraged Avery, pushing him into competitions which he won. He also had many ideas about programming which have influenced Avery. Under Kagen's teaching, Avery's musical taste matured. "He refined my feelings about certain kinds of music. So I grew to understand, love, and appreciate and perform the songs of Hugo Wolf, which . . . never [had been] part of my life."[19]

Most important was the idea that one doesn't sing notes but phrases, that the music moves and that upbeats must be treated like upbeats and downbeats like downbeats. "He made music come alive, and that's what I try to do. . . ."[20]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

Avery auditioned for the Juilliard Opera Theater, and was accepted. There he had musical coaching, acting and movement as well as performing experience. He did the part of Jacquino in Fidelio, Basilio in The Marriage of Figaro and the Beggar in The Beggar's Opera. In the summer of 1950 he went to Tanglewood, performing with Leontyne Price, among others. His first professional engagement was with the Little Orchestra Society, under the direction of Thomas Scherman, in De Falla's opera Maestro Pedro's Puppet Show. After Juilliard, he won the National Music League Competition, and as a result of this, he obtained professional management. This brought him opportunities to perform concerts and oratorio.

After his marriage, he and his wife explored the possibility of pursuing their careers in Europe. In those days it was considered necessary to do this to gain sufficient experience. They went to Thea Dispeker, a well-known manager. She offered them a year of contracts in provincial opera houses all over Europe.

Up to this time, Avery had been able to steer his secular music career clear of major conflicts with his religious upbringing. He would continue to perform in secular music over the next decade, but the direction of his life was about to change, and his enormous musical gifts turned towards the cantorate. This change was far from sudden; it reflected the other major musical influence in his life.

IV.

Avery's father loved chazzanut. He was himself a chazzan, though essentially untutored. Avery recalls that his father was one of the founders of the Young Israel movement. He served as cantor of a synagogue for the High Holidays, and brought Avery along to sing with him and help out generally. For his bar mitzvah, Avery davened Shacharit, Musaf and did the haftara (originally he learned the wrong one; it was one of the Shabbatot before Pesach, so he had to learn another one in two weeks.)

His father wanted him to study chazzanut. He found him a teacher, Shimon Raizen, who wrote music for cantors. Many cantors born in the twenties and thirties studied in this way, according to Mark Slobin. Such cantors "describe . . . the way they were trained in an unofficial, oral tradition that combined family influences, learning by osmosis from attending a wide variety of services, and a paid apprenticeship -- mostly just a set of lessons and choral back-up work -- with a European-born master hazzan-teacher."[21] Raizen's teaching method was this: first, you settled on a price; in Avery's case, he remembers, it was

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[21] Mark Slobin, Chosen Voices (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p. 71.

$600.[22] For this money, you got a whole year's repertoire, hand-written. Raizen would write out music and words and say, "go home and learn it." Raizen was "one of the most important teachers of the day."[23] In 1946, when his father would have been about forty-six and Avery about nineteen, his father gave him the job he had had as part-time cantor in a congregation in Rockaway Park. Avery went there every weekend for three years, though his heart was not really in it.

The Young Israel movement was a great influence on Avery. Avery recalls that his father was important in the creation of the Young Israel movement, and until his teens, Avery himself belonged to it. Young Israel was orthodox but not unreasonably observant. Lay people were encouraged to daven; they had no professional chazzan. When he was thirteen, it was understood that Avery would daven in the teen group, which was something that almost everyone wanted to do. There were many congregational tunes, generally in the proper nusach. When Avery started to study chazzanut at age 19, he was asked to officiate at the overflow service for the High Holidays at the Young Israel synagogue. It was his first appearance as a professional cantor.

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[22] Interview with Lawrence Avery, September 13, 1989. (In Chosen Voices, he recalls having paid $750 for this service.)

[23] Slobin, Chosen Voices, p. 72.

During those years, Avery didn't know anything about Jewish musicology or any systematic approach to nusach. Even when studying with Raizen, he just bought the sheets of Raizen's music and learned them. But Young Israel strengthened Avery's religious practice and gave him an opportunity to daven, even before he really knew what davening was.

In 1951 Avery was ripe for the next big step in his life, but it would not have been clear to anyone at the time just what that step would be. True, he was an orthodox Jew who was more than minimally trained in chazzanut. But he was also a performer with a great love of opera, he was married to an opera singer, he was Juilliard trained, he had professional management, and he seemed to be at the beginning of a promising opera and concert career. Mrs. Avery recalls that during this period, they heard Moshe Ganchoff in concert. They were very taken with his phrasing and swept away by his sensitivity. While singing at Tanglewood, Avery met a friend who knew about the School of Sacred Music. He recommended that Avery study there. They found out that Moshe Ganchoff was on the faculty, and Mrs. Avery said, "you know, can't hurt."[24] At the time, Avery seems to have thought of cantorial work as a sideline, a way to make some extra money. But although he had a deep background in chazzanut already, he knew that there were

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[24] Interview with Saralee Avery, January 19, 1990.

things he needed to learn, and that seems to be what brought him to the School.

Avery was already enrolled at the School when Mrs. Avery's voice teacher sent them to Thea Dispeker. They were considering whether to accept her offer to set up for them the obligatory performance tour in Europe, when the registrar of the School of Sacred Music, Fritzi Abrams, asked Avery if he wanted to audition for the cantorial position at Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle. He said that he did. The couple went out to New Rochelle, where he davened for them, and both were interviewed; Avery was offered the position on the spot. They were given a weekend to decide. "We agonized over it for a little while, but not very long. I . . . knew that Avery's life was wrapped up in his religion, in his davening, those were all very important things to him, and his family."[28]

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[28] Ibid.

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Avery's father had been serving as the cantor of congregation Ohev Zedek in Rockaway Park. In 1947, his father gave him that position. He went there every weekend for three years. Mrs. Avery recalls hearing him there. "I remember saying to him, 'You know, you really don't belong in this synagogue' because there was a . . . kind of crystal approach, a refined approach if you want to call it that, which was different from other traditional chazzonim whom I had heard."[28] Avery was not happy with the work he was doing at Ohev Zedek; he felt he was not growing in the job. It was soon after this that he started at the School of Sacred Music. Not long thereafter, he accepted the position of cantor of Beth El Synagogue of New Rochelle.

Avery feels that he was an attractive candidate for Beth El Synagogue because of his orthodox background (the rabbi of the congregation at that time was orthodox) and because his Young Israel background inclined him toward congregational participation. There was an elderly shammes working at Beth El, and Avery began teaching bar mitzvah students to assist the shammes. At the beginning, he was still a student, taking the train into Manhattan four days a week, and so he didn't do much besides davening and bar mitzvah training. But he decided that in preparing the bar

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[28] Ibid.

mitzvah students, he would teach them cantillation, which the shammes did not do. He also started making a recording for every child, which in those days meant putting the portion on reel-to-reel tape and having a studio transfer it to a disk. The congregation also wanted him to do programs for the sisterhood and other functions. He enjoyed this, and it had the added dividend that he was able to sing these programs with his wife, who was still then a student at the Juilliard. He recalls, "once we did a program that was rather questionable, because it was full of love songs, and there we were doing it in the synagogue, and there were those who said they felt it wasn't proper to be doing such a romantic schtik in the synagogue, on the pulpit."[27] The programming opportunities increased, and included Jewish Music Month programming, "Purim Frolics," and such things. It turned out to be a major aspect of the job, which Avery loved. "I love programming, I love inventing, putting together. A lot of it is a carryover from what I learned from Kagen. Kagen always said, you have to be skillful about that, you have to balance a program, you have to pick light things and heavy things and funny things, serious things. . . . It was great fun. It was always great pressure as well, but after a while they began to expect a Channukah program, they began to expect a Purim program, they expected us to perform at the Dinner Dance . . . More

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[27] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

often than not, we would do them together, Sara was in great voice, and we would find a local accompanist."[28]

As the congregation began to grow, the bar mitzvah load increased, and in addition, Avery offered to teach music two afternoons a week. It was a good way to reach children before their bar mitzvah; he got to know the them at an early age. Originally, Avery taught in a room with a piano and an overhead projector. Since the advent of the portable keyboard, he finds this part of his duties much easier, since it is possible to carry the keyboard to the classroom instead of bringing the students to the room with the piano. This minimizes class disruption. The curriculum he teaches has moved more and more toward synagogue melodies and nusach, at the request of the teachers and principal. The material he teaches comes "either from my head or from the nuschaot that I've always lived with and taught. . . . I can arrive at a class and easily do twenty minutes, ranging from the Birkat Hamazon to pop songs, to chassidic melodies, and in the end hopefully they come away with a reasonable curriculum."[29]

In the sixties, Avery decided to have a choral group in the Hebrew School. It had its ups and downs, but it enabled him to find talented children, those who might play an instrument or could sing.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

Avery brought to his singing of the services the same enthusiasm he brought to all his singing. Cantor Israel Goldstein, who served as Avery's "overflow" cantor for the High Holidays for two years, feels "that for him every Shabbes is like he's doing it for the first time; it's a wonderful feeling to have, he's not jaded. The thing that I found strange was that in a synagogue that has resources, he was always content to go through the entire year . . . a capella with absolutely no choir."

Avery did try to institute an adult choir for services. Here, it was the orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Golovensky, who was reluctant. "He said, no choir, never -- I don't want a choir. . . . I once challenged him, what if it was an all-male choir? He said, who will conduct it? I said, we'll get a guy. He said, is he shomer shabbas? Where would he come from? He would travel to the synagogue?" Avery himself did not want to both sing and conduct the choir. In that case, the rabbi said, ". . . 'we don't need it.' He was also afraid that if we did have a choir, it would become a mixed choir."[30] So there never was a choir for services, and to this day, Avery does even the High Holidays unassisted by a choir.

He did have a mixed choir called the "Beth El Chorale." They were never allowed to perform at a service, but they did programs, and Avery gave them a wide range of

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[30] Ibid.

repertoire, music by Freed and Piket, for instance. They did "Va, pensiero" from Nabucco, and excerpts from Judas Maccabeus. Avery recalls, "and then suddenly one year, nobody showed up any more . . . this one took a job and that one moved . . . and it never came back. . . ."[31]

His relationship with the children of the congregation is illustrated by the recollection of one of his students there, Richard Katz.

> As I got a little older, I started singing with the Hebrew School. One day Cantor Avery said something about, was that comfortable [to sing], and I said something like, well why don't you try it in C major, and he stopped in his tracks. I didn't realize I'd said anything worth noticing, and Cantor Avery started to play little games on the piano, he would say, what note am I playing and I'd tell him, and things like that -- he saw in me some sort of potential musicianship, and from then on we developed a special relationship, he was always like a second father to me. . . . For my Bar-Mitzvah . . . Cantor Avery sat me down and said, "This is the right way to do it and I want you to do it the right way, and you'll learn it the right way once and you'll know it the rest of your life" and he sat me down and, of course, . . . he had everything written out in music, which for me was a cinch . . . and he taught me to daven Shacharit. One thing that was true when I was a kid and I see it with the Bar and Bat Mitzvah kids now, is that he takes us very seriously, invests a lot into all of us, it was more than an adult-child relationship, it was more than the relationship you have with your teacher, . . . everybody became incredibly close with him, he was your friend . . . and he really put everything he had into you.[32]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Interview with Richard Katz, January 23, 1990.

VI.

It seems to have been Moshe Ganchoff that brought Avery to the School of Sacred Music. Avery heard Ganchoff in concert and was very impressed with him. At the same time, he knew that there was much he could learn from him. So when he discovered that Ganchoff was teaching at the School of Sacred Music, it was a natural move to go there. Once he was there, opportunities opened up for him. It happened that Ganchoff, "who didn't like to sing in the mornings, picked students to demonstrate to the class, so [Avery] got some sort of a fellowship, and in fact, [he was] very organized, so he used to run the class."[33] Avery was ready to graduate, but he hadn't taken Isadore Freed's class in modal harmony. Although Avery felt that accompanying Ganchoff's classes had already taught him most of what this class covered, Freed wouldn't let him graduate without actually taking the course, so he came back to take it. At that time, both Ephros and Ganchoff were unwell, so Avery ended up coaching five students and teaching courses in nusach and Shabbat Workshop. After he graduated, he continued teaching a workshop and coaching.

During the years he has taught at the School of Sacred Music, Avery has been very active, not only teaching but serving on committees and running projects, and always in

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[33] Interview with Ben Belfer, January 31, 1990.

the midst of what was going on. He has brought in faculty members (including the current director, Cantor Israel Goldstein) and is administrator for the practica, the student performance requirement.

If there is one outstanding characteristic of Avery's teaching, it is his enthusiasm for the material, for the performances of the students, and their vocal progress. Cantor Israel Goldstein recalls that "the thing that I remember most, as far as his teaching was concerned, was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for the material. Nothing was too mundane to be taken seriously, nothing was too frivolous to be taken seriously, everything was given importance, he was always a first-rate pedagog."[34] For Goldstein, who had grown up in a cantorial family, this was the first time he had learned how to approach and prepare the performance of the cantorial material he had always heard, the "process" as opposed to the "product." That was when he understood that the finished product he heard from his father and other cantors was not something that just happened, but was the result of mastering the notes, form, and style of a piece and only then bringing one's personal expression to it.

One of the outstanding features of Avery's method of teaching is his use of the piano as a teaching tool. He almost always accompanies the material, even when it is

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[34] Interview with Israel Goldstein, January 22, 1990.

music intended for a capella performance in the synagogue. For many students, the result is that when they perform the music without accompaniment, they remember the harmonies that Avery provided in the classroom, which serve as an underpinning to the tune. This makes it easier to remember the tune and easier to sing it in such a way that its harmonic structure is clearly heard. The stylistic approach to a piece can also be communicated through the accompaniment. Cantor Benjie-Ellen Schiller recalls walking past Cantor Avery's classroom and hearing him play an introduction to a V'shamru; "how he played the introduction was how the student began to sing it."[35]

In contrast, the majority the classroom work in nusach at the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary is not accompanied. There, piano is used more for melodic illustration, and in a more limited way in terms of harmonic support.[36]

With his dual background in chazzanut and classical music, Avery is able to teach the wide range of students who come to the School. "I don't think that somebody . . . could teach our students about traditional chazzanut without a full sense of the musical world. I believe that you can't build . . . a methodology of teaching chazzanut and how to

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[35] Interview with Benjie-Ellen Schiller, February 6, 1990.

[36] Interview with Max Wohlberg, January 16, 1990.

apply it, especially how to apply it to the Reform synagogue, without the tremendous experience and knowledge of the classics, of opera, of oratorio, of art song; this is indispensible. To a great extent, most of our faculty have that, but he's rather extraordinary in that area."[37]

The methodology of teaching chazzanut that Cantor Goldstein refers to is something that stands out in Avery's teaching. Cantor Richard Botton recalls, "Avery had the ability to synthesize the whole business, and make it clear to other people, he was able to put it down and say, 'here's what it is' plain and simple, this is a pausal phrase, this is a concluding phrase . . . [it was] very clear." There was another aspect to Avery's teaching that Cantor Botton recalls: "When you would sing for him, he would have respect for you, (sometimes he didn't have respect for someone, with Larry if he didn't you would know it right away,) but if he . . . respected you and you would sing something for him in a class, it was really kind of a master class, because he'd respect what you did but make some suggestions."[38] This way of conducting a class on the highest level, as if it were a master class, is another special feature of Avery's teaching.

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[37] Interview with Israel Goldstein, January 22, 1990.

[38] Interview with Richard Botton, January 22, 1990.

The nusach that Avery teaches comes mostly from two sources, the nusach of Adolph Katchko[39] and that of Israel Alter,[40] enriched by many individual pieces from the work of other cantors. Nusach is, of course, a largely improvisational art which is governed by law and custom relating to the liturgy It is important for the student to learn to move freely within the confines of these rules. The approach of the School of Sacred Music is to move from the specific to the general. The student first learns the material for a particular rubric (Kabbalat Shabbat, for instance) from Alter and Katchko. Then the music is set aside, and the student learns to chant directly from the Hebrew text, becoming independent of what is really an imprecise notation. As the structure of that particular nusach is internalized, it becomes possible for the student to incorporate the work of other composers or to improvise freely within the nusach. Some students come to the School with a background in traditional nusach, and their progress is guided so as to use what they know in the most authentic and musically creative way. All students are required to perform in practica (which Avery assigns) twice a year; one of those a performance of a particular traditional nusach

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[39] Adolph Katchko, A Thesaurus of Cantorial Liturgy, 3 Volumes, (New York: The Sacred Music Press, 1986).

[40] Israel Alter, The Sabbath Service, (New York: Cantors Assembly of America, 1968); The Festival Service, (New York: Cantors Assembly of America, 1969); The High Holy Day Service, (New York: Cantors Assembly of America, 1971).

(for instance, a student might be assigned to do the Musaf service for Shabbat with Rosh Chodesh blessings.) It is in the context of these performances that the student can branch out into new material, depending on the background and interests of the student.

By way of comparison, nusach is taught very differently at the Cantors Institute. According to Cantor Max Wohlberg, "we do the reverse; we start out with the basic nusach, which I write out in notes and sing for them and show them what it is and then we take various composers, we study their works where we identify, we recognize the nusach we have learned."[41] Both methods, that of the Cantors Institute and that of the School of Sacred Music, apparently work well in training cantors. What it is interesting is that Avery's method appears to be similar to the way repertoire is taught in the classical world, where one learns specific pieces and perfects them, rather than learning a style in terms of its principles, and then applying those principles to specific musical pieces.

The sources taught at the Cantors Institute appear to be broader than those of the School of Sacred Music. Because students at the Cantors Institute attend for five years as opposed to four at the School of Sacred Music, Cantor Wohlberg is able to give more of a sense of the evolution of nusach, from the earliest available volumes.

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[41] Interview with Max Wohlberg, January 16, 1990.

According to Cantor Wohlberg, the basic text of the Cantors Institute is Baer's Baal Tefillah (first published in 1877,) though Katchko and Alter are also used, in addition to many others.

Although the bulk of the nusach taught at the School of Sacred Music is from Katchko and Alter, it is enriched by many individual pieces from other sources. Frequently these sources are notated in Cantor Avery's distinctive hand, revised from materials which in some cases he brought to the School's collection. And in elective courses, he is able to teach a wider repertoire than the curriculum requires.

When Avery came to the School of Sacred Music, it was the only place to learn how to be a cantor. At that time, many of the students were of a traditional inclination and serving traditional pulpits. In the 1950's, the Orthodox and Conservative movements both founded cantorial training schools. Yet Avery remained at the School of Sacred Music, never teaching at other institutions. This appears to be the result of a deep personal loyalty to the School, and a committment to helping the School maintain its standards and to stay on an even keel. It is impossible to say what in what directions the School might have gone were it not for Avery; the Reform movement has been and continues to absorb a wide range of traditional and non-traditional influences. According to Cantor Goldstein, director of the School, the deep respect in which Avery is held has helped to anchor the

School's position as an institution primarily for training cantors and, as many consider it, the primary institution for training cantors. In the words of Dr. Paul Steinberg, a past director of the School, "He's been a rock, an anchor; helped give the School stability and direction."[42]

The following example of Avery's teaching style demonstrates something of his standards, and also something of his influence on the cantorial world.

> You ready, Benny? [Benny sings] That's what we would call 'interesting'. [laughter] ["He wants to sound like a chazzan!"] That's a good comment, Jack -- I'd like it to sound more like the bel canto singers that we all imagine we are [laughter] . . . [another cantor tries] That's not right. Let me tell you . . . we arrive at what we think is the thing, so we say, it's good enough, and it really is not good enough. Especially when you're with somebody like me, because I'm very demanding, and I'm really nutty about things like that. I want to hear all the notes. The first step is, you must analyze the phrase. You've got to know how many notes there are in the phrase [and] in each group. . . . when I see a triplet I want to hear a triplet, and when I see a group of four I want to hear a group of four . . . because it makes all these phrases more effective.[43]

Cantor Helene Reps recalls coaching with Avery in her last year as a student at the School. As a well-trained musician, she didn't need to struggle with every note, and could have been tempted to "just read it off and say, well, I've got that and what's next?" But Avery "goes over and over and polishes and thinks and analyzes. He struggles

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[42] Interview with Paul M. Steinberg, January 29, 1990.

[43] Lawrence Avery, 1988 Cantors Assembly Lecture

with every phrase. I found that a very important model for my own experience and my own preparation. If he, who can do it so well without even thinking about it, still studies, studies, studies . . . [I know that] he really cares. That's an influence on my life."[44]

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[44] Interview with Helene Reps, February 6, 1990.

VII.

On January 17, 1989, the School of Sacred Music hosted its annual Alumni Day. Cantor Lawrence Avery was honored at this event. His compositions were performed and he taught a master class to the cantors who were present. Avery gathered together materials which were presented to those who attended the Alumni Day. The booklet[45] included compositions by cantors such as Glantz, Ganchoff and Roitman, transcriptions by Avery of pieces of chazzanut, Israeli songs, and a number of Avery's own compositions, some arranged by others and some arranged by Avery himself. Included is a transcription of an Ahavat Olam by David Roitman, from 1930.[46] Avery has spoken about his treatment of this piece: "I must confess to the following: I have really edited the piece. The piece was probably about 32 measures longer . . . some of the unbelievable coloratura passages I've wiped out; I've adjusted the words as well as I could, because originally he says, "Ahavas Olom, Bes Yisroel, Amcho Ohavto; all the wrong accents, but of course that was something of another era. And of course I've transposed the piece, I've made it in a kind of accessible

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[45] Lawrence Avery, Music Resource Booklet for S.S.M. Alumni Day, (Unpublished booklet, 1989).

[46] The piece is in the distinctive calligraphy that has characterized Avery's manuscripts since he took a course in calligraphy at Hebrew Union College in the mid-1980's.

key, because the original of this was I think about four tones higher; you know, Roitman had that stratospheric kind of lyrico-leggiero tenor, he could just pop out high d's and high e flats whenever he wanted to; he probably spoke on high g's, like Nicolai Gedda, something like that."[47] All Avery's changes are intended, it is clear, to make the piece accessible, but still within the context of Roitman's intentions. For instance, the 32 bars that Avery has excised represent the time considerations of the past, where congregants would expect a much longer service than they do now. The sort of coloratura passages that Avery refers to were the hallmark of a different generation of chazzanut; in our time, the singing of lengthy recitatives in the synagogue has become a rarity. The change to Sephardic Hebrew transliteration and the adjustment of the text accents also make the piece usable by modern Conservative and Reform cantors. In its original form, the piece would be of interest only to a scholar; Avery's version will be used by cantors and heard in synagogues throughout the Jewish world.

Among the various musical compositions to be found in this little collection is a chart of the cantillation melodies for the Book of Ruth, the Book of Kohelet, and the Song of Songs. Cantillation, which he studied with A. W. Binder, has been an important compositional tool for Avery;

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[47] Lawrence Avery, 1988 Cantors Assembly lecture.

in his settings of texts from Song of Songs, for example, the cantillation melodies are noticeable, sometimes very prominently. He also feels that it is important to teach cantillation to congregants. Binder "was a real demon when it came to getting the te'amim right, and the great labor of love in his life was the little book that he published called Biblical Chant." After Binder died, Avery took over the teaching of cantillation. Speaking to a group of cantors, he said "I feel very strongly that we . . . all of us, should know our te'amim better than we know them, and that we should use the most correct, the most complete systems, that we should not be afraid to teach an elaborate system to our children and to our balabatim and this has really worked for me over the years."[48] Avery uses cantillation as a programming tool as well; a program of sophisticated music can be effectively broken up with inclusion of a text chanted simply in the proper cantillation. Programming like this for his synagogue also educates the congregation to an appreciation of the use of cantillation in his compositions.

Among the transcriptions in the booklet is a simple, chant-like setting of Avadim Hayinu, which Avery calls a "traditional Seder chant." This is one of the Seder tunes he recalls from childhood, here rendered in great detail, with every accent and crescendo clearly indicated.

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[48] Lawrence Avery, 1988 Cantors Assembly Lecture

An interesting piece which Avery put in this booklet is a setting of the text Ribono Shel Olam. The text comes from the the prayer book of the Reform movement, Gates of Prayer,[49] pages 679-80, which Avery indicates on the manuscript. Avery has set a number of texts from the Gates of Prayer. This gives cantors who are serving in Reform synagogues a chance to do chazzanut using non-traditional texts which are found in the Reform prayer book. Ribono Shel Olam is in a cantorial style, without accompaniment, though the harmonies are indicated.

Avery likes setting texts which have not been frequently set by other composers. "I like the idea of taking a text that nobody has touched; that's why I did the Rabbi Tarphon thing, I mean, I found that text, I said, wow, this is a wonderful text, this grabs me. What's the point of writing another Omar Rabbi Elozor, what's the point of writing another Ahavat Olam . . . You know how many Ahavat Olam's there are, and when you write something that somebody else has done before, you're obviously going to be influenced by it. . . ."[50]

In addition to biblical and prayer book texts, Avery has set the poetry of the Israeli poet Rachel, like Balaila Ba Hamevaser, and texts by Holocaust poets, like I'd like to

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[49] Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975).

[50] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

Go Away Alone, by A. Sinkova, from the collection I Never Saw Another Butterfly.

In the Alumni Day collection is an arrangement of a setting of the 23rd Psalm by Max Wohlberg. Avery was part of the preliminary editorial staff of the Chazzan's Manual. Cantor Wohlberg had submitted this 23rd Psalm setting; in the end it did not find its way into the collection. Avery liked it and put a simple setting to it. Sometime later, he thought to himself that one could go a step further and set the conventional translation of the Psalm. In the meantime, his daughter was studying singing and entered a competition wherein one of the requirements was a religious piece in English. "So I thought, wow, I'll translate Chazzan Wohlberg's piece and let's see if it works, and it worked very well, and these people at New Rochelle High School heard real nusach sung in English and . . . it works perfectly."[61]

Avery is particularly fond of the David Roitman material in the School's collection, partly because he brought it to the School. He had been introduced to Roitman's son Leo, and they became friends. He knew that there was a tie between Ganchoff and Roitman -- Ganchoff adored Rpoitman, and actually succeeded Roitman in the same synagogue. First, Leo Roitman allowed Avery to tape a lot of old 78 rpm recordings that he had. Then he said,

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[61] Lawrence Avery, 1988 Cantors Assembly lecture.

if you really care about this, I'll let you see the manuscripts. And he took out 265 pages of hand-written manuscripts that wisely Roitman himself, . . . when he was in his late 50's, decided to write everything down. Which included a certain amount of just plain old nusach. . . . Because Leo saw that Sara and I were very enthusiastic and very excited . . . [he] gave me the manuscripts and said I could do with them as I liked. I said I'd like to find a library for them and perhaps even publish them. He said, what a wonderful idea -- poppa will get published . . . and he contributed the whole collection to HUC. . . . I published one booklet of a half a dozen or so recitatives, and we have the collection. . . . Where I feel that students can either take it or understand it or perform it properly, I might revise a piece of nusach and give it to them.[52]

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[52] Interview with Lawrence Avery, February 18, 1990.

VIII.

As one of the most influential teachers of cantors at the School of Sacred Music, Lawrence Avery has occupied a pivotal position in the evolution of music in the Reform movement during a volatile period. There have been many trends in the Reform cantorate during the last two decades -- the acceptance of women in the cantorate, the guitar-accompanied synagogue service, the rise of the soft-rock style of "NFTY" music and its entry into the synagogue, "folk-rock" services, the Chavurah movement and its (often) lay-led services -- all these and more have made their presence felt at the School of Sacred Music. One of these trends is the increased presence of "NFTY" or so-called "new trend" music in the Reform synagogue. This music was "largely a product of the UAHC camps and the youth groups of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). The new songs show the influence of American rock and folk songs and popular Israeli melodies. Accompanied by guitar, they lend themselves to group participation."[83] This music entered the Reform synagogue through rabbis and cantors who were products of the youth movement. Cantor Jeffrey Klepper, for instance, employed this new musical style to "change the cathedral-like aura in Reform synagogues by

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[83] Elli C. Galed, "Synagogue Music Controversy," Reform Judaism, Vol. 9, No. 5 June, 1981 p. 1.

using the guitar as a means to create a feeling of intimacy during services."[54] There have been many objections to the adoption of this style of music largely on the grounds that "the new songs do not maintain high enough standards and should not be used in the synagogue."[55] Whatever its quality in musical terms, this music presents a homogenized and impoverished Jewish musical language. Though it has shaken up the musical life of the Reform synagogue in an important and potentially positive way, it speaks a musical language which is rooted neither in a Jewish vision of worship nor in a respect for text. Its popularity arose in part out of a dissatisfaction with the music that was prevalent in Reform synagogues through the mid-1970's. Lawrence Hoffman, one of the most thoughtful critics of Reform liturgy, sees in the older music of the Reform synagogue something that "pointed to God in the distance, with masterful choirs singing four-part harmony composed in a key marked 'angels only.'"[56] For Hoffman, such "new trend" music represents the "emergence of a distinctively North American sound;"[57] he calls for "new music that will

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Lawrence Hoffman, The Art of Public Prayer (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988) p. 172.

[57] Lawrence Hoffman, "Beyond the Cat Stand," Reform Judaism, Vol. 18 No. 3, (Spring 1990), p. 25.

engage worshippers, as music composed with the European aesthetic in mind does not."[88]

At stake here seems to be the very survival of the Reform movement on the one hand, and the survival of a recognizably Jewish music within that movement on the other. Critics like Hoffman and Klepper say that the movement cannot survive with the music that brought it to the 1970's, that declining membership in Reform synagogues and declining participation in prayer among those who remain can be in part attributed to music which is the domain of the expert, that is, the cantor. Some Reform cantors are concerned that the changes being put forward will result in a music which is no more Jewish in character or musical content than the "soft rock" of the 70's.

Participation has always been but one aspect of synagogue music, which has three main elements: participation, presentation, and improvisation. "Participation refers here to music/services in which the hazzan shares the responsibilities with the congregants; presentation to preset services, ranging from classic composition through trendy pop-based events; and improvisation to those moments of the service when the hazzan feels most ties to the ancient tradition of hazzanut

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[88] Ibid., p. 27.

and fewest constraints on creativity."[59] Among Reform congregations, as we have seen, there is a strong movement to increase the participation of the congregants and to cut back the contribution of the cantor; that is, to increase the participation at the expense of presentation and improvisation.[60] In the settings which are the Reform movement's main participatory material, sensitivity to text is often subservient to the rhythmic features of the music. Cantors feel threatened by this trend; they often see in it a challenge to their mission to convey and illuminate the text and create a musical atmosphere appropriate to prayer. According to Slobin, cantors, in responding to this challenge, "return repeatedly to the . . . notion of 'balance' to indicate their attempt at finding the middle road between cantorial and congregational domination. . . ."[61] It is at this balancing point between participation, presentation, and improvisation, that we find Cantor Lawrence Avery's role in the Reform movement.

Avery grew up in the Young Israel movement, which, as the orthodox youth movement of the 20's and 30's, was the champion of congregational participation at that time. With

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[59] Mark Slobin, Chosen Voices, p. 195.

[60] The trend towards greater participation on the part of the congregation also exists in the Orthodox and Conservative streams; there, however, the connection with text through nusach is stronger than in Reform.

[61] Mark Slobin, Chosen Voices, p. 197.

this as his background, he then spent years studying with the most demanding masters of vocal excellence. When he became a full-time cantor, he began the process of synthesizing these elements. Mrs. Avery recalls that an "important part of Avery's davening is that he decided almost at the outset that he did not want to be the kind of chazzan who left his congregation sitting there. His instinct was to encourage them to prayer. And we talked about it many times that there had to be a way to encourage the congregation to sing in a traditional service which is what he was in, and yet to give them moments of chazzones, so to speak. And this is how his style came to be; I don't think it was conscious, I think it was an unconscious instinct which took all of these things together . . . and made his style into what it is today. . . . It wasn't that at the start; at the start he was doing more 'singing' than 'encouraging.'"[62] The style that emerged was an "American, eclectic style, where he's taken from all of the traditions and made a style all his own, and he's affected generations of cantors."[63] How does this style come across to congregants who hear him every week? "For me it was always great. Cantor Avery always incorporated . . . a lot of congregational singing, something that I think was important to his father; he once explained to me that a couple of the

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[62] Interview with Saralee Avery, January 19, 1990.

[63] Interview with Richard Botton, January 22, 1990.

melodies he used at the Schul were melodies that his father had taught him. . . . There was always a lot of congregational singing, and when there is, things don't get boring, because you're not sitting there and listening. After you'd gotten used to the same melody, Cantor Avery would bring a new one, every Shabbat things would be so familiar, but you'd hear something different. . . . When you talk about the juxtaposition of traditional and modern -- my nephew will be able to sit and hear things that are familiar to him in the service, a new modern, fun melody to Adon Olam, and by the same token, my grandfather, who grew up on the East Side and was part of a boy's choir, will say, that's the arrangement we did."[84] Mrs. Jan Peerce and her late husband were members of Beth El Synagogue in New Rochelle when Cantor Avery began there. She recalls, "I can only tell you how much we enjoyed the services at Beth El. And Jan was . . . very critical. . . . That's the interesting thing about Avery -- it hasn't been going down at all; it gets better all the time."[85]

With this as his background and congregational practice, Avery has been able to guide the Reform cantorate through its contemporary maze. While accepting and assimilating many of the new trends, Lawrence Avery has also

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[84] Interview with Richard Katz, January 23, 1990.

[85] Interview with Alice Peerce, February 6, 1990.

presented a consistent, evolving vision of Jewish music to his students. "Spirituality" is a word seldom heard from Avery. But by continuing to preserve, teach and extend the structure of traditional Jewish music, building on a firm foundation, Avery is one of the architects of a kind of "home" for Jewish spirituality that has continued to be available when needed. The Reform movement has always been free to dispense with ritual or obligations it deemed unnecessary, but it has also been ready to re-adopt those that Reform Jews consider meaningful. In 1922, for instance, the cantillation of the Torah had not been heard in Reform services in one hundred years when it was re-introduced by A. W. Binder.[ee] It has since become a basic Jewish skill taught (to varying degrees) to many of the bar and bat mitzvah students in the Reform movement. In the last two decades, along side all the other changes, there has been an incrementally increasing interest in nusach and traditional chazzanut in the Reform movement. There began to be heard in Reform synagogues nusach for the Festivals, for Shabbat Mincha and Havdalah, and for the weekday prayers. As these and other traditions returned, there was already present in Reform congregations a cantorate which was trained and ready to provide that structuring of time which is the characteristic of traditional chazzanut.

[ee] A. W. Binder, Studies in Jewish Music: Collected Writings of A. W. Binder, Irene Heskes, ed., (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1971), p. 23.

Cantor Lawrence Avery has been a significant contributor to this state of affairs, helping the Reform movement to recover the babies which it sometimes has thrown out with the bathwater.

In his congregational cantorate, Avery exemplifies participation and improvisation. In his compositions, he touches the world of presentation. His work exemplifies the musical qualities valued by cantors who care about singing the text, by use of nusach and cantillation motifs in addition to a full range of musical expression.

Avery's cantorate is balanced between participation, presentation, and improvisation. In it, there is music of high vocal and textual standards, where an educated congregation can participate with the familiar, but still be interested in the new, Sabbath after Sabbath. It is music for youth and age alike; and it is uniquely and unquestionably Jewish in origin and American in development. Can this be an example of the "new American sound" that Hoffman seeks for the Reform movement?[67]

Of course, such questions can never be answered in theory, and music is only theory until it is heard. But Avery's music is being heard in synagogues throughout the Reform movement, where his students bring their version of

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[67] Max Wohlberg, William Sharlin, and Ben Steinberg are among the other contemporary composers of Jewish music whose work satisfies in some way the needs expressed by Hoffman; there are many cantors whose work enriches the lives of their congregants in a similar way.

his chazzanut, his instincts and little tunes, his high regard for musical quality which is true to Jewish texts and the spirit of prayer, a sense of integrity toward the art they serve which bears its own spiritual message to the worshippers they lead in prayer.

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APPENDIX

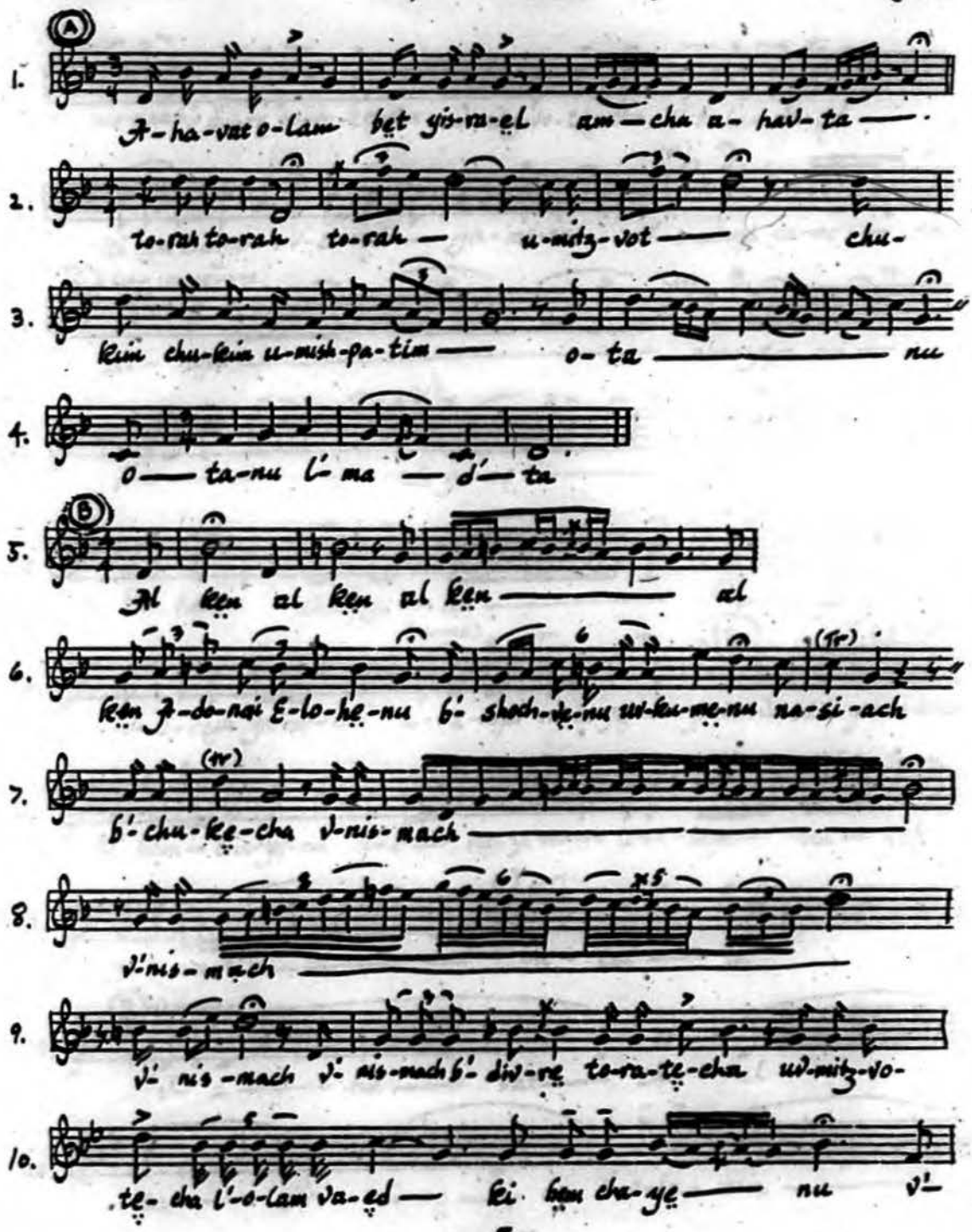
1. Ahavat Olam by David Roitman, arr. Lawrence Avery
2. K'Shoshana - The New Wedding Song by Lawrence Avery
3. Analysis of K'Shoshana - The New Wedding Song by Lori Corrsin

-B-C-D-

Ahavat Olam

אַהֲבַת עוֹלָם

D. Koitman-1930 (L.A.)



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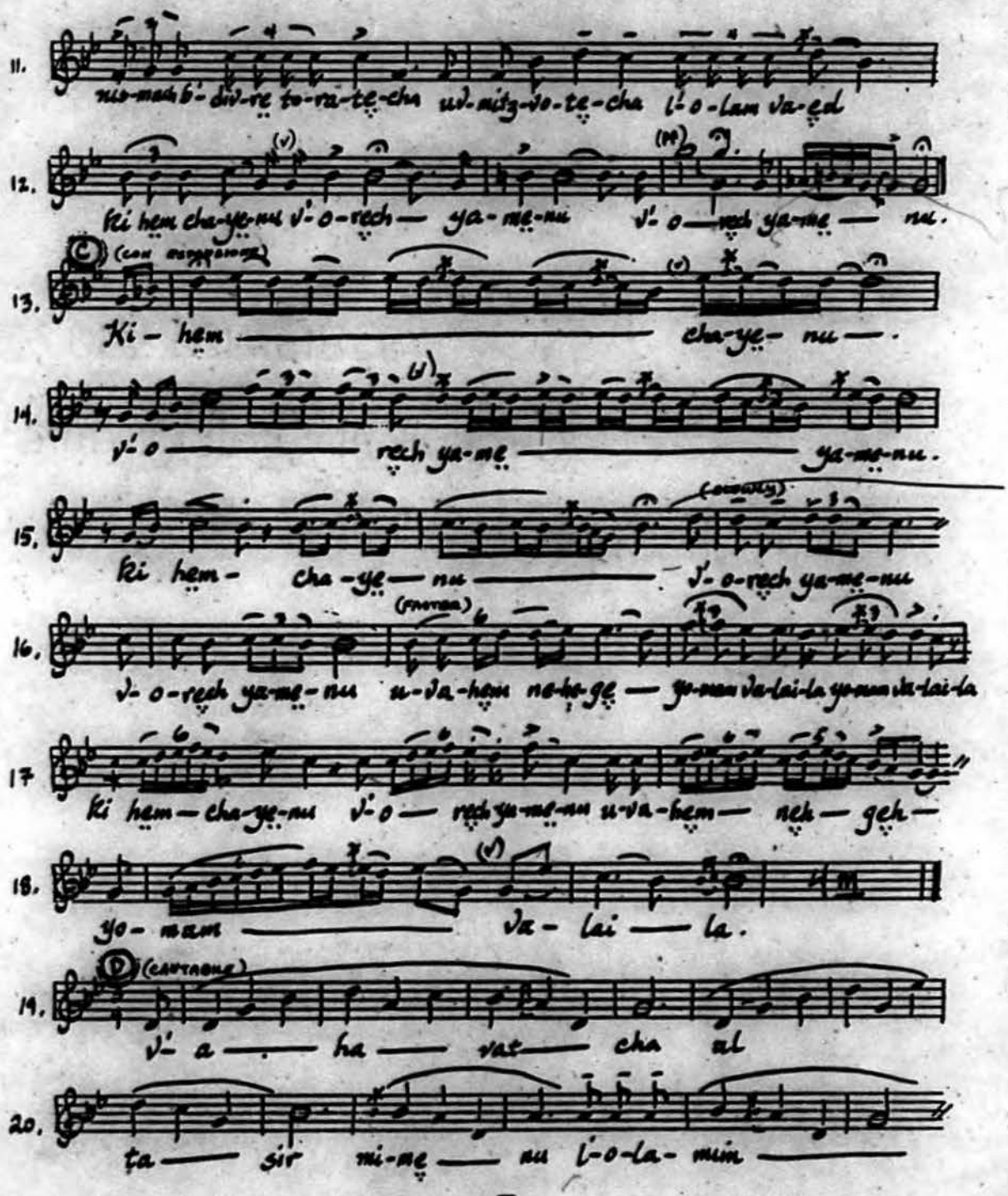
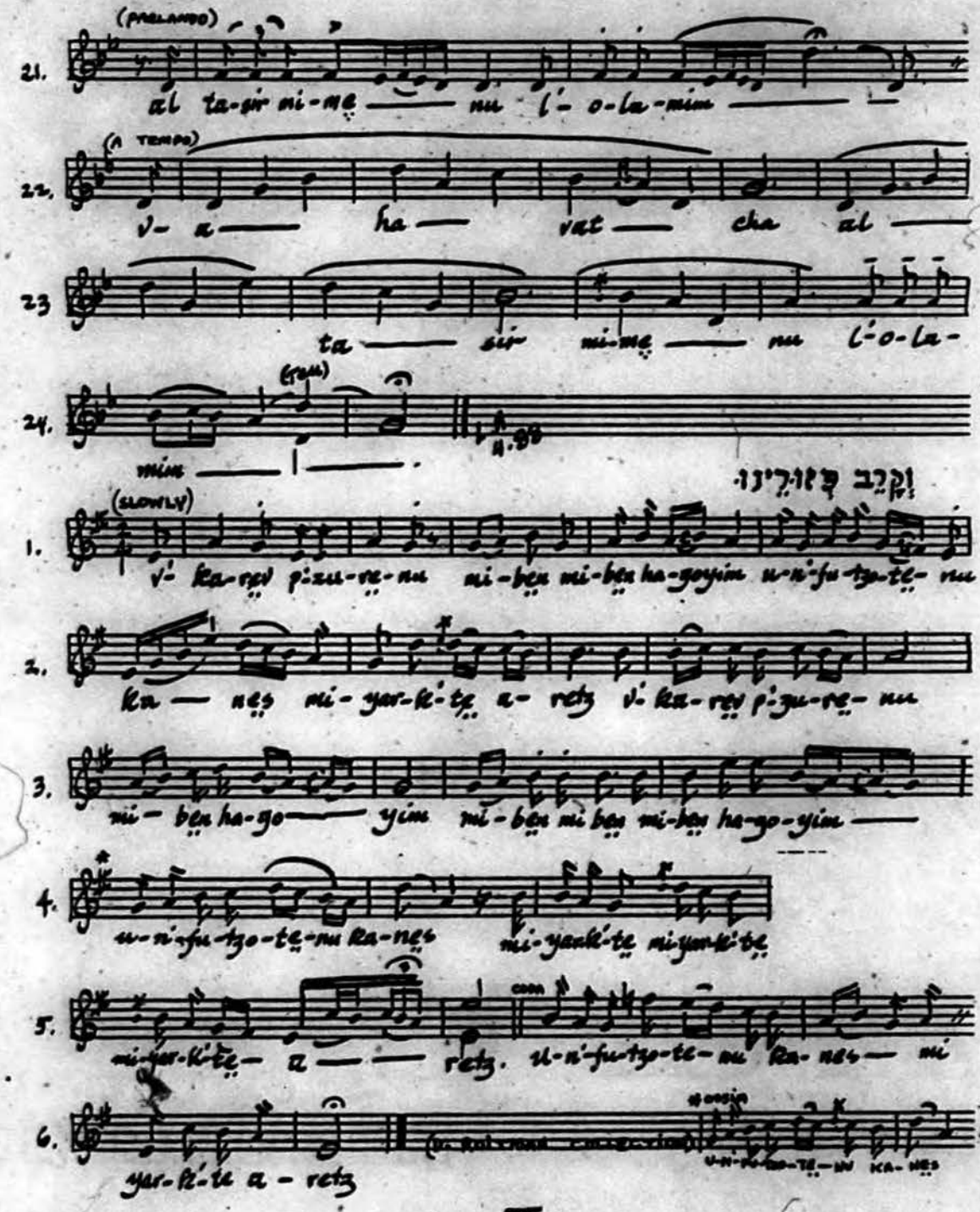

11.
nu-mah b'-div-re to-ra-te-cha uv-mitz-vo-te-cha l'-o-lam va-ed
12.
ki hem cha-ye-nu v'-o-rech ya-me-nu v'-o rech ya-me nu.
13.
Ki - hem cha-ye- nu.
14.
v'-o rech ya-me ya-me-nu.
15.
ki hem- cha-ye nu v'-o-rech ya-me-nu
16.
v'-o-rech ya-me-nu u-va-hem ne-he-ge ye-mam va-lai-la ye-mam va-lai-la
17
ki hem-cha-ye-nu v'-o rech ya-me-nu u-va-hem neh-geh-
18.
yo-mam va-lai la.
19.
v'-a ha vat cha al
20.
ta sir mi-me nu l'-o-la- min

II

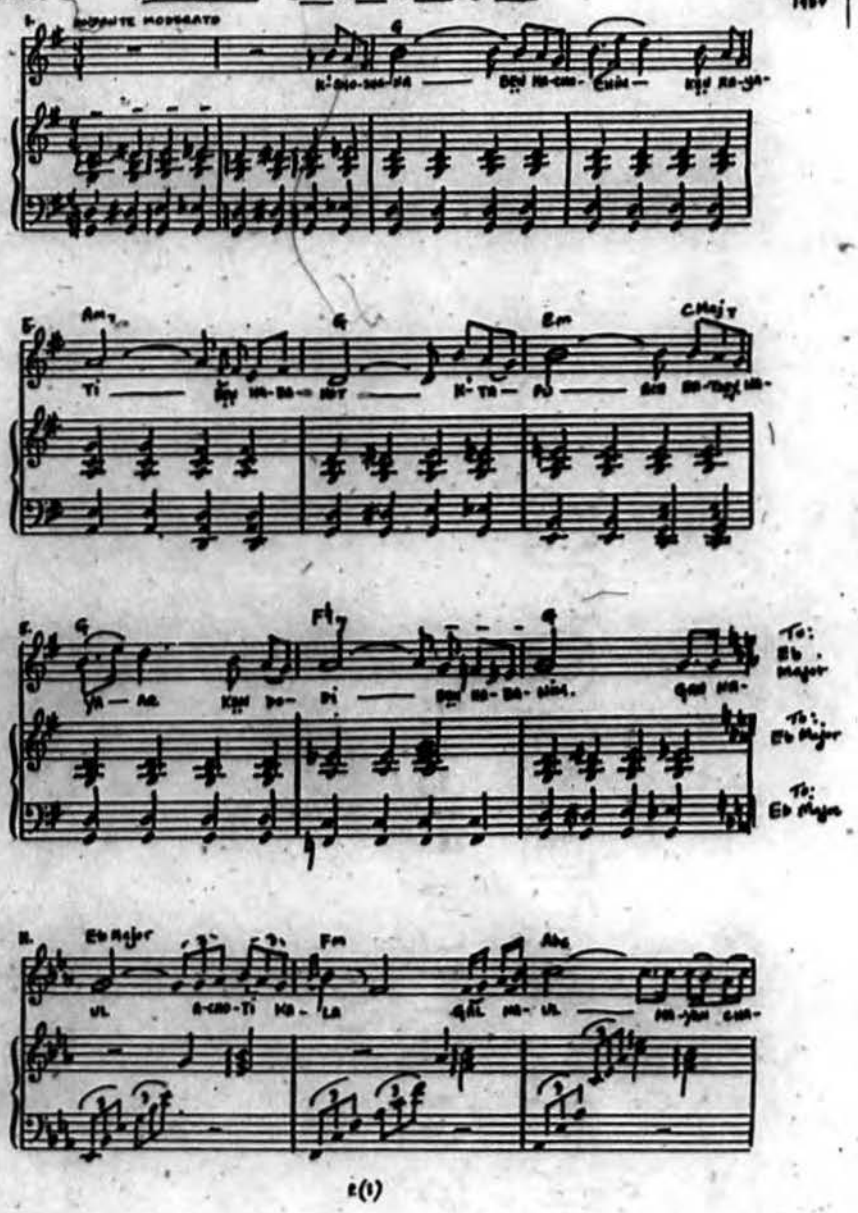

21. (PRELUDIO)
al ta-ir mi-me — nu l'- o-la-mim —
22. (A TEMPO)
v'- a — ha — vat — cha al —
23
ta — sir mi-me — nu l'-o-la-
24. (rall)
mim — .
(SLOWLY)
1. v'- ka-rev p'zu-ze-nu mi-ben mi-ben ha-goyim u-n'fu-tzo-te- nu
2. ka — nes mi-yar-k'-te a- retz v'- ka-rev p'-zu-ze- nu
3. mi- ben ha-go — yim mi-ben mi ben mi-ben ha-go-yim —
4. u-n'fu-tzo-te-nu ka-nes mi-yark'-te mi-yark'-te
5. mi-yar-k'-te- a — retz. u-n'fu-tzo-te-nu ka-nes — mi
6. yar-k'-te a - retz
U-N-FU-TZO-TE-NU KA-NES

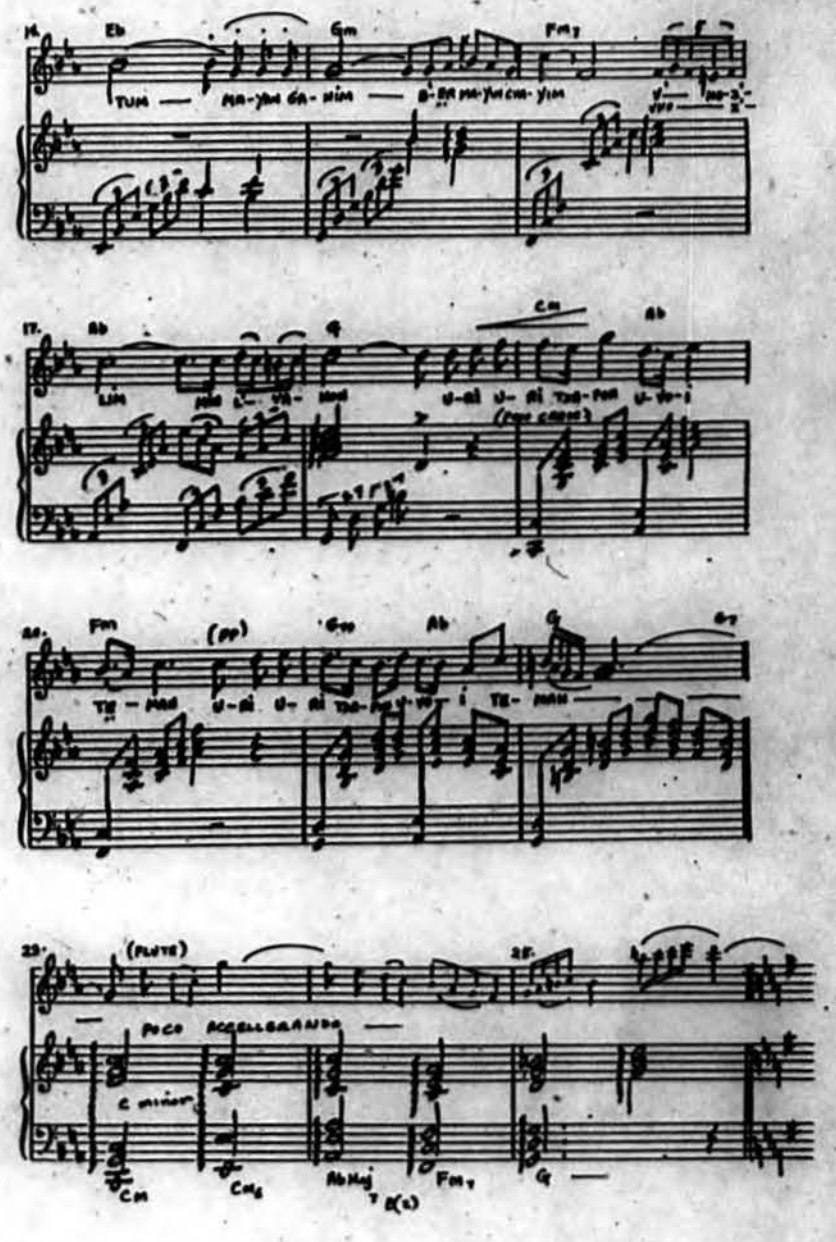
III

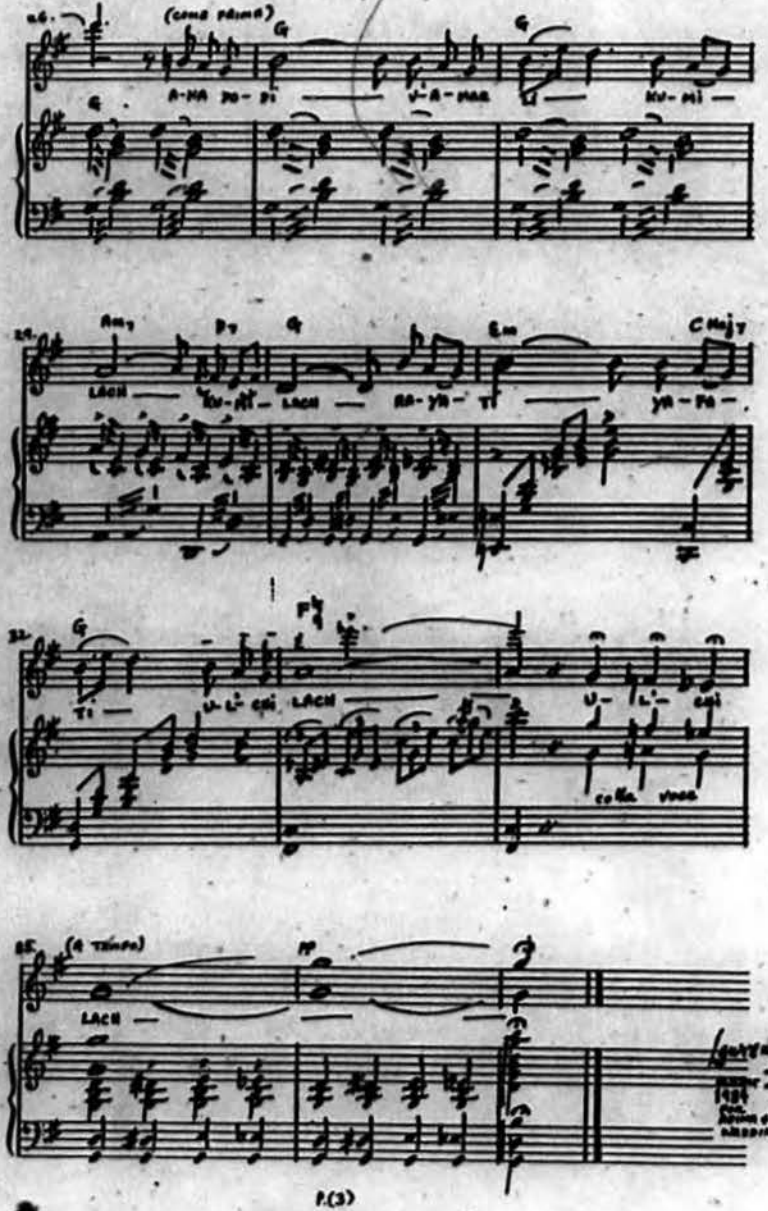
SHIR HASHIRIM

"K'SHOSHANA"... The New Wedding Song

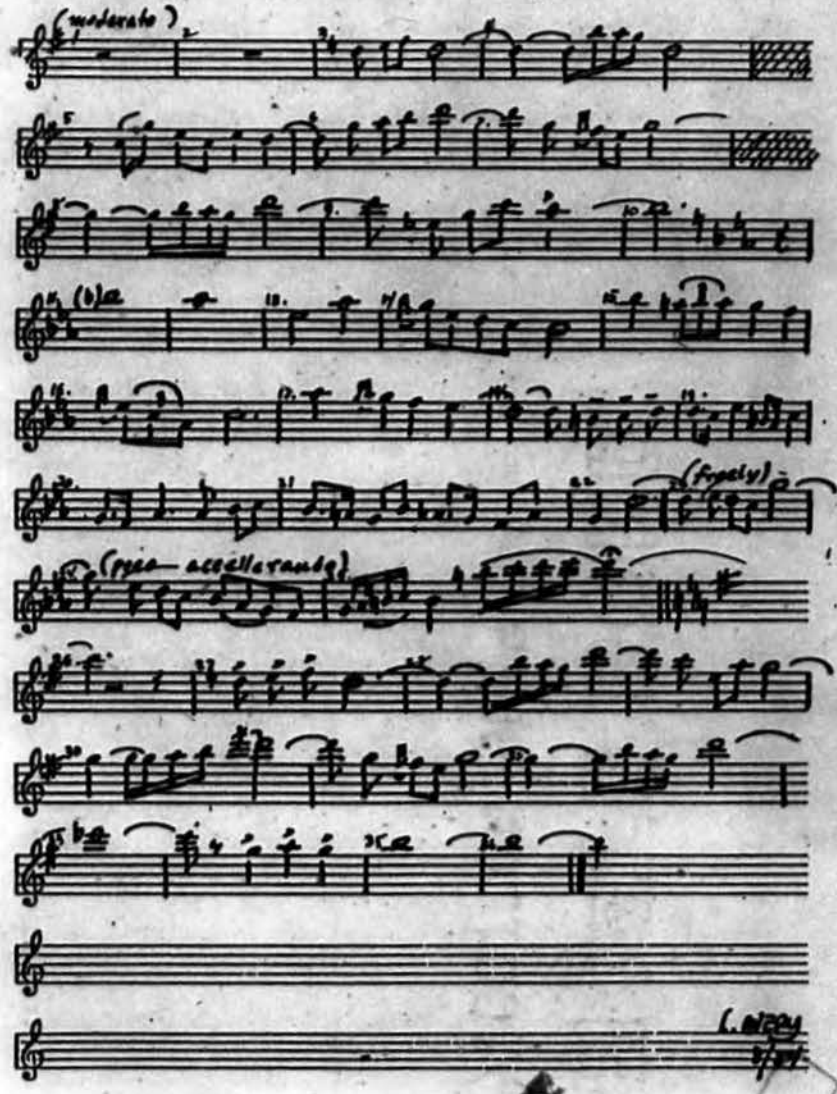
L. AVERY 1984







"K'SHOSHANA"..... The New Wedding Song (FLUTE PART)



Musical Analysis of K'Shoshana . . . The New Wedding Song

by Lori Corrsin (February 1990)

The piece is for piano and voice. The range of the vocal line is from d below the staff to g above the staff. The piece begins in G major, moves to E flat major and then returns to G major. It has one cantillation motif which repeats 7 times (including 3 with melodic variations.) It is in 4/4, but has 6 different rhythms in the accompaniment:

1. steady quarters (begins and ends the piece; measures 1-10; 34-36
2. steady eighth-note triplets; measures 11-17; 33
3. steady eighth-notes; measures 18-22; 31-32
4. arpeggiated half-notes; measures 23-25
5. tremolos in half-notes; measures 26-28
6. tremolos in eighth-notes; measures 29-30

There is a fragmentary rhythmic motif in the voice part, a pick-up of 3 eighth-notes in measures 2, 9, 14, 18, 20, 26-32; this figure gives a "flowing" feeling. In measure 34, this figure is elongated into a pickup of 3 quarter-notes with fermate over each; this slows down the movement of the piece and indicates the end of it. In general, there are four measure phrases and an "ABA" structure, which is also reflected in the main tonal movement.

G major sections are chiefly quarters, halves and eighths. The E-flat major section has triplets for half its extent, then goes back to a duple feeling in eighths and halves.

There are only 2 dynamic indications, at measures 19 and 36.

The introductory harmonies return (as well as the quarter-note march-like rhythm) to end the piece.

The return of the "A" section (measures 26 through the end) elongates the tonic a bit, but consists largely of the same harmonies as the first time. The accompaniment here is the "fastest" in the piece, as the chords are tremolos, then eight-notes and triplets (as in the "B" section), then back to quarter-notes. (Avery pulls rhythmic materials from the "B" section into the "A" section in order to unify the piece.)

The chords are rolled in an arpeggiated manner only when the voice is not singing (measures 23-25). The flute plays alone in those three measures.

The flute part has the melody on its own in measures 23-25, when the voice is silent.

The flute "answers" the voice throughout the "A" section, switches to whole and half notes supporting the key change to E-flat at measures 11, 12 and 13. There is a secondary melody in the flute in measures 14 through 17. Then it is in thirds with the voice in measures 18 through 21. When the "A" section returns in measure 26, the flute returns to its "answering" mode.

There is a particularly beautiful moment in measures 33 and 34 when the flat VII° chord is found with the flute on the 7th of the chord.