# THE BASSO CHAZZAN:
# THE VOICE OF GOD, THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE, THE VOICE OF SIDOR BELARSKY

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Basso Chazzan
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## Introduction

In traditional chazzanut, solo repertoire is largely focused upon the tenor or high baritone voice. The purpose of this thesis is to define and explore the use of the bass voice in the cantorate and Jewish song; briefly tracing its function as a *bas* in the *M'shor'rim* tradition, analyzing how Richard Wagner and Jacques Halévy cast bass roles in their operas to make vocal statements about Jewish stereotypes, demonstrating examples of prominent Jewish opera singers and *chazzanim* who could be classified as basses or bass-baritones, and ultimately illustrating how Sidor Belarsky with his bass voice defined himself from these other bassos to become the "Embassador of Song for the Jewish People."

In each instance, the bass voice used for purposes of Jewish music is compared to its applicable non-Jewish contemporary. Therefore, the *bas* of the *M'shor'rim* is compared to the bass that sang Bach, and the function of the *M'shor'rim* is compared to the *Meistersinger*. Metaphors of political statements related to the use of the bass voice in Jewish and German opera are discussed through two composers, Halevy and Wagner, and this analysis is used to determine why Classical Reform congregations held preference to bass-baritone voices over tenor voices. The lives of basso-chazzanim, and the lives of other well-known Jewish bassos will be highlighted. The use of the bass voice as a metaphor for the "Voice of the People," or the "Voice of God" is discussed as related to three bassos— Sidor Belarsky, Jerome Hines, and Paul Robeson. The ultimate objective is to demonstrate how Sidor Belarsky, as a basso-chazzan, was able to resonate

with the Jewish people in a manner similar to Paul Robeson by becoming a "Voice of the People."

## A Short History and Definition of "Bass Voice."

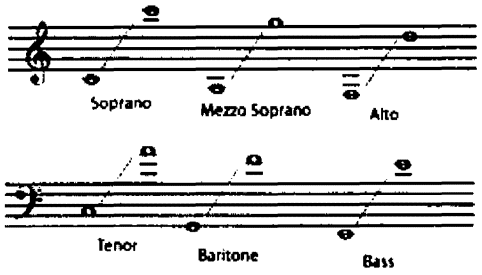


Figure 1: Voices vary within each voice classification. Some basses will have a shorter or wider range, or the sweetest and most powerful part of their range in a different place than other basses. These are approximate, average ranges for each voice category.

Since the development of opera and choral singing, there have been voice categories. Musicians delineated a bass from a tenor and an alto from a soprano. Before exploring the use of the bass voice in the cantorate, one must have a very clear understanding of the bass voice as a vocal category. In the cantorate, these vocal categorizations are often far less clearly understood and are largely misunderstood or ignored due to the flexible and individualized nature of *chazzanut*. This study will clearly establish the context in which the bass voice has been used, particularly in the gentile world, and will serve as a reference for the continued study of the bass voice in Jewish song.

The bass voice is the lowest male voice, normally written for within the range E to e', which may be extended at either end, particularly in solo writing. Over time the bass voice has been subdivided into a number of distinct categories: The *basso profundo* refers to a particularly heavy and low bass, the *basso cantante* a higher, lyrical voice, and the *basso buffo* a comic or character bass. By the 19th century the baritone split off from

the bass, to be regarded as a separate category, yet some confusion remains in the terminology, especially between bass and bass-baritone. Therefore, while this thesis is titled "The Basso-Chazzan," ranges of voices sometimes titled bass, bass-baritone, and with rare exception baritone, are included as examples.

Although the bass voice has always existed, prior to the 17th century Western art music didn't use it, and early writers had little to say about it. Isidore of Seville (559-636) wrote that, "in fat voices, as those of men, much breath is emitted at once", and he added that, "the perfect voice is high, sweet and loud." When *parallel organum* was popular in the 9th-century, parts often called for the addition of exceptionally low voices an octave or 5th below the principal voice "for the sake of the symphony." Bass voices were used to add resonance and create an imposing sound.[1]

The upper voice parts in polyphony were composed for tenor until around 1350. In the early 15th century, tenor and countertenor overlapped in the same range to provide a harmonic foundation. In the mid-century, however, the single *contratenor bassus* line was created to take on the role of supporting the harmony. Some theorists showed their understanding of the important function of this line by referring to it not as *bassus* (Latin for low), but by the Greek word *basis* (foundation). The sound created by these low-pitched *contratenor bassus* lines became a source of fascination. Many references to the Greek prefix *bari-*, as in baritone abound in literature of that period. There are not only bass lines ranging between D and *d* but also two or even three parts in what would now

[1] Sadie, Stanley, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001. S.v. "Bass (ii)," by Owen Jander, Lionel Sawkins, J.B.

be described as the bass or baritone range. Polyphonic music emphasizing the bass voice originated in the chapels of Burgundian and French courts and quickly spread elsewhere.

During the 16th century composers became more sensitive to the bass's function of defining the harmony. Nicola Vicentino remarked that, "it is the bass which governs, and gives the grace of beautiful progressions and variety of harmony to all the parts."[2] In this period there developed a tendency for bass lines to use wide intervals more than other voices did, to be more angular, and to span a wider range in general. Despite the relative angularity of bass lines, bass singers, like those with high voices, became increasingly preoccupied with the art of improvised ornamentation during the 16th century. Giovanni Bassano illustrated how the bass part of a Palestrina motet might be sumptuously ornamented, but Pietro Cerone who complained that through such practice the whole fabric of polyphony 'falls to the ground' attacked such elaborate ornamentation of bass parts.

In spite of such resistance, virtuoso basses attracted much attention in the period 1575-1625 and were in great demand. The Neapolitan bass Giulio Cesare Brandcaccio was the highest paid singer in the elite corps of virtuosos assembled in Ferrara by Alfonso d'Este, and the availability of such skilled basses was essential to the development of the luxuriant style of madrigal composition cultivated at Ferrara by Giaches de Wert and others, in whose works the bass line is often as florid as any of the upper voices.

The Italian style of highly ornate music for bass was extended into the monodies of the early 17th century. In Italian opera during the 17th century, however, ornate writing

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[2]Sadie, Stanley, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001. S.v. "Bass (ii)," by Owen Jander, Lionel Sawkins, J.B.

for the bass voice was quite rare. In the surviving operas by Monteverdi the bass already appears in some of its most important historical role types: as a god (particularly the god of the underworld: Pluto in *Orfeo*, Neptune in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*, or as a sepulchral figure, Charone in *Orfeo*— a role I've performed before. His most impressive use of the bass voice was in the tragic role of Seneca in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643).[3]

The comic potential of the bass voice was reached through the *basso buffo*, whose ancestor was the *commedia dell'arte* character Pantalone. In late Renaissance madrigal comedies, the blustering, the stammering and the bathetic self-pitying of the classic old fool were given eloquent musical depiction. In the early history of opera similar comic male characters, usually basses, appeared occasionally on the fringe of plots and were called upon to perform exaggeratedly wide-spanning phrases that plummet to the depths of the singer's range. In 17th century Italian opera the *basso buffo* was frequently aligned with the comic contralto role. As a central figure, the comic bass began to appear only in the last quarter of the century.[4]

The diminishing importance of the bass voice in *opera seria* is best reflected in Alessandro Scarlatti's solo cantatas. More than 600 are for soprano and five are for bass. However, the earlier tradition of the virtuoso bass continued to find expression, usually in a mood of defiance or rage. These vehement emotions are expressed in angular, wide leaping lines that show the influence of instrumental styles in the developing concerto. Handel inherited this tradition through such predecessors as Stradella and Scarlatti and wrote remarkable parts for bass in his Italian oratorios, serenatas and cantatas. Vivaldi's

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[3] O. Termini. "From a God to a Servant: the Bass Voice in Seventeenth Century Venetian Opera," CMc, no. 44. 1990, 38-60.
[4] R. Celletti: "The buffo and the melodramatic tradition," Music Today, New Ser., ii (1959), 61

vocal music is written so that the bass parts can be performed an octave higher by girls when bass singers were unavailable. As a result, the bass is rarely highlighted.

Most Handel operas include a role for bass, although usually secondary in character is of sufficient importance to be assigned an aria in each of the three acts. These roles are most often kings or generals, whose noble arias declare pride in rank; sometimes a villain may be cast as a bass. A favorite type of aria is that of rage or defiance, often with huge leaps. James Miller wrote of Handel's Royal Academy bass G.M. Boschi, "And Boschi-like, be always in a rage." Boschi's parts remain in a high tessitura, in what would now be called a baritone range; some of Handel's finest bass parts were for Montagnana, who sang down to *F* in the role of the magician Zoroastro in *Orlando*. The 'rage aria' was cultivated even in the oratorio; the most famous of all is 'Why do the nations so furiously rage together?' in *Messiah*.[5]

In French opera, with no castrati for male roles, the bass remained more important than it was in *opera seria*. The importance of the bass in French opera was remarked on in Francois Raguenet's *Paralele des italiens et des francois:* "When the Persons of Gods or Kings, a *Jupiter, Neptune, Priam,* or *Agamemnon*, are brought on the Stage, our Actors, with their deep Voices, give 'em an air of Majesty, quite different from that of the feign'd Bases among the *Italians*, which have neither Depth nor Strength." Lully's bass roles are often gods, especially those of the underworld, but also include roles with comic elements. Only in *Roland* did he use the bass voice in a title role. Some of the most imposing roles for the bass voice in French Baroque opera are by Rameau, for example Theseus in *Hippolyte et Aricie* and Pollux in *Castor et Pollux*, both were first sung by

[5] Pleasants, Henry. The Great Singers. New York. 1966.

C.I.D. de Chasse. This French tradition is further evident in the late operas that Gluck wrote for Paris, which include such roles as Calchas in *Iphigenie en Aulide,* Hercules in *Alceste* and Thoas in *Iphigenie en Tauride.*[6]

In Germany, the bass was prized for depicting seriousness and wisdom, both in opera and sacred music. In Buxtehude's cantata, *Jesu, meine Freude,* for example, the bass sings 'Trotz dem alten Dracheen' in which the lowest range of the bass (down to D) is explored for the world 'abyss'. J.S. Bach's works are full of remarkable solo parts for bass. In *Jesu, der du meine Seele,* the bass (G-d') represents the dying soul expressing trust in the Lord in an elaborate concerto aria ('Nun, du wirst mein Gewissen stillen'). In the *St Matthew Passion,* the bass arias towards the end are among the most beautiful in the entire work (especially 'Mache dich mein Herze, rein'). In his secular music, Bach used the bass for Aeolus, god of the wind, in *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan* and the old, conservative father in the Coffee Cantata. He also set the role of Christ as a bass in his annually performed Christmas cantata, *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland.*

Extensive passage work in the music written for bass in Germany demanded a virtuoso technique, but J.F. Agricola complained that many German basses, by inserting a "ga, ga, ga" before each note and gulping for breath every half-bar, created an unpleasing effect. In England, following the Italian tradition of virtuoso basses, Purcell wrote arias for John Gostling 'They that go down to the sea in ships' and Richard Leveridge ('Ye twice ten hundred deities'), who had deep and agile bass voices with very wide ranges. Leveridge went on to perform in opera but made his name in such parts as Charone,

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[6] Raguenet, Francois. *Parallels of the French and Italians*

Merlin and Pluto in the English theatrical pantomime, notably the witch Hecate in *Macbeth*.

In 1781 Mozart expressed a wish to recast *Idomeneo* 'in the French style' and change the title role from tenor to bass: 'I would have altered Idomenus's role completely and made it a bass part for Ludwig Fischer,' one of the most famous basses of his generation. Mozart's typical bass roles are more characteristic: Osmin, the comically savage overseer in *Die Entfuhrung* and Sarastro, a high priest, in *Die Zauberflote*. Most of his roles, nominally for bass in his mature Italian operas are now regarded equally as baritone roles. Basses often sing Figaro and Leporello and are essentially *basso buffo* roles, the former designed for Francesco Benucci, an excellent Viennese singer. Another such role is Bartolo in *Figaro*. The tradition to which these and may other roles belong is in fact the hallmark of *opera buffa*; it goes back to the 17th century, appears in numerous intermezzo-type works, such as Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, is central to the entire repertory of operas to Goldoni's librettos and the principal works of Paisello and Cimarosa, and continues in the operas of Rossini and Donizetti.

## The *M'shor'rim* Tradition

Could it be that the *M'shor'rim* tradition may have been rooted in the secular German tradition of the *Minnesang* and *Meistergesang*, two related musical and poetic traditions that continued from the 12th to 19th centuries? Or were the *M'shor'rim* a separate entity, particular to the Jews of Germany that merely evolved from the common baroque practice of emphasizing the bass and soprano? To understand whether the possibility of such a relationship may have existed, one must investigate the function of each of these groups, their music, and the possibility of Jewish involvement.

The *Meistersingers* were artisans of the middle and lower classes of German society, usually from South German imperial cities, who from the 14th to 19th centuries formed themselves into guilds now known as *Singschulen* (singing schools) for the composition and performance of *Meister-lieder*.

Whoever wished to become a member of the guild first of all studied as a *Shuler* with one of its members. His main task was to learn a number of *Tone* and the most important rules of the *Tabulatur*. Each guild numbered various classes of members, ranging from beginners, or Schuler (corresponding to trade-apprentices), and Schulfreunde (who were equivalent to Geseilen or journeymen), to Meister, a Meister being a poet who was not merely able to write new verses to existing melodies but had himself invented a new melody. The poem was technically known as a Bar or Gesetz, the melody as a Ton or Weis.

The songs were all sung in the schools without accompaniment. The rules of the art were set down in the so-called Tabulatur or law-book of the gild. The meetings took

place either in the Rathaus, or town hall, or, when they were held as was usually the case on Sunday, in the church; and three times a year, at Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas, special festivals and singing competitions were instituted. At such competitions or Schulsingen judges were appointed, the so-called Merker, whose duty it was to criticize the competitors and note their offences against the rules of the Tabulatur.

The *Meistersingers* claimed themselves descendents of the *Minnesang*, the earlier German tradition of courtly lyric and secular monophony that flourished particularly in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries. It is likely that at the same time, the *chazzan* and other Jews of musical orientation were aware of the art of the *Meistersingers*, but it is questionable whether they were active participants in that aspect of German society. According to A. Z. Idelsohn, "since and during the development of the *Minnesong*, in which art Jews took part, it was inevitable that German music should leave its impress upon the song of the Jew, that the Jew's spirit should be imbued with the musical scale and style of his surrounding."[7]

While these parallel traditions certainly drew from one another well into the 17th and 18th centuries, newer developments in music, particularly the Renaissance, swept up from Italy into the darkest corners of the Ghettos beginning in the 16th century. This new Italian style of florid singing, marked by the introduction of castrati singers in both religious and secular arenas, literally brought music to new heights. While Jews could never ethically make use of castrati in the music of their synagogue, it was appropriate to use boy sopranos to mimic this new style of florid singing. These young singers called *singerl*, were hired by *chazzanim* who had left their posts to go on tour with the new

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[7] Idelsohn, A.Z., "The Synagogue Song of the Ashkenazim," chap. in Jewish Music in Its Historical Development (New York: Tudor Publishing Company 1948), 186.

Renaissance music for the synagogue. Rabbi Herz Treves, 1470-1550, bitterly complained against the new movement and the strange attitude that the *chazzanim* took toward their holy function: "They have ceased to be writers of *Torah, Tefillin, Megillot*; nor do they care for the correct grammatical reading nor for the meaning of the prayers—only for their songs, with out regard for the real sense of the words. They neglect the traditional tunes of their ancestors."[8]

While it may seem that every generation of Jewish music says this about the last, the reality that *chazzanim* were dropping their positions to go on tour with this popular music is akin to the cantors of today dropping their cantorial posts to become popular song-leaders or rock stars. It was certainly a drastic move for a *chazzan* to make, but he was prepared for the task with an entourage of supporters.

In addition to the *singerl*, the *bas* played a distinctive role in the welfare of the *chazzan* in his new endeavor. The *bas* was the most musically knowledgeable of the group, yet the *singerl* had the greatest memory for tunes. The *bas* often taught the tunes to the *chazzan* on the violin, an easily portable instrument, and the *singerl* retained memory of the tunes, which he transferred to each *chazzan* he worked with. The trio was often joined by a *chor* that each community formed expressly for purposes of *m'shor'rim* songs.

Essentially, the *m'shor'rim* may have functioned in a manner similar to the *Meistersingers* in that they had a rite of passage. Some *zingerl* eventually became *chazzanim* or *bas*, and in some instances, a *bas* would become a *chazzan*. While there are no records of competitions or organized guilds among the *m'shor'rim*, the nature of the

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[8] Idelsohn, A.Z., "The Synagogue Song of the Ashkenazim," chap. in Jewish Music in Its Historical Development (New York: Tudor Publishing Company 1948), 204.

relationship between *chazzan zingerl and bas* is reminiscent of the *Meistersingers' Shuler, Shulfreund, and Meister*. They similarly retained the use of monody— solo voices normally without accompaniment, well into an era when music was abound with polyphony and instrumental accompaniment. Also, the name—*M'shor'rim*, meaning poets, in the context of the popularity of the poetic art of the *Meistergesang*, implies at least a connotation of connectivity.

Other contemporaries of the *m'shor'rim*, particularly during the later stages of their development, were two very famous classical composers, Henry Purcell and J.S. Bach. It is noted that the *m'shor'rim*, while not nearly as musically sophisticated as either of these composers, would copy musical form, particularly from Bach. The similarities in musical form between selections from *bas chazn zingerl* repertoire and the Brandenburg concerto have been analyzed and discussed in lectures by Dr. Mark Kligman. He maintains that the music of Bach may have influenced certain *m'shor'rim* who may have had access to his music and one may even hear classical themes of his extracted for use in the synagogue. The next set of examples was taken from the *bas* of Cantor Birnbaum of Königsberg. Birnbaum was a cantor from 1879 to 1920 in Königsberg, East Prussia, now known as Kaliningrad, Russia. (Kaliningrad is the main city in a small region of the same that is not contiguous with the rest of Russia, but located along the Baltic Sea between Lithuania and Poland. It is not to be confused with another Kaliningrad in the vicinity of Moscow.) His musical examples involving the use of the *bas* in the *m'shor'rim* tradition are taken from Israel Adler's *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources up to Circa 1840: a Descriptive and Thematic Catalogue with a Checklist of Printed Sources*. While one would certainly wish to find a clearly delineated

comparison of the Bach and *m'shor'rim* repertoire that would yield conclusive evidence of their relationship, the study of these examples are included in this thesis for purposes of understanding the generally supportive function of the bass voice in the *m'shor'rim* tradition, which is eventually contrasted to Bach's treatment of the bass voice as the "Voice of God" in *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland*. As Dr. Daniel Katz observes in his Prolegomenon to the Study of the Performance Practice of *M'shor'rim*, "this repertoire has never been studied in depth, but Israel Adler's recent catalogue of Hebrew music manuscripts includes in 'two indices... a synoptic view and some attempts of classification of the various elements related to... the plurivocal performance practice of *chazzan* and *m'shor'rim.*'" With the author's permission, analysis of the use of the *bas* in the *m'shor'rim* tradition is offered as a basis for understanding the various ways in which the *bas* played a supportive role in Jewish music of this genre.

To make an in-depth analysis of the bass voice in the *m'shor'rim* tradition as related to all of the influences contemporary to them— Baroque classical composers like Bach, *Minnesang*, *Meistergesang*, and other folk traditions, would be a task well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is valuable to recognize the comparative functions of the bass voice as related to Jewish and non-Jewish sources to create a foundation for the further study of the topic of the Basso-Chazzan. The final chapter references this comparison within the broader narrative of the Basso-Chazzan's progressive history.

**Analysis of various functions of the bass voice in *Chazn, Zingerl, Bas***

**1. Low range**

As the name *bas* implies, this voice tends to operate within a low range. The *bas's* range may be lower than or may overlap with that of the *chazzan.* In Ex. V. 1, the *chazzan* sings below G only two or three times, depending on who sings the untexted phrase on s. 3-4. In contrast, the *bas's* four-measure triadic interlude (s. 1-2) has G as its highest note. In Ex. VII. 1-2, the distinction in range is even clearer. The bas's highest note in Ex. VII. 1 is a fifth below the *chazzan's* lowest note; Ex. VII. 2 is similar.

Ex. III. 3 features a repeated three-note rhythmical motive. The *chazzan* hovers around high C and D. In m. 5, a statement of the motive at a lower pitch is marked for the *bas.* By analogy, it is possible that the low notes C, B, C in m. 3, although not marked, should also be sung by the *bas.*

This example, incidentally, is reminiscent of the third Brandenburg Concerto, which uses the same three-note rhythmical motive with a similar alternation of higher and lower pitches. The first movement opens with six statements of the motive on G, D, and B by the three violins in unison (Ex. III. 5). Later, Bach uses the orchestral equivalent of *m'shor'rim* by passing the motive around among different groups of instruments. In m. 9 (Ex. III. 6), the motive, now in a triadic arrangement instead of unison, is stated in successively lower pitches by the violins, the violas, and the celli in turn (cf. also m. 97-99 and 114-121).

**2. Filler *bas***

**a. Harmonic filler**

Perhaps the most common function of the *bas* is to fill in a few beats where there are rests in the melody between phrases. This may be seen in Ex. I.2, m. 4 and Ex. VII. 1-2. In each case, the principal singer (the *chazzan*) has two beats of rests, which are not notated. Instead, a stepwise descent from the fifth degree of the scale to the second occurs in the lower octave and is labeled as a *bas* part.

These passages function as dominant harmonies, which resolve to the tonic at the beginning of the following measure. However, the *bas* itself does not resolve. Rather, it drops out suddenly just before the resolution, which occurs with the reentry of the *chazzan*. In Ex. VII. 2, the resolution takes place an octave higher than expected. In Ex. 1.2 and VII. 1, the resolution again is higher than expected, but is made by irradical (i.e., non-root) tones of the tonic triad—the fifth and the tenth, respectively.

Although the return of the *chazzan* is not explicitly indicated, it is suggested by the reappearance of the melodic line, often in the upper register (Ex. VII. 1-3). The function of the *bas* as a filler between two melodic statements is particularly clear when the reappearance of the melody constitutes a motivic repetition (Ex. VII. 2-3).

In Ex. I.2, m. 4 and Ex. VII. 1-2 and 4, the music is notated as if it involved only one voice. If the *bas* part were not marked, someone familiar with the style could still identify it from its form and from the musical context. Someone else, however, might never know that the music is for two voices. On the other hand, Ex. VII. 3 places rests in the upper voice when the *bas* is singing. In this case, it is clear that two voices are involved, even if they are not singing simultaneously.

In Ex. VII. 3-4, the filler *bas* varies slightly from the initial pattern of a stepwise descent from 5 to 2. Example VII. 3 replaces 2 with 5 to form an arpeggiation figure, and

Ex. VII. 4 encompasses a seven-note run. In Ex. VII. 4, the word *bas* seems to have been carefully placed in the manuscript so that the *bas* does not enter until the second note of the measure, allowing the *chazzan* to resolve his line first.

Our last example of the harmonic filler *bas* comes from an unusual source, Mus. 72, the "musical companion to the *Synagogenordnung*" of a Danish congregation.[9] This is the only manuscript in Adler's catalogue that uses the term *chor* to mean the congregation. Most of the pieces in Mus. 72 are to be sung responsively by the cantor and congregation.[10]

Ex. VII. 5 is such a piece. The transition from the end of the *chazzan's* first line to the *chor's* entrance is bridge by an unlabelled passage resembling the filler *bas* in Ex. VII. 1-2. The stepwise descent from the fifth scale degree to the second outlines a dominant harmony, lasts for two beats, and resolves with the entrance of the *chor* on the downbeat. This passage differs in two respects from other filler *bas* passages. It is significant harmonically, for it changes the harmony from A minor to G7 in preparation for the *chor's* entrance in C, and it connects the preceding melody to the following one diatonically. The absence of the usual registral shift (cf. Ex. VII.1-3) does not, however, suggest that the filler should be sung by the *chazzan*, for in a similar context in Ex. VII. 4, the filler is labeled for the *bas*. In Ex. VII. 5, the filler's role in modulating to the relative major facilitates the entrance of the non-professional singers of the *chor*.

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[9] Adler, *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, vol. 1, p. 323; the importance of this source may lie not only in the survival of interdependent musical and verbal liturgical guides from this community, but also in the community's possible influence on Salomon Sulzer (p. 324).

[10] For the identification of *chor* with the congregation ("die ganze Gemeinde"), see ibid., p. 324; for other occurrences of *chor* or similar terms, see vol. 2, p. 801.

Perhaps one is tempted to ask: shouldn't the *bas* resolve along with the *chazzan* in these examples? Since certain aspects of the performance practice of any repertory may not be apparent from the notation,[11] might there have been an unwritten convention according to which the *bas* resolved its filler passages as the *chazzan* was beginning the next phrase of the melody? If so, the *bas* in Ex. VII. 2 would sing a low G together with the *chazzan's* G. Especially in examples that resolve on irradical tones (e.g., Ex. VII. 1) such a practice would add harmonic support to the resolution and remove some of the abruptness of the sudden change in register. However, the manuscripts in this study do not indicate that his was done. Even in examples notated in two parts, such as Ex. VII. 3, the *bas* drops out as the *chazzan* enters.

**b. Temporal filler**

The temporal filler is similar to the harmonic filler. Both fill the space of a small number of beats between phrases. In most cases, neither is harmonically essential, since both tend to sustain the harmony that is sounding at the time of their entrance; yet they are harmonically distinct. The harmonic filler enters on a dominant harmony and requires a resolution, which is made by the *chazzan* (by the *chor* in Ex. VII 5). The temporal filler, by contrast, has no harmonic expectations. It is static. It enters on a tonic harmony and is not necessarily connected musically to what follows. The arpeggios in Ex. I. 4, s. 6, m. 3 and Ex. IV. 1, m. 4, 8 are temporal fillers. In Ex. 1.4, the *bas* supplies a rhythmic movements through the *chazzan's* cadence and rests, thereby linking the preceding and following phrases. In Ex. IV. 1, the *bas* lengthens the moment of time on

[11] Cf. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

A (the A is tonicized, although it is not the tonic of the piece; D does not function as a tonic until the cadence before the Allegro).

Both the harmonic and the temporal filler *bas* introduce a change of timbre, and are often accompanied by an abrupt change of register. The latter feature is seen most clearly in Ex. VII. 1-2; at the other extreme, the resolution in Ex. VII. 4-5 is stepwise. Like the lower pedal point, the filler *bas* can be omitted without causing any overt harm to the music. It is ornamental, but not essential. In Ex. 1-2; IV.1, s. 8; and VII. 1-3, the melody could continue undisturbed if the *bas* were absent. Perhaps this characteristic is useful for practical reasons, in case a singer is not available. Even in Ex. VII. 4, where the *bas* effects a smoother transition to the Da Capo, and Ex. VII. 5, where the *bas* modulates to the relative major to assist the entrance of the *chor,* it can be omitted without destroying the music.

The one-measure *bas* passage in Ex. III. 1 (s. 7, m. 3) is a hybrid. Like the harmonic filler, it functions as a dominant, but like the temporal *bas*, it does not need a resolution. Rather, the following phrase uses it as the point of departure. The repeated sixteenth-notes are suggestive of the rhythmic *bas* (see below, section A. 4). The *bas* in Ex. VI. 7 (marked by descending note-stems underneath the rests on s. 8, m. 5 and s. 9, m. 1) are similar to that of Ex. III. 1. Additionally, it serves as a pivot between the relative keys of D minor and F major. Perhaps further research will suggest a more appropriate classification for these examples.

**3. Lower pedal point**

The third use of the *bas* is to provide a drone or pedal point to accompany the main voice. This can be seen only when two simultaneously sounding parts are notated. When the pedal point occurs beneath the *chazzan*, it is obviously to be assigned to the *bas*, even if this is not indicated. Example VI. 1 shows a lower pedal point on the dominant underneath a rapidly moving passage. When the *chazzan* resolves to the tonic at the end of the phrase, the *bas* does not follow, but suddenly drops out, just as the filler *bas* does. In this example, the *bas's* abrupt departure is clearly indicated by a quarter-rest; with two-part notation, we cannot speculate about the possibility of the *bas's* resolving.

**4. Rhythmic passages**

Certain *bas* solos are characterized by a prominent rhythmical motive. Although the *bas* sets the tonality in the introduction to Ex. III. 1, it is stronger rhythmically than melodically. Similarly, the drive behind the opening of the Allegro in Ex. IV. 1 (p. 17, s. 1-2) is derived from the repetition of the rhythmical motive of an eighth-note and two sixteenth-notes. Repeated notes play a rhythmic role in both these examples, as they do in the *bas* passages in Ex. VIII. 1 and IX. 1.

**5. Extended *bas* passages**

One manuscript in this study, Mus. 75, is characterized by extended *bas* passages. This is an autograph by Hirsch Weintraub, and consists almost entirely of his own compositions.[12] Weintraub's *bas* operates in a high and wide range in passages that are

[12] Ibid., p. 330; two of the three pieces not by Hirsch are by his father, Solomon. Solomon Weintraub (1781-1821) was cantor in Dubno (Ukraine). Hirsch (1813-1881)

often longer than those which we have seen so far, and that can be virtuosic as well. In Ex. IX. 3, the *bas* part is labeled, and the beginning and end of the passage are indicated with signs resembling quotation marks. The *bas* and the *chazzan* both participate in a series of rapid descents in eighth-notes, sixteenth-notes, and sixteenth-note triplets. The *bas* in Ex. IX.3, unlike a filler *bas*, cannot be omitted without significantly altering the nature of the music.

In Ex. X. 1, Weintraub's *bas* intrudes well into the *zinger's* territory, rising to a high B-flat above the staff (s. 9). Even at these heights, a distinction in range is made between the main voice and the secondary *bas*. The latter maintains the respectful distance of a fifth below the *chazzan*, who sings in an extraordinarily high register as well, reaching an F above the staff (s. 11).[13]

Example X. 1 also illustrates the common problem of having to deduce where a *m'shor'rim* passage ends. This example contains two *bas* passages, and the end of the first is not marked. The second passage ends with a whole-note (p. 6, m. 3); it serves to reinforce the tonality of F and provide a break in the surrounding florid texture of the piece. By contrast, it is not apparent where the first *bas* passage is meant to end. Perhaps it ends on s. 10 either after the whole-note or at one of the quarter-rests. The *chazzan* almost certainly takes over from the *bas* by the second rest, since presumably he is more likely than the *bas* to sing such an ornate line with a high F (s. 11). However, even if this

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briefly succeeded his father in Dubno (where he composed Ex. IX.2-3 and, based on the dates of composition, probably Ex. IX.1 and X.1 also). He was cantor in Königsberg before Birnbaum.

[13] This is unusually high even if the music, notated in the treble clef, is read an octave lower by male singers.

passage ends as early as the first rest on s. 10, the *bas* cannot avoid an uncharacteristically high range.

### 6. Textual echo

In Ex. IX. 2, an excerpt from Weintraub's *Anim z'mirot*, the *bas* appears twice for the duration of two beats. At the beginning of the example, the *chazzan* sings the word *asaprah* before the first *bas* entrance. The first two syllables, a and sap, are placed over the first and third beats of the measure, respectively. On the fourth beat, however, where one would expect the final syllable, the entire word appears. The complete underlay is thus a-sap-*asaprah*.

This cannot be interpreted literally as the desired underlay. If we accept the clearly marked placement of sap over the third beat, there are not enough notes left before the *bas* entrance to accommodate a repetition of the first two syllables. The only way to fit in a-sap-*asaprah* is to move sap back from the third beat to the preceding sixteenth-note (Ex. X.2.A). The result is not only nonsensical and contrary to the notated underlay of the manuscript, but may be stylistically inappropriate as well. None of the other texted examples in this study (Ex. I.1, IV.1-2, V.1, VII.5, VIII.1, and IX.1, 3) includes syllabic repetition within a word.

Can the additional writing out of *asaprah* be meant to remind the chazzan what word he should be singing? This is not plausible, for we have seen no other such reminders, even in long melismata. (On the contrary, the manuscripts favor the opposite extreme—they tend to be untexted rather than overtexted.) In this instance a reminder should not be necessary, for the entire word is sung within the space of a single measure.

Can this be a mistake? What if Weintraub had been repeating the text to himself as he was copying the manuscript? At this point, he would have been saying, "*asaprah, asaprah, asaprah,*" and could understandably have written out the full word in an unconscious fourth-beat fit of scribal absent-mindedness.

However, such a mistake would have been easy to correct. A better interpretation would explain the notation without requiring the scribe to be in error. The word *asaprah* occurs on the downbeat of s. 3, m. 2 (the first measure shown in Ex. IX.2), immediately before the first entrance of the *bas*. Although the end of the *bas* passage is not marked, it can be deduced. The resumption of the text underlay over the last note in m. 3 suggests the return of the *chazzan* (this is confirmed by the presence of a new *bas* indication in m. 4; if the *bas* were still singing, the indication would be unnecessary). Also the opening phrase of the example is repeated sequentially a step higher beginning at m. 3, beat 3. It would seem logical not to separate the first note of a phrase by putting it in a different voice from the remainder of the phrase. Since the *chazzan* sings the rest of the phrase, perhaps he should sing the first note as well.[14]

Thus the *chazzan* enters again in the second measure of the example (s. 3, m. 3, beat 3), and the *bas* sings only the first two beats of this measure. These two beats have three notes, and the word *asaprah* has three syllables. Weintraub wrote *asaprah* a second time to show that the *bas* repeats this word after the *chazzan* (Ex. X.2.B). The text or the

[14] In Ex. IV.1, on the other hand, the sequential repetition of the opening phrase is split between the untexted *zinger* and a texted voice, presumably the *chazzan* (possibly still the zinger?). However, this line is divided into two sub-phrases of about a measure and a half each; no individual note is isolated. Furthermore, the beginning of the repitition is distinct in Ex. IV.1, since it coincides with the entrance of the *zinger*, but would not be set apart in Ex. IX.2 if the first note were joined to the preceding *bas* passage.

*chazzan* is divided syllabically, like the text in Ex. I. 1, IV.2, VIII.1 and 3, is not. The *bas's* word *asaprah* is squeezed in between the *chazzan's* text and the *bas* indication. For lack of space, the two writings of *asaprah* share the final syllable *rah.*

The textual echo is easier to identify when it recurs in the following measure. At s. 3, m. 4, the bas's text is written directly over the *bas* indication. Once again, the *chazzan's* text is divided syllabically and the *bas's* is not; the *bas* must apportion the four notes among the three syllables. Similarly (to return to the preceding measure), if the *chazzan* reenters on s. 3, m. 3, beat 3, there are different possibilities for his underlay as well. These are shown in Ex. X.3.A-C. In Ex. X.3.A, the notated underlay of the manuscript is preserved, and the double-dotted B is sung to an extraneous nonsense syllable, ah. So far, no manuscripts or musical examples have suggested such a practice. In Ex. X.3.B, the first syllable of text is moved forwards to coincide with the first note. The elongation of the schwa, although objectionable in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, may not have been problematic for Weintraub. Indeed, since the division of *k'vod'kha* into three syllables conforms to Weintraub's practice of distinguishing the *sh'va nach* from the *sh'va na*, this underlay may be historically the most appropriate. It also conforms to the underlay in the manuscript better than that of Ex. X.3.C, which relegates the schwa to the grace-note and brings the next syllable forwards by two beats.[15]

[15] Katz, Dr. Daniel S. A Prolegomenon to the Study of the Performance Practice of Synagogue Music Involving *M'shor'rim*. December, 1995.

**Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland**
**Cantata BWV 61 - Now come, saviour of the gentiles**

**1. Chorus [S, A, T, B]**
Violino I/II all' unisono, Viola I/II, Fagotto, Continuo
**Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland,**
*Now come, saviour of the gentiles,*
**Der Jungfrauen Kind erkannt,**
*recognised as the child of the Virgin,*
**Des sich wundert alle Welt,**
*at whom all the world is amazed*
**Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt.**
*that God decreed such a birth for him.*

**2. Recitative [Tenor]**
Continuo
**Der Heiland ist gekommen,**
*The saviour has come,*
**Hat unser armes Fleisch und Blut**
*and has our humble flesh and blood*
**An sich genommen**
*taken on himself*
**Und nimmet uns zu Blutsverwandten an.**
*and accepts us as his blood relations*
**O allerhöchstes Gut,**
*O highest goodness of all,*
**Was hast du nicht an uns getan?**
*what have you not done for us ?*
**Was tust du nicht**
*What do you not do*
**Noch täglich an den Deinen?**
*still every day for your people?*
**Du kömmst und läßt dein Licht**
*You come and let your light*
**Mit vollem Segen scheinen.**
*shine with full blessing.*

**3. Aria [Tenor]**
Violino I/II, Viola I/II all' unisono, Continuo
**Komm, Jesu, komm zu deiner Kirche**
*Come, Jesus, come to your church*
**Und gib ein selig neues Jahr!**
*and grant us a blessed new year!*
**Befördre deines Namens Ehre,**
*Increase the honour of your name,*
**Erhalte die gesunde Lehre**
*Preserve sound teaching*
**Und segne Kanzel und Altar!**
*and bless pulpit and altar!*

**4. Recitative [Bass]**
Violino I/II, Viola I/II, Continuo
**Siehe, ich stehe vor der Tür und klopfe an.**
*See, I stand before the door and knock.*
**So jemand meine Stimme hören wird**
*If anyone will hear my voice*

**und die Tür auftun,**
*and open the door*
**zu dem werde ich eingehen**
*I shall go in*
**und das Abendmahl mit ihm halten und er mit mir.**
*and have supper with him and he with me.*

**5. Aria [Boy Soprano]**
Violoncelli, Continuo
**Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze,**
*Open, my whole heart*
**Jesus kömmt und ziehet ein.**
*Jesus comes and enters within*
**Bin ich gleich nur Staub und Erde,**
*Though I am only like dust and earth,*
**Will er mich doch nicht verschmähn,**
*he does not want to scorn me*
**Seine Lust an mir zu sehn,**
*but to see his pleasure in me*
**Daß ich seine Wohnung werde.**
*so that I become his dwelling.*
**O wie selig werd ich sein!**
*Oh how blessed I shall be!*

**6. Chorale [S, A, T, B]**
Viola I coll'Alto, Viola II col Tenore, Fagotto col Basso, Violino I/II all' unisono, Continuo
**Amen, amen!**
**Komm, du schöne Freudenkrone, bleib nicht lange!**
*Come, you beautiful crown of joy, do not delay for a long time !*
**Deiner wart ich mit Verlangen.**
*I wait for you with longing*

# Jewish Bassos

## Basses of the *M'shor'rim*

**Joseph S. Goldstein** was the Bass of Oberlauringen bei Schweinfurth am Main. He wrote a collection of Synagogue songs towards the end of the eighteenth century and several recitatives for the High Holidays and Festivals in the traditional modes. This is the first and only written music of his, and it demonstrates that the recitative of the eighteenth century is in no way different from the recitative of East European *chazzanut*, since Goldstein was of German origin. In 1813 he became the bass of Moshe Raff, *chazzan* in Jebenhausen in Bavaria, to whom he presented his collection and who "he taught the tunes by playing them on the violin," providing further insight on the relationship of bass, singer, and *chazzan* of those days.[16]

**Yekl Bass** lived in Prague somewhere between the years of 1765 and 1791. Not much is written about him, but it is thought that he might have also been known as Yekl Singer. People of that time were often given surnames that corresponded to their professions. If this is the case, it is possible that the *m'shor'rim* tradition may have allowed the *singerl* to become not only a *chazzan*, but also a *bas*.[17]

**Isacche Servi** was a bass singer who performed in Siena during the late eighteenth century. Few resources remain written about him except for two performances which

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[16] Idelsohn, A.Z., "The Synagogue Song of the Ashkenazim," chap. in Jewish Music in Its Historical Development (New York: Tudor Publishing Company 1948), 129.
[17] Repertoire Internationale des Sources Musicales, 1989.

may have also been associated with Jacob (Giacobbi) Medina, who may also be a merely another name attributed to the same *bas*.[18]

**Meir Kornik**, also known as Moses Kurnik, was an author, scribe, and m'shorer. He was the bass singer of the Amsterdam hazzan Benjamin Wolf. He also functioned as a rabbi in his birthplace, Glogan (Silesia), where he died in 1826. There is one extant manuscript of his that was found in Amsterdam dated from 1794.[19]

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

**Basses of the Opera**

**Arie, Raphael,** 1922-1988 Bass Bulgaria

Raphael Arie was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1922. He first studied the violin, but then his voice was discovered and he began study with the baritone, Cristo Brambarov. He made his concert debut in Sofia in 1939, singing the bass part in Handel's Messiah. He sang at the Sofia Opera (1945) and in 1946 won first prize in a singing competition in Geneva. In 1947 he was engaged by La Scala and sang there successfully for a number of years. He also sang at a number of music festivals and made guest appearances at the leading opera houses in Germany, France, and North America. In 1951 he sang in Venice in the world premiere of Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress, and in 1960 and 1961 he sang the role of the Grand Inquisitor in Don Carlos at the Salzburg Festivals. Arie appeared in most major opera houses in the world, yet for some reason, was never invited to sing at the Met. Upon retirement from the stage in 1978, Arie moved to Israel, where he became

a professor of singing at a leading institution there. Raphael Arie died in Switzerland in 1988.[20]

[20] Telephone conversation and internet exchange with Mike Richter, Jewish opera and cantorial music collector.

**Artur Eizen,** 1927- Bass Russia

Artur Eizen was born in Moscow in 1927. He graduated from the Shukin Music Academy in 1948, and from 1949-1957 he was a soloist with the Red Army Chorus. He entered the Moscow Conservatory for further study in 1956, and in 1957 was engaged by the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, where he appeared well into the Eighties. Eizen had one of the most beautiful of Russian bass voices and gave many concerts abroad, as well as guest appearances in major opera houses.

**Kipnis, Alexander,** 1891-1978 Bass Ukraine

Alexander Kipnis was born in Zhitomir, Ukraine in 1891 and first studied conducting at the Warsaw Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1912. He served as a bandmaster in the Russian army during WWI, and was captured by the Germans. After the War, Kipnis remained in Germany and began studying voice at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory. After graduation, he first sang in operetta, but then made his operatic debut in Hamburg in 1915. He then sang in Wiesbaden (1917-1919) and then became the leading bass at the Charlottenburg Opera (later Städtische Oper) in Berlin (1919-1929.) From 1930-1935 he sang at the Berlin State Opera, and then the Vienna State Opera until 1938, when the Nazi regime made it too uncomfortable for him to remain. During his German period, Kipnis appeared frequently at the Bayreuth Festivals (1927-1933), as well as at the Salzburg Festivals, where his Sarastro in Die Zauberflöte was particularly admired. In 1940, the Metropolitan Opera engaged him, where he remained for seven seasons, appearing in 74 performances of 13 roles. His roles ranged from Wagnerian to Arkel in Pelleas et Melisande, Boris Godunov, Baron Ochs in Der Rosenkavalier, and Sarastro. After his retirement from the Met in 1946, he taught singing

in New York, dying there in 1978. Kipnis possessed one of the most smoothly produced bass voices of the century, and excelled in both opera and art song[21]

[21] Ibid.

**Lankow, Edward,** 1883-1940 Bass U.S.A.

Edward Lankow (Edward Rosenberg) was born in Tarrytown, N.Y. in 1883. He was a pupil in New York of Anna Lankow, whose name he took. He made his debut (1904) as a concert singer and in 1905 made a tour of the United States as assisting artist with Adelina Patti. He then went to Europe and was a member of the Dresden Royal Opera (1906-08). He then sang at the Frankfurt Opera (1908-1910) and the Vienna Imperial Opera (1910-11). The Metropolitan Opera engaged him in 1912, where he sang only one season, appearing 5 times as Sarastro in Die Zauberflöte. After leaving the Met, Lankow became mainly active as a concert singer, but he did appear as King Mark in Tristan und Isolde at the Chicago Opera in 1922, and later in the same season he sang as guest with the Opera-Comique in Paris. He gave up his career relatively early and became a teacher in New York where he died in 1940.[22]

[22] Ibid.

**Lattermann, Theodor,** 1886-1926 Bass Germany

Theodor Lattermann was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1886. He made his concert debut at the age of 19, and sang only in concert until 1907, when he made his stage debut in Barmen. The Hamburg Opera engaged him in 1908, where he remained until his death. He made many guest appearances at other leading opera houses including the Gura Opera in Berlin (1909-10), and in Cologne, Dresden, Amsterdam, Brussels, and the Vienna Opera (1920-21). In 1923-24 he undertook a tour of the United States with the German Opera Company, to which his wife, the contralto Ottilie Metzger, also belonged. While in Chicago, Lattermann and his wife appeared in the American premiere of Korngold's Die toten Augen. Lattermann had an extensive vocal range, which allowed him to sing both bass and baritone roles. He was also a noted sculptor and painter. His career was ended prematurely in the Spring of 1925 when he contracted a fatal illness. He died near Berlin in 1926.[23]

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[23] Ibid.

**Adolf Lieban,** Bass Austria

Brother of Julius Lieban, a noteable tenor (and also of the baritones, Sigmund and Adalbert) was born in Austria in 1867 to a family of cantors. He was, above all, a singer of operetta on Berlin stages, but also active as an opera and concert singer. He frequently made guest appearances at the Berlin Opera, and was also very popular as a vocal teacher. In 1904 he founded the Lyrophon Record Company, which in addition to his solo recordings, also recorded him with his brothers in quartet. Adolf died in Berlin in 1924

**List, Emanuel,** 1890-1967 Bass Austria

Emanuel List (born Emanuel Fleissig) was born in Vienna in 1891. Originally a tailor, he also sang in the chorus of the Theater am Westens and studied singing with Emil Steger. He then traveled all over Europe as the bass in a quartet. In 1914, after appearing in a vaudeville theater in London, he went to the U. S., where he studied in New York with Josiah Zuro. At this time he sang only in film theaters and small vaudeville houses. In 1921 he returned to Austria and made his stage debut (1922) at the Vienna Volksoper as Mephistofeles in Faust. He went to the Berlin City Opera in 1923, and remained there until forced by the Nazis to leave Germany in 1934. He sang at the Salzburg Festivals (1931-35), and was greatly admired at the 1933 Bayreuth Festival as Fafner, Hunding, and Hagen in the Ring cycle. In 1934 he became a member of the Metropolitan Opera, remaining there until 1939. He made guest appearances at Covent Garden as Baron Ochs in Der Rosenkavalier in 1936, and later appeared in San Francisco

and Chicago. He sang again at the Berlin Opera (1950-52) and thereafter lived in Vienna, where he died in 1967. List had probably the blackest bass voice to be heard on records[24]

[24] Ibid.

**London, George,** 1919-1985 Bass-Baritone Canada

George London (Burnstein) was born to Russian-Jewish parents in Montreal, Canada in 1919. He first studied in Los Angeles and made his debut under the name George Burnson at the Hollywood Bowl in 1942, singing the role of Grenville in La Traviata. This was followed by further study in New York and by appearances in operettas and musicals, as well as at the San Francisco opera in the minor role of Monterone in Rigoletto in 1943. Beginning In 1947 he sang with two other singers (Frances Yeend and Mario Lanza) in a group called the Bel Canto Trio, which toured the United States and Europe. In 1949 he went to Europe and was engaged by the Vienna Opera, where he became an immediate success, singing such roles as Amonasro, Onegin, Escamillo, Boris Godunov, and Don Giovanni. After singing at the Edinburgh Festival in 1950 and as Amfortas in Parsifal at Bayreuth in 1951, he was engaged by the Metropolitan Opera in 1951, singing there until 1966. At the Met he appeared in 262 performances of 23 roles. He also sang in Salzburg, at La Scala, at the Teatro Colon, and at the Paris Opera. In 1960, he became the first American to appear on the Bolshoi Opera

stage, when he sang Boris Godunov there. His singing career was cut short by partial paralysis of the vocal cords, and he worked in arts management, as a stage director, and as Director of the Opera Society of Washington, D.C. (1975-80) before retiring because of a heart ailment. He died in Armonk, New York in 1985. London possessed one of the most beautiful vocal instruments of his time, coupled with extraordinary dramatic ability[25]

[25] Ibid.

**Ney, David,** 1842-1905 Bass Hungary

David Ney was born in Hungary in 1842. He began his career at the Vienna Carltheater, then directed by von Suppe, first as a member of the chorus and then as a soloist. He made his debut at the Budapest Opera right after its establishment in 1884 and continued as its leading bass until his death in 1905. He appeared in 103 parts in 78 operas, singing such diverse roles as Don Giovanni, Leporello, and the Commendatore in Don Giovanni, Hans Sachs, Sarastro, Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro, Wotan, Mephistopheles and Falstaff. He sang the role of King Mark in Tristan und Isolde at the Budapest premiere of the opera in 1901. It was said that after his death in 1905 even three singers found it difficult to take over all of his roles.[26]

[26] Ibid.

**Reizen, Mark,** 1895-1992 Bass Russia

Mark Ossipovich Reizen was born in Nikitovka, Ukraine in 1895. At first he was an engineer, but then studied in Kharkhov with the Italian professor, Bugamelli. He made his debut in Kharkhov 1921 as Pimen in Boris Godunov, and also sang Ruslan, Dosifei in Khovanshchina, the Miller in Rusalka, Basilio in the Barber of Seville, Mephistopheles in Faust, and Kochubei in Mazeppa. He joined the Leningrad Opera in 1925 and made his debut at the Moscow Bolshoi in 1928, where he sang regularly until 1954. In 1930 he made a tour of Western Europe and sang at the major houses of Europe, appearing in Berlin, Barcelona, Monaco, Paris, and London. When he left the Bolshoi in 1954, it was not because of any problems with his voice, as can be evidenced from recordings he continued to make for another 25 years. He still appeared occasionally in opera, and also continued to appear in concert and on the radio. He gave a recital for his 80th birthday, and for his 90th he sang the role of Gremin in Eugene Onegin at the Bolshoi, establishing a record for longevity of a leading singer on the stage; films of the occasion show that the

voice had deteriorated very little from the days of his prime. Reizen is considered to have had one of the most beautiful bass voices of the century, and he was also an accomplished actor and musician. He died in Moscow in 1992.[27]

[27] Ibid.

**Schorr, Friedrich,** 1888-1953 Bass-Baritone Hungary

Acknowledged as the greatest Wagnerian baritone of his generation, Friedrich Schorr was born in Nagyvarad, Hungary in 1888, where his father, Mayer Schorr, was cantor at the major synagogue. He originally planned on becoming a lawyer, but studied singing with Adolph Robinson in Brünn and made his official debut at Graz (1911) as Wotan in Die Walküre, although he had already sung first in Chicago earlier that same year. Remaining in Graz until 1916, he then sang in Prague (1916-18) and at the Cologne Opera (1918-1923). In 1923 he toured the United States with the German Opera Company and in 1924 he was engaged at the Metropolitan Opera, making his debut as Wolfram in Tannhäuser. He remained a celebrated member of that house until 1943 and was treasured all over the world as an incomparable Hans Sachs in Meistersinger and Wotan in Wagner's Ring Cycle. He appeared annually as a guest at the Berlin State Opera (1922-1933) and also sang regularly at the Vienna Opera. He first sang at the Bayreuth Festival in 1925 and was greatly admired there until 1931. In 1943 he gave up the stage, but continued to appear in concert, and also produced operas at the New York City

Opera. At the same time he conducted an opera studio at the Hartt School in Hartford, Connecticut. Schorr died in Farmington, Connecticut in 1953.[28]

[28] Ibid.

**Sibiriakov, Lev,** 1870-1938 Bass Russia

Lev Mikhailovitch Sibiriakov (Spivak) was born in the Velinski District of Russia in 1870. He mainly studied in Italy, and sang as a guest in Naples and, at the invitation of Toscanini, at La Scala in Milan (where he sang under the name - Spivacchini) before returning to Russia. There, he appeared in Kiev, Baku, Tiflis, and Kharkov. After his successful appearances in the provinces, Sibiriakov became a principal singer at the Imperial Maryinsky Theater in St. Petersburg (1902-04; 1909-20), as well as at many other major houses. His U.S. appearances were limited to one season at the Boston Opera (1910-11). There, he sang the roles of Mefistofele in Boito's opera, and also in Gounod's Faust. He also appeared as Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia. In 1920 Sibiriakov left Russia, mainly settling in France and Belgium, where he sang until quite an advanced age. There is some discrepancy about Sibiriakov's later years. According to some sources, Sibiriakov never left Belgium, and sang there as late as 1938, the year of his death, dying in Anvers. Soviet sources state that upon retirement from the stage, he became a Professor of Singing at the Warsaw Conservatory, dying in Warsaw. Personally, I give

more credence to the former. Sibiriakov was a giant of a man, about 6'5" in height, with a booming, black bass voice of exceptional range. It is felt by many that his is the most beautiful bass voice on records.[29]

[29] Ibid.

**Basso-Chazzanim**

**Leon Lishner**, 1913-1995 U.S.A.

Lishner was born in Brooklyn, the son of Russian immigrants from Kiev. His family was somewhat traditional— they kept kosher but were not orthodox. He went to City College and then to Julliard studying operatic performance. Shortly afterwards, he served the United States military in World War II as entertainment director for his platoon. His platoon helped in the liberation of Nazi concentration camps, which had a profound effect upon him. Upon his return from Europe, he became involved with City Center, performing many operas with them. He then participated in the premier of several of Carl Gian Menotti's operas on Television and Broadway. He created the role of King Balthazar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the Secret Police Agent *in The Consul*, and Don Marco in *The Saint of Bleecker Street. Amahl and the Night Visitors* was the first opera created for performance on national television. He toured with *The Consul,* which was produced by Laurence Olivie in England and France. He later accepted a teaching position at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, which he

maintained for seven years. It was while he was teaching there that he was asked to record his first set of Yiddish folk songs, *Out of the Ghetto*, with Lazar Weiner improvising at the piano. He taught voice at Oberlin College for one year, and then took another teaching position at the University of Washington from 1964 until he retired. He recorded once again with Lazar Weiner at the University of Washington, *The Yiddish Art Song* in 1976. While in Seattle, he sang with opera theaters in Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Tuscon, and Santa Fe to name only a few. He continued to tour extensively in operas and recitals. He often sang lieder, especially the *Winteriesse* and Yiddish music in Seattle. He was also involved with local television productions of operas. He sang in Temple de Hirsch, a Reform Congregation as an occasional soloist for the High Holidays. He has a daughter and four sons from two marriages.[30] He, like many other bassos was also a Wagnerian, having sung in the Ring Cycle for two summers in Seattle. In his lifetime, he sang more than 85 roles with leading opera companies, including the San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, New York City Opera, Seattle Opera, Central City Opera, Santa Fe Opear, and Vancouver Opera. He is featured on well known record labels including RCA, Decca, Columbia, Vanguard, and Omega. "The Lishner voice," wrote the Washington D.C. Evening Star, "is a bass rich in quality, flexible, superbly controlled—it can strike the heroic strain credibly and it can project a pianissimo of rare melliflousness." He was committed to justice and peace in the world through the Jewish organizations that he involved himself with, particularly in relationship to the Holocaust. He sang Yiddish songs that memorialized the Holocaust until the year he died. His third and last recording of Yiddish songs, *Our Town is Burning, Cries from the Holocaust*, was

[30] Telephone Conversation with Anne Manning, Ex-wife of Leon Lishner

recorded in 1994 at the University of Washington. "Recording this CD has been more than a musical project," says Mr. Lishner. "Rather it has been a commitment and mission to help keep alive the tragic memory of the Holocaust with the hope that remembering may help prevent such atrocities from ever occurring again." He felt that his bass voice prevented him from becoming a cantor, since most of the cantors that one heard were tenors. He considered himself to be Reform, or at least culturally Jewish. He was more intrigued with the mystique of Old World Judaism. He held a huge love and respect for Paul Robeson. Like Robeson, he had a left wing political perspective that was close to a communist thinking and mentality.[31]

[31] Telephone conversation with Denise Lishner, Leon Lishner's daughter.

**Rosenblatt, Cantor Henry,** Bass-Baritone U.S.A.

Cantor Henry Rosenblatt continued the legendary name of Rosenblatt in the world of Jewish music through his "Father-Son" tradition. Senior Cantor Rosenblatt, in the biography, "Yossele Rosenblatt" by Farrar, Straus and Young states he expressed the hope that his son Henry, "Who is probably better than I . . ." carry on with Cantorial music. He was . . . " very proud of his son's musical accomplishments, and hoped that Henry would combine a successful career as a cantor with equal success in opera.

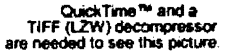
During his lifetime, Cantor Rosenblatt was famous not only as a gifted vocalist, but for his compositions, many of which were never recorded. His personal library was left to his son Henry, who researched, reedited and arranged his father's works, many of which had no accompaniments.

Henry Rosenblatt appeared with his father, Cantor Josef Rosenblatt in many joint recitals throughout the world. Possessing a fine bass-baritone voice, he entered the field of opera, specializing in buffo and character roles. Assuming the name of Paul Dennis,

he appeared with leading opera companies coast to coast, together with concerts, theatres, radio and television.

He was personally chosen by Arturo Toscanini to sing the role of Marquise d'Obigny on the NBC presentation of *La Traviata* together with Licia Albanese, Jan Peerce and Robert Merrill. He won four consecutive fellowships and is a graduate of the Julliard Graduate School, School of Sacred Music and the Hebrew Union College as Cantor-Educator, Summa Cum Laude. As Cantor he officiated in the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Temples during the High Holy, Days.[32]

[32] Telephone conversation and internet exchange with Mike Richter, Jewish opera and cantorial music collector.



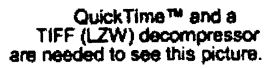

**Adolph Katchko**, 1886-1958 Russia

Katchko was born in Varta, Kaliscz, Russia. Like most great cantors, Katchko was a child prodigy. He began singing at the age of six with the choir of Jonah Shochet. As a young man he studied voice and composition in Berlin. Arriving in the United Sates in 1921, he served for six years with various congregations, and thn became cantor at Temple Anshe Chesed of New York City where he remained for twenty-four years until his retirement. A teacher of numerous cantors, Katchko published many of his own compositions including *Avodath Aharon*, a Friday evening service for cantor and mixed choir.

He had a clear, flexible baritone range with a low bass extension. Normally, a voice as heavy as his would not lend itself to long, florid passages. However, it was a unique vocal quality of Katchko that he was not only able to execute such passages, but performed them with artistry and taste. His virtuosity was impressive in that he was able to adapt both to the Orthodox style as well as the Reform, and his cantorial artistry was highly regarded in all types of congregations in the three branches of American Judaism. He was a popular vocal coach and cantorial teacher. In addition to his published music, he also sold

manuscript copies of his recitatives. Some of his works were never published, but sold individually to students and other cantors.[33]

[33] Ibid.




**Alter Yechiel Karniol,** 1855-1925 Hungary

Karniol moved at an early age to Hungary where he was apprenticed to the notable cantor, Moshe Lutzker. Afterwards, Karniol occupied several cantorial posts, including one at Finfkirchen, where he gained a strong reputation in the cantorial art. In 1903 the Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek invited him to New York, where he remained for five years, returning to Europe for the post of the Great Synagogue of Odessa. Following the Ukranian pogroms of 1905, Karniol returned to New York, and became the cantor of the Rumanian Synagogue, and then returned to Ohab Zedek. There, because of increasing difficulties with synagogue officers, he retired. During his latter years, Karnil was assisted economically by other prominent cantors in the area. In 1928 the philanthropic group arranged a benefit appearance for him at the Warshauer Synagogue, where he chanted the *Yom Kippur Koton Service*, supported by a chorus of two hundred cantors. This event was his final appearance.

Karniol is an important link after the cantorial group mentioned by Idelsohn in volume seven of his *Thesaurus*, and was considered the father of modern *t'filoh* improvisations. He had a bass voice with a very high vocal range,

much like a real tenor, and was an outstanding improviser. Though his musical knowledge was limited, he could make musical modulations and smoothly return to the original key. He retained the European pronunciation, and in his recordings one hears half words and broken words. He sang with *hislahavus* (fervor) and particular soulful intonation which brought many to tears during his renditions. He was exceptional in sclections for his *Yom Kippur Koton* service (for the day preceding the New moon). A number of cantors, including Samuel Vigoda and Moshe Ganchoff, borrowed phrases and thematic motifs from Karniol and interjected them into their own creations and recordings. Samuel Joshua Weisser (Pilderwasser) in his book *Rinas Y'hoshua* (vol. 2) included some materials from Karniol, such as in the *Sh'ma Kolenu* the word *chus*, (Weisser/page 11) and in *Oveinu Malkenu* thee words *kosvenu b'sefer* (Weisser / page 59). The reason Weisser gave for these inclusions was to "eternalize something of Karniol." Jacob Rapaport, an outstanding liturgical composer and leader of the Jewish Cantors Ministers Association, once challenged karniol to improvise on the spot one of his recorded selections. To the great delight of the assembled cantors, Karniol without hesitation created a totally new musical setting of the text. Although respected by his peers, he died in abject poverty. His grave remained without a headstone for eight years. While he was still alive, one of his admirers wanted to pay for the publication of his works which Weisserhad a greed to notate. Karniol refused, however, and so only his recordings remain as testament to his significance in 20th century cantorial art. There is no instrumental

accompaniment for any of Karniol's recordings, only unaccompanied male choirs. Nothing of Karniol has appeared in print.[34]

[34] The Golden Age of Cantors, Musical Masterpieces of the Synagogue. Velvel Pasternak and Noach Schall. Tara Publications, NY 1991.

**Rudinow, Cantor Moishe,** 1891-1953 Bass-Baritone Russia

Cantor Rudinow was born in Odessa, Russia in 1891. At the age of eight, he began to sing in a choir and to study the rudiments of musical theory, solfeggio and Jewish liturgical music. At fourteen, he was alto soloist in the Kiev Synagogue. After his voice changed, he became bass soloist in the choir of the Great White Synagogue. Drafted in 1915, he was gassed on the battlefield. Upon his return he became choir director and conductor of the Haomir and also sang opera in Kiev. He was graduated from the Imperial Conservatory of Music in 1919. In 1921, Cantor and Mrs. Rudinow concertized in Poland and Rumania, where they introduced the new Jewish and Hebrew folk and art songs. After the tour was over they went to Palestine where Cantor Rudinow met the father of modern Hebrew music, Joel Engel, with whom he collaborated in producing Hebrew opera and oratorio. In 1928 Cantor Rudinow and his family came to the United States. Shortly thereafter he became assistant Cantor of Temple Emanu-El of New York City and subsequently senior Cantor. He served in this Temple for 22 years, retiring in 1951. In the late thirties, he was commissioned by a minor label to record a number of songs by Mussorgsky. He also recorded several cantorial pieces for another label.[35]

[35] Ibid.

**Contemporary Basso-Chazzanim**

**Cantor Joel Colman,** Bass-Baritone U.S.A.

Cantor Joel Colman has been serving as the Cantor at Temple Sinai for the past four years. Previously he has served as the Cantor at Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York and as the Cantor/Educator at Greenwich Reform Synagogue in Greenwich, Connecticut. He received a Master Degree from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music where he was invested as Cantor in 1995, and graduated from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan with a BA in Special Education. Cantor Colman is also a past regional director for the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and has taught High School in Texas and in Israel.

Cantor Colman has sung in concerts in New Orleans, Rochester, St. Louis, Miami, Detroit, Tulsa, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York City and Jerusalem, and has also been the featured artist at two concerts held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Cantor Colman has sung with some of the finest male college choirs in the country such as the Wayne State University Glee Club in Detroit, Michigan, and the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The Journal of Synagogue Music published Cantor Colman's master thesis on Sidor Belarsky. Cantor Colman has sung the

National Anthem at the 2002 Nokia Sugar Bowl, which was televised nationally on ABC. He is also well known for his rendition of *Ol' Man River* from Showboat.

Cantor Colman is proud to serve the New Orleans community as a Chaplain with the New Orleans Fire Department, and is a member of the American Conference of Cantors and serves on the Board of Directors. He is an active amateur radio operator, and is the amateur radio emergency coordinator for Orleans Parish. In 2003, Cantor Colman took on the responsibility of being the Temple Sinai Religious School Director.[36]

[36] Telephone conversation with Cantor Joel Colman, January 2005.

**Cantor Nathan Lam,** Bass-Baritone U.S.A.

Nathan Lam has been a cantor most of his life. Born in Los Angeles, he began the study of Hazzanut at the age of eight under the tutelage of Cantor Allan Michelson. At the age of 16, he was engaged by a leading congregation to serve as its cantor for the High Holy Days. Cantor Lam holds an Honoris Causa from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

In 2001, Cantor Lam completed 25 years at Stephen S. Wise Temple. The Temple has established scholarships in his name that are given to students at the H.L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary and to students at the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College. He developed a group of children called M'shor'rim, Synagogue singers who sing every erev Shabbat of the year. These children delight and inspire the congregation with their solos and interpretations of the liturgy.[37]

[37] Personal interview with Cantor Nathan Lam at Kutcher's, July 2004.

**Thom King,** 1956-Present Bass-Baritone U.S.A.

A native of Connecticut and a magna cum laude graduate of the Hartt College of Music, baritone Thom King has an impressive and varied list of roles to his credit in opera, light opera, musical theater, and oratorio. Having started out in bass-baritone roles, Mr. King has been singing wide range of baritone roles with many other companies and orchestras throughout the country. Aside from the standard repertory, in which he has sung some 35 roles, he has appeared in a number of contemporary operas by Ching, Bernstein, Weill, Pliska and Wargo.

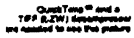
Arthur Karet voice teacher was cantor with beautiful tenor voice. Wife worked as a cantor. Thom was not Jewish converted later on. Started doing parts of the service. Davened at orthodox shul. First regular cantorial job was United Jewish Center in Danbury Connecticut— Used Union Hymnal in Shabbat Evening— Shabbat Morning and Holidays Orthodox. Good learning experience. Learned nusach. Never went to schools. Regrets lack of schooling. Composed niggunim for niggun anthology. Writes a lot of music. Gets to sing a lot. Baltimore Symphony for charities in Israel. Composed music. Beth El Congregation for eight years. Member of Cantor's Assembly.

More recently he had great success with his interpretation of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* with the Camerata de Bellas Artes in Mexico, Handel's *Messiah* with the Bridgeport Symphony, Handel's *Samson* with the Baltimore Choral Artists, in Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the Greater Lansing Symphony and he was featured in a concert with the Memphis Opera celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. He also appeared in Charles Davidson's oratorio *Souls on Fire* in Detroit with Leonard Nimoy as Narrator and sang the title role of *Jephtha* with the Handel Choir of Baltimore.

His most recent performances include Olin Blitch in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* with Eugene Opera, Amonasro in *Aïda* with Mississippi Opera, Germont in *La Traviata* with Annapolis Opera and he will perform the role of Crespel in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with the Baltimore Opera this season.

Mr. King is showcased in a CD entitled *"Thom King sings Michael Issacson"*, featuring contemporary Jewish liturgical music. He resides in Baltimore and serves Beth El Congregation, a conservative synagogue.[38]

[38] Telephone interview with Thom King, January 2005.



**Cantor Richard Botton,** 1935-present Bass-Baritone U.S.A.

Cantor Richard Botton is an operatically trained, Sephardic chazzan and graduate of Hebrew Union College School of Sacred Music with cantorial investiture. As a young man, he won the Arthur Guthrie talent scout auditions and sang operatic arias on national television for several weeks on his program. Later in his career, he won first prize in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions for the eastern region. He was the featured bass-baritone soloist for Jewish operas including Frederick Picket's *Isaac Levi* and Lazar Weiner's *Golem.* He was called upon to perform Bloch Service nationwide with orchestras. Performed premiere in Carnegie Hall of Dayenu by Paul Allen Levi with the New York Choral Society and Orchestra. He performed extensively with the Paul Whiteman orchestra and continues to be in demand for cantorial concerts and recitals of Ladino music.

As a cantor, he commissioned Charles Davidson to write *And David Danced Before the Lord*, the first Jewish Jazz service in 1967, which was nationally televised on CBS. He commissioned Elizabeth Swados to write musical settings of the Song of Songs which he performed at Central Synagogue, the congregation he served for over 20 years. Botton has performed all types of music in the synagogue when appropriate— classical, jazz, rock, and folk. He pioneered the performance of multimedia services in the 1960s,

using audio-visual technology as a sermonic device to illustrate the problems of the Vietnam War. He teaches in the Italian tradition of *bel canto*, and maintains a long-standing vocal studio.

He served the American Conference of Cantors as President from 1984-5, and is recognized as Placement Director Emeritus, a position he served for ten years. He served as student placement director, advisor, and teacher at HUC-JIR Sacred School of Music for four years.

Raised in the Sephardic tradition, Richard Botton is the foremost interpreter of Ladino song. He has traveled extensively, performing his entertaining and informative lecture/concert, "Ladino Reverie." His extensive performing experiences and knowledge of various styles of music have helped to enrich Sephardic folk songs, and have raised many of them to the level of Art Songs.[39]

[39] Telephone interview with Cantor Richard Botton, January 2005.

**Gerard Edery,** bass-baritone U.S.A.

Gerard Edery was born in Casablanca and raised in Paris and New York City, speaking several languages throughout his childhood while absorbing a variety of musical traditions spanning three continents. Trained as a classical baritone at The Manhattan School of Music, he has sung more than 30 roles with opera companies around the United States. Mr. Edery is also a cantorial soloist for The Village Temple in New York City and is a frequent guest at Synagogues and Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States and Canada. Considered one of the leading interpreters of Sephardic Song, he has been honored with the Sephardic Musical Heritage Award and has received a Meet the Composer grant for his original songs. His musical, *Song of the Turtledove,* was co-written with Noa Ain, and was presented by the Premieres Festival at Lincoln Center. He plans to perform at The Indianapolis Early Music Festival with The Ivory Consort, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors with The Gerard Edery Ensemble and Merkin Concert Hall (sponsored by The World Music Institute) with The Sons of Sepharad. Mr. Edery has been featured in major concert halls and festivals in the United States, Canada, Europe, the Far East, Israel, Morocco and Mexico. He has performed at the United Nations in New York City and the Palais des Nations in Geneva, The

Smithsonian Institute, The Library of Congress, The Holocaust Museum, Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood, The Cervantino International Festival in Mexico, the International Festival of Sacred Music in Morocco, and at Lincoln Center, Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, The Jewish Museum and The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, to name a few. Mr. Edery is a prolific recording artist and has released ten CDs on the Sefarad Records label.[40]

[40] Personal Interview with Gerard Edery, January 2005.

**Sidor Belarsky,** 1898-1975 Bass Russia / U.S.A.

Sidor Belarsky was born on February 22, 1898 in Krijopol, a small shtetl near Odessa under the original name of Isidor (Yisroel) Lifshitz. He was the son of Moshe and Esther Lifshitz. His father achieved wealth as an egg merchant with Berlin connections and other agriculturally based ventures including a subsidiary watermelon business. His mother worked in the home as the mother of six daughters and one son.

Sidor was the first and only son, and his family and friends affectionately nicknamed him Shrulik. Despite his family's secular inclinations, he used his musical talents in the synagogue as a boy cantor at the Krijopol synagogue in 1910 at the age of 12.

When he reached Bar Mitzvah age in 1911, Sidor's voice changed from alto to a rich "basso" voice. As his voice continued to develop, he commenced his music studies in 1913 at a private high school known as the gymnasia. This led to continued musical studies at the Odessa Conservatory where he met another student, Clara, also known as Clarunya, who through a dramatic turn of events played a pivotal role in Sidor's life.

Clarunya was born in Moskivka in 1895, the daughter of David and Rachel Schoichet. Clarunya, like Sidor, came from a wealthy family. Her father was a wealthy oil dealer, which afforded her uncommon privileges including an exceptional education, exquisite clothes, a governess, piano lessons, and an imported German piano.

While at the Odessa Conservatory, Clarunya saw Sidor as handsome, charming, and gregarious with many girlfriends. She, however, while beautiful and elegant, was shy and three years Sidor's senior. While at the conservatory, she remained his close friend and secret admirer until one day something happened that forever altered their relationship.

In 1919, it was Czarist army policy to round up Jews for use as cannon fodder in the military. They received assistance from the local police to draft Jews into their last stand against Germany and Bolshevism. Sidor, who was of draft age, Jewish, and a two time draft avoider, fit their profile quite well. On a trip from the conservatory in Odessa to his home in Krijopol, military officials took Sidor captive. Besides being an institution that condoned religious persecution, the military was essentially a death sentence for the Jew. Sidor's fate was sealed, but it was a selfless act that transformed the normally shy and demure Clara into a heroine.

Clara approached the head officer who held Sidor captive and pleaded for his release. The officer, impressed by her boldness, agreed to her request under the condition that Clara spend the night with him. In Russian society, an unmarried woman who gave herself to a man was publicly ostracized, unmarriable, and essentially excommunicated from her family and friends. Despite Clara's disgust at the thought of the officer's

demand, her love for Sidor and fervent desire to save his life caused her to reluctantly agree to his demand.

Upon Sidor's release from military duty, his father demanded that Sidor offer his hand in marriage in redemption of Clara's altruism. Sidor and Clara were married in 1919 without a traditional ceremony or attendance of friends or family. At that time, due to the prohibitions of the pogroms, weddings were not religious in nature and were performed covertly by Jewish families so as not to attract attention.

In 1920, Krijopol was hit by an especially fierce pogrom. Moshe Lifshitz's wealth and influence upon the local railroad allowed his family to travel and find temporary safety in Odessa. The Shoichet family was not as resourceful, however, and while they went into hiding in Krijopol, they were shortly found and burned by their assailants.

Simultaneously, Clara gave birth to Isabel in Odessa. Sidor gave her the name Isabell as the feminine form of his own, Isidor. With a new family, Sidor decided to create a new name, Belarsky, from the combination of their names: Bel from Isa**bel**, ar from Cl**ar**unya, and sky, a typical Russian ending.

When Odessa became dangerous with spreading pogroms, the Belarskys fled to Berlin where it was relatively safe despite overt anti-Semitism and the resentment of disgruntled Germans. Upon returning to Leningrad, Sidor began his studies at the State Conservatory with a full load of music and academic subjects in music and engineering. He studied under the financial support of a government student subsidy and the generosity of Sidor's father.

He and his family lived in one room of a six room flat. Under Stalin's rule, the Bolsheviks converted apartments into living complexes for multiple families for more

proletarian use. The Belarskys lived with five other families, one of which was the former occupant, who appeared aristocratic. The formerly elegant flat was now cramped and dingy. There was one "kerosinka," a one-burner stove shared by the six families, a communal kitchen, shared toilet and bathing. The families bathed only once a month because water was too expensive.

The Belarskys were the only Jews on the flat. The other families were Greek Orthodox, but were very tolerant of their Jewish flat mates. The Belarsky parents were lenient with their religious practice because of anti-Semitism and communism, so Isabel was allowed to participate in their ceremonies. The tenants thoroughly spoiled Isabel, and she assisted them with household responsibilities.

Every summer, the Belarskys would return to their native Krijopol by train to rest and collect enough food to last the winter. They had only three minutes to load and unload all of the eggs, fruit, vegetables, and pavdila (a sticky plum jam) that they could carry onto the train.

One of these summer visits was tragic for the Belarsky family. Isabel's mother informed her that she was going to have a baby brother soon in a low-keyed manner, which was typical of Clara. On the day of the expected birth, Isabel heard terrible screams from her mother's room. After a protracted labor, Clara gave birth to a ten-pound baby boy. Sadly, the baby died soon afterwards due to an incompetent "butcher of a doctor who tore mama apart."

The return to Leningrad was solemn, and Clara, who suffered agonizing pain, would never be able to have conjugal relationships with her husband again. Instead, Clara assumed a parental relationship with Sidor and allowed him to take a lover. Sidor

returned with his family to Leningrad to complete his studies at the conservatory, receiving degrees in both music and engineering. Afterwards, he joined the Moscow and Leningrad State Opera, singing classic repertoire as a leading basso and performing widely in concert.

Moshe Lipshitz had a brother, Benjamin, who had left Russia at the turn of the century as an agricultural pioneer, leading Jewish colonies in Mexico, Canada, and Utah. He became involved in ICOR, the Association for Jewish Colonization in the Soviet Union, Inc., an American philanthropic organization, after serving time building a colony in Utah.

Jewish colonization in Utah was not a new idea. Even as early as 1900 there were Jewish colonies formed in the United States. As a part of the U.S. Back-to-the-farm movement, Rabbi Hirsch of New York bought 6000 acres of land in Sevier County, Utah named Clarion. Benjamin, who had changed his last name to Brown, was the first colonist. In 1911, he led other Russians with no farming knowledge or experience to till the Utah soil and create a community. By 1913 there were 52 families, but the soil was poor and there was little water. The families couldn't afford the land or the water necessary to reap a harvest, so in 1915, Brown resigned and the land was sold at public auction a year later. Afterwards, Brown and the other families stayed to form the Central Utah Poultry Exchange, eventually known as the Utah Poultry Producers Cooperative Association and finally the Intermountain Farmer's Association.

Over the course of Brown's colonial efforts, however, he formed a relationship with Franklin Harris. Harris was an agricultural expert from the Agricultural College of Utah and popular President of Bringham Young University who performed soil survey

work for the Jewish community in Utah. Brown convinced Harris to travel with him to the Soviet Union to assist in the colonization of Jews in Siberia.

Jewish colonization in the Soviet Union was attempted previously in 1924 at Komzet in response to an overturn of the Czar's discriminatory laws and the post-Czar settlement of new land. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in the Ukraine and Crimea also attempted it, but the local residents were unhappy with the encroachment of the new settlers. In 1929, colonization was under the influence of the dictatorship of Stalin, who purged and exiled dissidents and implemented collectivism by force. As a part of his leadership, there were many five year plans to eliminate territorially based Jewish identity, deflect Zionist tendencies, accelerate Jewish assimilation, and create diffusion.

For organizations like ICOR, colonization efforts offered plans to economically transform Siberia, create a defensive barrier to Japanese expansionism, and Jews from abroad would fund the project. In 1928, ICOR made plans to colonize Birobidzhan. At the time, there were 654 Jewish settlers and 24,000 inhabitants were already there. There were 10 million acres of land located 5,000 air miles from Moscow on the Bira River, a tributary of the Amur River. The land was filled with swamps, swampy forests, grassland, fertile soils, and timber on low hills. There were cold, dry winters and hot, moist summers.

While Harris was to serve as an agricultural expert, offering teaching and advice to the newly found settlement, it was when Brown took Harris to one of Sidor's concert appearances in Moscow that Sidor's life was to change tremendously. Harris offered Sidor an opportunity to teach vocal music at Brigham Young University for a period of

six months, after which the Belarsky's would have to return to the Soviet Union. Upon Sidor's invitation Harris and Brown took a short detour to Krijopol, which would be revolutionary in Sidor's professional development. Before the ICOR commission left for Siberia, they spent almost ten days traveling south, chiefly by train, to visit Jewish colonies in the Ukraine and Crimea. It took them twenty-four hours to get to Kiev. Then while the others went to Vinnitsa and Voronitsa, Harris and Brown went further southwest to Brown's native village of Krijopol and spent a long day with his family. Harris felt fortunate to have "a most unusual opportunity of getting right into Jewish life with the family and relatives of Mr. Brown...They are fine people but are in poverty." (Diary, 11 July 1929) Apparently, the Lifshitz's did not have the wealth that they had prior to the pogroms, and Franklin Harris was further moved to help Sidor and his family.

Their visit lasted twenty-four hours. Curious, friendly, villagers, especially youngsters, followed the commissioners. Dr. Harris wrote about his journey to Krijopol upon returning to the United States. He made observations upon the hardships of Jews in a post World War One Russia. "The village in which we are visiting has seen may of these raids (pogroms)...With the coming of the new regime, an attempt is made to eliminate all race persecution and to allow each people to develop its own culture. The people in the villages, however, have vivid memories and are in constant fear that something may arise to bring on a repetition of past atrocities."

Harris was perceptive and prophetic: Atrocities did occur, culminating in the savagery of the Wehrmacht onslaught during World War Two, when special Einzatzgruppen (SS Forces) were aided in their massacre of the region's Jews, by enthusiastic local people.

The commission's visit to Krijopol ended at three o'clock the next morning. The entire community escorted the travelers to the railway station, and, as a mark of respect, two of the men accompanied the group to the next station.

The visit to Krijopol, and other shtetls in the area, had been planned in part as a fact finding trip so that the commissioners might better understand the complex social, political, and economic changes that had taken place recently, affecting the lives of the Jewish population, who were mostly artisans and trades-people and had previously operated under the free enterprise system.

Dr. Harris ended his account of the visit to Krijopol with the declaration that the Commission would do, "everything possible to alleviate their suffering and to give these good people an opportunity to live happy lives unmolested by hostile neighbors and freed from the abject poverty which is now their portion."

The commission traveled to Moscow, from where they set out for Khabarovsk, the administrative capital of the Eastern Soviet region. Remaining there for several days, they conferred with local officials and representatives of various governmental agencies concerning programs already underway in Birobidzhan, which had been designated a Jewish colony a year earlier.

The Commission then proceeded to Birobidzhan by private railway car, arriving there on July 31, 1929. From their base on the train, the group made trips on horse into the countryside, where due to the primitiveness of the roads, motorized vehicles could not travel.

They found there an under-developed area of great potential where settlements of Koreans and Russians had cultivated some of the land. But the Commission warned that

due to the relative primitiveness of the area, only the heartiest, youngest members of the Jewish communities of western Russia should be allowed to settle there.

On their return to Moscow, the Commission members reported their findings to the Chief of the People's Commisariat, who impressed the Americans as being understanding of the problems of the Soviet Jews, and eager to help them. He pledged government support for the Birobidzhan project, but according to Kiefer Sauls, an official of Brigham Young University, and a Commission member, the Soviet official was subsequently demoted and eventually liquidated.

Despite the Commission's warning, many Jews who were unfit for the extreme conditions of the East, left their homes to participate in the experiment, which had the blessing of the Bundist Jews from the United States, some of whom settled in the colony themselves. Jews went there from other parts of the world too, and even from Palestine.

While the Jewish population of Birobidzhan grew for a time, it later decreased as more and more Jews became disillusioned with the Soviet experiment, and when they were able to, left the Soviet Union for the United States and Israel.

One who had absolutely no faith in the Soviet system and the colonization efforts was Sidor Belarsky. And so he decided to accept the invitation of Dr. Harris to teach in Utah, even though he had been told he would have to return to the Soviet Union after six months. He had no intention of doing so. In fact, he never returned to the Soviet Union.

In December 1929, the Belarsky's left Russia forever, traveling to Cherbourg, France, to board the Aquitania, via Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris. Getting out of the Soviet Union was a traumatic experience. First, there was a train wreck from Krijopol to Moscow. Luckily, the Belarskys were not in a train car that was devastated by the crash.

Sickened by the sight of bodies of victims of the Revolution lying about, and frightened concerning what lay in store for the immigrants, Clara lost her voice, and Sidor and Isabel were bruised as they attempted to cram themselves into the cattle car that brought them to Moscow.

At stops along the way, passengers, carrying their samovars, the brass vessels used by Russians to heat water with which to brew "chae," the aromatic Russian tea, crowded platforms to obtain water, and to stretch their stiff legs.

The Belarsky's were among the samovar-laden passengers. Sidor had brought theirs along without crating it. A border guard, eager to make some money for himself, and torment a fleeing Jew in the bargain, demanded that Sidor crate the vessel. When Sidor asked how much that would cost, the official asked, "how much money do you have?"

When Sidor replied, "ten dollars," the official said that that was what it would cost. Sidor paid the man and the samovar was crated. To Sidor it was worth every cent to be able to bring this treasured symbol of family life to the United States. Many other Russian Jews felt the same way, as witnessed by the proudly displayed object in many second and third generation Russo-American Jewish homes.

When the train finally arrived in Warsaw, the exhausted passengers were subjected to the humiliation of strip searches. In addition, Clara's fur coat was ripped to shreds as officials searched for valuables. They found none.

The family arrived in Berlin penniless, or so they thought, until Isabel discovered two dollars hidden in the heel of her shoe. Clarunya had secreted the money there before they had left the Soviet Union. It was all they had, but paid for their first night's lodging

at the same pension they had stayed in ten years earlier, when they had fled Odessa. Sidor cabled his uncle, Benjamin Brown, for money, and the family then spent two weeks, including New Years in Berlin before heading for Paris.

If Berlin had been uncomfortable ten years earlier, it was almost unbearable in 1929; so ominous were the signs of impending doom for German Jewry. The Belarskys had two strikes against them; they were Jewish and Russian.

The family continued on to Paris, where they stayed with relatives, workers in the fur industry, in the Jewish Quarter. They remained there illegally, for three weeks, before making their way to Cherbourg to board the Aquitania to sail to New York in the luxury of second-class accommodations. The voyage was rough, but there were delightful moments too, such as the time another passenger, named Seltzer, introduced the Belarskys to the banana, a fruit unknown to them in Russia. And Sidor sang, entertaining his fellow passengers with his unique rendition of *Ramona*, a popular hit then in the United States.

The Aquitania docked in New York on the chilly morning of February 8, 1930. Most of the passengers debarked. But foreigners had to stay on board until a financial guarantor appeared, so for the Belarskys, the voyage was not yet over. Benjamin Brown had agreed to act as the Belarskys guarantor. When he did not appear at the appointed hour, Mr. Seltzer, their banana-eating friend, offered to look for him on the pier. Not finding Brown there, the enterprising Seltzer made inquiries and learned that Brown had gone to Los Angeles to attend a wedding, and had left instructions regarding the Belarsky's arrival with his trusted associate, named Berezovitch. Investigating further, Seltzer learned that the trusted associate had been rushed to the hospital suffering from an

attack of appendicitis. Undaunted, the resourceful Seltzer located the ill man's business partner, Abraham Shein, who knew nothing of the matter, but promised to go to Ellis Island, where the Belarskys were taken twenty four hours after the Aquitania docked, when no one showed up to vouch for them.

At the turn of the century, and until the immigration laws were changed during the 1920's to limit entry into the country, Ellis Island had temporarily housed all who sought to enter the United states as immigrants. There were tales of triumph and of heartache. One could be refused entry because of illness, or for lack of a sponsor. Sometimes one family member would be refused entry and the others admitted, causing anguish, and forcing the agonizing decision of whether to abandon the refused person. But while the hiatus on the Island was difficult for all, there was some comfort in being among one's fellow immigrants.

However, by 1930, immigration from Europe had all but ceased. Newcomers were now processed elsewhere and the Island was converted to accommodate criminals awaiting deportation. So, housed among felons, in a dormitory containing "forty beds made up with filthy linen," and separated from Sidor, who had to sleep in men's quarters, Clarunya and Isabel, nervous, hungry and exhausted from their twenty-four hour long ordeal of waiting and wondering, tried to make the best of a bewildering experience.

The next day, they were given ten minutes for exercise and served skimpy meals, "as they do in prison," Isabel recalls. The family went before a judge for their hearing. Conversing in German, the judge asked Sidor if the family would attempt to stay beyond their allotted six months. Sidor, who had no intention of ever returning to the Soviet Union, had the good sense to say no.

After the hearing, the Belarskys awaited further developments, and news of their guarantor. Abraham Shein had appeared on the Island as promised, but due to a mix-up, the Belarskys were not informed of his presence. So, they had to endure a second night of incarceration. Finally, the next day, Shein found the Belarskys, and they were allowed to leave the Island. They headed for Manhattan, where they took a room at the Union Square Hotel, which to everyone's delight possessed a private bath.

The family was elated at being in the United States. Culture shock surprisingly was minimal. "We became Americans the first day," Isabel recalls, and Sidor began to receive visitors immediately.

Sidor then went ahead to Utah to arrange for living quarters there, and Clarunya and Isabel stayed in an apartment at Broadway and 145th Street, paid for by Benjamin Brown. Sidor sent for them shortly thereafter.

To Sidor, Clarunya, and Isabel, their observation of increasingly overt anti-Semitism en route to the United States spelled a great future in the United States. As a family who abhorred Communism, and also feared for the future of European Jewry, America was their promised land.

On Sidor's arrival in Utah, Dr. Harris arranged temporary lodging for him in the home of a local judge, Alfred Booth, who spoke uncommonly good English, and thus would most likely; set a good example for his guest.

On the family's arrival, the Belarskys moved into an apartment, and Sidor began to teach, both at Brigham Young, during summer sessions, and at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where he served during the academic year as special instructor in vocal music.

Endearing himself to faculty and students alike, Sidor became known as a strict disciplinarian who also took a personal interest in his pupils. Reminiscing many years later, during a reception held in Isabel's honor in 1980 at Brigham Young, on the establishment of the Sidor Belarsky archive, some former students had fond memories of their unusual teacher.

Ariel Ballif, in whom Sidor sensed "star quality," recalls that his teacher asked if he was married. Told that he was and that he was also the father of four, Sidor, obviously disappointed, but concerned more for his student's emotional well being than in his role as a mentor, simply said 'oh,' and never mentioned the subject again to the would-be star.

Another student, Eugene Jorgenson, recalled Sidor's early, awkward attempts to communicate with his students in a new and difficult language, by confining his observations to "that's yes okay," or "that's no okay."

Touched by Sidor's difficulties, Jorgenson made a barter arrangement about to expire, a "singing engagement," scheduled to take place after that expiration date, was hastily arranged, giving them a few months breathing space. Immigration officials told Sidor that there would be absolutely no additional extensions.

The Mormon community then sprang into action. Dr. Harris enlisted the help of his brother, who had good connections with consular officials; the Mayor of Provo, Utah; the American Legion, and local bank officials who also helped, vouching for Sidor financially.

The American Consul in Vancouver, Canada, was asked if Sidor could enter Canada, be given documents, and return to the United States under the Canadian immigration quota. While indicating that the plan might work, the consul sought

assurance that the United States would indeed allow Sidor to re-enter, before agreeing to help.

Sidor, who was never one to flinch in the face adversity, decided to plead his case in person. Traveling by train to Vancouver, he went to the Consulate and barged into the consul's inner office without an appointment. He emerged some time later with not only the necessary immigration documents, but with an invitation to a party that evening at the Consul's home. And when Sidor departed the next morning for Los Angeles, the Consul accompanied him to the station carrying his suitcase.

Similar documents were subsequently arranged for Clarunya and Isabel. The Belarskys could now apply for United States citizenship. Sidor had accomplished their freedom by "sheer force of his personality," and through the good offices of the Mormon community, "without whom we wouldn't be here," Isabel insists.

In 1932, sensing that there was more professional opportunity in Los Angeles, Sidor moved the family there, but continued the warm friendships he had established with his Mormon mentors. The years in Los Angeles were fruitful. Sidor soon began to appear with the prestigious Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Artur Rodzinski, who was responsible for the final transformation of Isidor Belarsky, through the amputation of the first "I" from his name to Sidor Belarsky.

The once again newly named basso also began then to appear in leading roles with the Los Angeles and San Francisco Operas and with the Teatro Colon, in Buenos Aires, the Teatro Municipal in Rio and the Chicago Civic Opera. Sidor also founded the American Opera Company, presenting the classic European repertoire in English, a

daring and visionary approach by one who only a short time earlier had experienced difficulty in communicating with his students in the language.

Sidor also continued to teach, spending summers in Utah, and winters in Los Angeles, working with private students, among them Maria Kramer, who later owned the Edison Hotel, in New York; Tennis pro Alice Marble; Dudly Nichols, author of The Informer; and Anatole Josepho, inventor of the instant photo machine.

Dr. Chaim Greenberg Z'L, a profound thinker, charismatic orator, gifted writer and editor, headed the Labor Zionist Movement in America. A giant of the Jewish world, he edited the *Jewish Frontier* and held tremendous influence in Yiddish circles. "Greenberg heard Sidor Belarsky in concert for the first time in 1936. He was indelibly impressed with his artistry. Since to Greenberg music was a vital component of Jewish civilization, he approached Belarsky with a proposal. Instead of devoting his career to classical music alone, Greenberg suggested that he undertake a tour of American Jewry and introduce them to the treasure house of Yiddish and Hebrew songs. The Labor Zionist Movement was to sponsor the tour.

As a result of Greenberg's powers of persuasion and charisma, Belarsky accepted his offer and prepared for a career as a singer of folk songs. Thus he became the beloved Ambassador of Jewish Music.

From that day, he delighted the American Jewish community, which at that time consisted mostly of immigrants from Europe who had left their homes to fashion a new life in the Goldene Medinah. He introduced to the Jewish masses *dos Yiddishe lied.* In a word, it can be said that what Shubert was to lieder, Belarsky was to Jewish folk songs.

Thus began a troth between the master concertizer, Sidor Belarsky, and the Jews of America." (Feb. 14, 2001)

Sidor began then to perform on the Jewish organizational circuit. In 1936 he appeared at a banquet with Professor Albert Einstein. The two men made a pact that evening, that Einstein would only accept speaking engagements where Belarsky was invited to perform.

Later that year, sensing once more that professional opportunity existed elsewhere, Sidor moved the family back to New York, to an apartment in Washington Heights.

During their first sojourn in New York, Sidor had paid the rent by performing cantorially during the High Holy days, in Philadelphia, Atlantic City and New York, under the name of Lifshitz, or Brown. He preferred then to reserve the use of "Belarsky" for secular engagements, as he didn't want to be narrowly categorized.

Despite his secular leanings, Sidor had great reverence for the Cantorial tradition, and was very much aware of the hazzan's responsibilities. He usually spent the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur performing cantorially in South America, or South Africa.

Clarunya and Isabel remained in New York, fortified emotionally by Sidor's long, informative, witty and affectionate letters, written in his distinctively bold, flowing script, and addressed mostly to Clarunya.

Sidor, the virtuoso, was known to students and audience alike as an exuberant soul, given to mischievous outbursts from the stage during a concert, such as calling to a friend in the audience, "hello, boichik."

"If Sidor called someone 'boichik,' he knew he was in." Isabel explains. One so addressed was Israel Mowshowitz, a Queens, New York rabbi who serves as the New York state governor's liaison with the Jewish community.

Sidor's audiences returned his affectionate greetings: "Governor Rockefeller (the late Nelson Rockefeller) kissed Sidor, Isabel recalls, "And I'm sure Sidor called him "boichik,' too."

But Sidor's letters reveal another soul, vulnerable and insecure, perhaps because he felt that organizational bureaucrats didn't always appreciate him artistically.

Alluding to these feelings in a letter addressed to Isabel from Caracas in the 1950's, he confided that he was "sentimental, romantic, terribly sensitive, very often too weak and sometimes hot tempered, with certain beliefs that are good, but with others that are mostly bad, and are often giving me a lot of trouble."

There were also humorous self-references, some revealing appealingly expressed vanity. From Melbourne, Australia he wrote in May, 1960, "I have made many friends here but will not run for mayor until my next visit...I will probably be busy with a job in some other city," while in September, 1970, he informed Isabel from Montevideo that he had just performed "the most successful concert...Everybody is happy. Me too." On September 6, 1974, almost nine months, to the day, before he died, Sidor enthused from San Pablo, "all of them say I look younger than ever, and I believe this."

It was in his correspondence with Isabel in 1950, in the wake of the break-up of her first marriage, that Sidor revealed his most deeply held feelings about himself, his family and his philosophy of life as a chazzan.

Believing then that Sidor's career demands were the main priority in her parents' household, Isabel had not told her father of her deteriorating marriage until divorce was inevitable. Writing to Isabel from Caracas during the High Holy days, Sidor said, "My Darling Belotchke, We've very seldom exchanged letters. I don't know how good or bad that is...Now I have the feeling that it would not have been a bad idea to talk to you...There is something that has been bothering me for a long while...It makes a strange impression on me, your father, the fact that you didn't have enough confidence to let me know of your problems long before you decided, all alone to get into your present status. I'm not at all blaming you for what you did...Why didn't you do it before?...It doesn't pay to live in torment when there might be a chance to live a happier life...When you are being presented with all kinds of problems...I, Sidor, should not have been the last fellow to seek advice from. It is true that I am only a singer, and in fact, I am not supposed to be too smart...but I am considered a man of the world. It is about time."

Sidor went on to say that he was about to embark on his High Holy Days observance, when as a cantor, he would become "the representative of the people to the Almighty. In these sacred days for our people," he added, "and for my nearest and dearest, I am in deep thought now, realizing the responsibility that I carry."

On November 21st of that year, Sidor wrote from Johannesburg that he was then "looking at the world with open eyes and seeing things as they really are. People are always trying to give the impression that things are alright with them...But give their situations a little 'scratch' and you'll find that they are all lonely and bored...You are much better off now and you have reason to look to the future with much hope..." Sidor

concluded the letter with his customary, "please remember me to all your friends. Your friends are mine."

In 1959, if there was anguish concerning Isabel's unfulfilling personal life, or if Sidor sometimes felt at odds with the world, his artist's sensitivities ruffled, there were delightful moments too. There were music filled soirees at the Washington Heights apartment, and spur of the moment forays to the Russian Tea Room. And Clarunya provided him with the calm of a well-ordered household, even arranging his beloved poker games in advance of his return from such far-flung locations as Johannesburg, Caracas, or Rio. And Clarunya acted as his buffer with the outside world, soothing Sidor's occasionally wounded pride, and offering him sound professional advice.

Performing was only one aspect of Sidor's second career in New York: He joined the faculty of the Jewish Teachers' Seminary-Herzlia Institute, where he became mentor to several generations of students of the Jewish musical resource. Many of his former students are among today's leading exponents of Yiddish Art and Folk music.

Sidor was also active as an arranger of Yiddish Art Songs, and also recorded many of them, as well as Hebrew and Russian works, on the Artistic Enterprise label, a company that Sidor created, and the well renowned RCA Victor label as well.

In 1944, when Sidor was invited by Arturo Toscanini to perform the role of Rocco in the NBC Symphony Orchestra recording of Beethoven's Fidelio under the RCA label, the world may not have been aware of the significance of Toscanini's choice of cast members. In 1944, the Nazi regime was at its height of European domination. Toscanini, in his hatred of anti-Semitism refused to conduct European orchestras with any association to the Nazi party. While he had already recorded Fidelio in 1936, prior to

public knowledge of the atrocities of the Nazi regime, the opera was made with an entirely German cast with the Wiener Philharmoniker and Staatsoper in Salzburg. As of 1937 Toscanini lead an orchestral group created expressly for him, the NBC (National Broadcasting Company) Symphony, for which he was able to cast and record operas for national radio broadcasts at his own discretion. Toscanini re-recorded the same opera, *Fidelio*, eight years later with Jan Pierce as the lead tenor and Sidor Belarsky as the lead basso—two prominently recognized Jewish artists. It seems that Toscanini was making a clear statement for the American musical community that anti-Semitism would not be tolerated by casting Jews as his principal artists in a German opera.

Aside from the casting of the opera, the opera libretto is significant for other reasons. Composed in the wake of the French Revolution, Fidelio is recognized as the quintessential defeat of oppression and an exercise in the exacting of justice. This concept as related to the use of the bass voice in opera will be further examined in a later chapter demonstrating the use of the bass voice to serve socio-political statements.

In 1944 Sidor achieved yet another milestone when he joined the newly formed New York City Opera, making his debut on opening night as Angelotti in Puccini's Tosca.

Sidor was highly regarded by many operatic colleagues, among them Metropolitan Opera basso Jerome Hines, who had been moved and inspired by Sidor's recordings of Yiddish Art Songs, and Paul Robeson with whom he didn't agree politically, but respected professionally. These three bassos will be compared as representatives of three different political messages.

During more than forty years of living in the United States, Sidor traveled the world, performing on the operatic and concert stages, and acting as God's emissary to Jewish communities in Europe, South America, and South Africa. He also visited Israel in 1948, and concertized there the day Statehood was declared.

He had made those journeys alone, while Clarunya remained in New York, preferring to be in the background. But in the 1960's when Sidor received the first of two official invitations from the then President of Israel, Zalmen Shazar, to perform there, Sidor insisted that Clarunya, who had insured his survival as a Jew, share with him the fulfillment of their Jewish destiny.

The impact of Israel on Sidor was profound, emotionally and artistically, In an extraordinary wedding of intellect and emotion, he infused the haunting Hebrew melodies, at their core the yearning for Jerusalem, with a richness and spirit only hinted at in earlier performances. In several record albums, he commemorated milestone anniversaries of the State. In turn, in tribute to Sidor, Radio Israel to this day broadcasts a weekly program of his music.

While Sidor realized his dream of visiting Israel, he was frustrated in attempts to re-unite his relatives in the United States, or even to visit them in Russia. At one point, he planned such a trip, but changed his plans when Clarunya became "terribly frightened" at the prospect of his being detained there.

If Sidor was frustrated at being cut off from his Russian family, he compensated by creating a professional "family," all of whom became his beloved "maideles" and "boichiks." They include Masha Benya, with whom he recorded Yiddish songs, and who has retired from performing and is now among the most eminent coaches of the

repertoire; David Montefiore, the British-born operatic tenor, himself the son of a famed hazzan, who is putting his Yiddish repertoire to good use as a star of Yiddish language musicals in New York; Loretta Di Franco, a soprano of Italian heritage, now with the Metropolitan Opera, who although not Jewish, delighted Sidor by her interpretations of Yiddish Art Songs; and Annette Burnstein, a folksinger who studied with Sidor for ten years, and has appeared in concert and on the radio.

Criticism was the highest compliment, polite, restrained comment the kiss of death. Masha Benya recalls that on their first meeting, he (Sidor) complimented me on my singing and then criticized a number he didn't approve of." She adds that Sidor always accepted criticism of his own singing, "gracefully."

"His voice was of unusual timbre," Benya observes. "The more I listen to his records, the more I appreciate him. There was no jealousy. He was generous with repertoire and never refused me anything. There was wonderful harmony."

Annette Burnstein recalls, of Sidor's voice, "over the years it gained color and richness. The autumn was so beautiful."

For Sidor, the autumn was as active as the spring and summer. There would be no winter. "To his last days, "Isabel recalls, "he was at the piano, studying. He was making plans for the next ten years. One evening in late May, 1975, while attending a dinner in Great Neck, New York, in honor of a cantorial colleague, he became ill.

He was taken to a local hospital. A heart condition was diagnosed. He must have sensed the end was near. He asked to see one of the "boichicks," Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz. On June sixth, in the ninth day of his hospitalization, he told Clarunya that he loved her. The next day, he died.

## The Three Bassos—

## Sidor Belarsky, Jerome Hines, and Paul Robeson

Sidor Belarsky was internationally recognized as an operatic basso as well as a singer of Russian, Israeli, and Yiddish folk and art songs and a cantor. He was named "The Ambassador of Song of the Jewish People." Sidor was granted this title by Rabbi William Berkowitz, who reminisced upon Sidor's life in an article honoring the centennial of his birth. Chaim Greenberg played a pivotal role in his career. Greenberg convinced Sidor to set aside his operatic ambitions to pursue a career as a singer of Yiddish folk songs. As Sidor established himself as an operatic talent, his operatic credits granted respect from the Jewish community, and guaranteed him a prominent role as "The Voice of the Jewish People."

Sidor was not the only basso to be selected as the representative voice of his people. Two other prominent bassos of Sidor's generation defined their careers not only upon their voice, but also upon the message of their people. Jerome Hines and Paul Robeson, two internationally famous bassos who Sidor knew personally and who shared mutual admiration and respect for him, had different types of bass voices and different causes that they each represented. Their lives and voices were dedicated to different causes. Paul Robeson represented the oppressed African-American in his struggle for freedom. Jerome Hines, in his own religious fervor, strongly represented the Evangelical Christian faith. Sidor Belarsky served as a voice for both secular and religious Jews who yearned to connect with Yiddishkeit and the memories of the "Old World." Each of them

were the "Voice of the People," utilizing their unusually rare bass voices to make strong political, religious, and sentimental statements.

**Paul Robeson,** 1898-1976 "The Base of Basses"

Paul Leroy Robeson was born in Princeton, New Jersey, on April 9, 1898, the fifth and last child of Maria Louisa Bustill and William Drew Robeson. During these early years the Robeson's experienced both family and financial losses. At the age of six Paul and his siblings, William, Reeve, Ben and Marian suffered the death of their mother in a household fire. This was followed a few years later with their father's loss of his Princeton pastorate. After moving first to Westfield, the family finally settled in Somerville, New Jersey, in 1909, where William Robeson was appointed pastor of St. Thomas AME Zion Church.

Enrolling in Somerville High School, one of only two blacks, Paul Robeson excelled academically while successfully competing in debate, oratorical contests, and showing great promise as a football player. He also got his first taste of acting in the title role of Shakespeare's *Othello.* In his senior year he not only graduated with honors, but placed first in a competitive examination for scholarships to enter Rutgers University.

Although his other male siblings chose all-black colleges, Robeson took the challenge of attending Rutgers, a majority white institution in 1915.[41]

In college from 1915 to 1919, Robeson experienced both fame and racism. In trying out for the varsity football team, where blacks were not wanted, he encountered physical brutality. In spite of this resistance, Robeson not only earned a place on the team, but was named first on the roster for the All-American college team. He graduated with 15 letters in sports. Academically, he was equally successful. He was elected a member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa Society and the Cap and Skull Honor Society of Rutgers. Graduating in 1919 with the highest grade point average in his class, Robeson gave the class oration at the 153rd Rutgers Commencement.

With college life behind him, Robeson moved to the Harlem section of New York City to attend law school, first at New York University, later transferring to Columbia University. He sang in the chorus of the musical *Shuffle Along* (1921) by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, and made his acting debut in 1920 playing the lead role in *Simon the Cyrenian* by poet Ridgely Torrence. Robeson's performance was so well received that he was congratulated not only by the Harlem YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) audience but also by members of the Provincetown Players who were in the audience. While working odd jobs and taking part in professional football to earn his college fees, Robeson met Eslanda "Essie" Cardozo Goode. The granddaughter of Francis L. Cardozo, the secretary of state of South Carolina during Reconstruction, she was a graduate of Columbia University and employed as a chemist. She was the first black staff person at

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[41] Duberman, Martin B. *Paul Robeson.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. The couple married on August 17, 1921, and their son Paul Jr. was born on November 2, 1927.

To support his family while studying at Columbia Law School, Robeson played professional football for the Akron Pros (1920--1921) and the Milwaukee Badgers (1921--1922), and during the summer of 1922 he went to England to appear in a production of *Taboo,* which was renamed *Voodoo.* Once graduating from Columbia in 1923, Robeson sought work in his new profession, all the while singing at the famed Cotton Club in Harlem. Offered an acting role in 1923 in Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings,* Robeson quickly took this opportunity; he had recently quit a law firm because the secretary refused to take dictation from a black person.

Although *All God's Chillun* brought threats by the Ku Klux Klan because of the play's interracial subject matter and the fact that a white woman was to kiss Robeson's hand, it was an immediate success. It was followed in 1924 by his performances in a revival of *The Emperor Jones,* the play *Rosanne,* and the silent movie *Body and Soul* for Oscar Micheaux, an independent black filmmaker. In 1925 Robeson debuted in a formal concert at the Provincetown Playhouse. His performance, which consisted of Negro spirituals and folk songs was so brilliant that he and his accompanist, Lawrence Brown, were offered a contract with the Victor Talking Machine Company. Encouraged by this success, Robeson and Brown embarked on a tour of their own, but were sorely disappointed. Even though they received good reviews, the crowds were small and they

made very little money. What Robeson came to know was that his talents in acting and singing would serve as the combined focus of his career.[42]

Robeson's acting career started to take off in 1928, when he accepted the role of Joe in a London production of *Show Boat* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein. It was his singing of "Ol' Man River" that received the most acclaim regarding the show and earned him a great degree of attention from British socialites. Robeson gave concerts in London at Albert Hall and Sunday afternoon concerts at Drury Lane. In spite of all this attention, Robeson still had to deal with racism. In 1929 he was refused admission to a London hotel. Because of the protest raised by Robeson, major hotels in London said they would no longer refuse service to blacks.

Much attention was given to Robeson's acting and singing and he was embraced by the media. The *New Yorker* magazine in an article by Mildred Gilman referred to Robeson as "the promise of his race," "King of Harlem," and "Idol of his people." Robeson returned briefly to America in 1929 to perform at a packed Carnegie Hall. In May of 1930, after establishing a permanent residence in England, Robeson accepted the lead role in Shakespeare's *Othello.* This London production at the Savoy Theatre was the first time since the performance of the great black actor Ira Aldridge in 1860 that a major production company cast a black man in the part of the Moor. Robeson was a tall, handsome man with a deep, rich, baritone voice and a shy, almost boyish manner. The audience was so mesmerized by his performance in *Othello* that the production had 20 curtain calls.

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[42] Foner, Philip S. Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews 1918--1974. New York: Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1978.

Accolades for outstanding acting and singing performances were prevalent during the 1930s in Robeson's career, but his personal and home life was surrounded by difficulties. His wife Eslanda "Essie," who had published a book on Robeson, *Paul Robeson, Negro* (1930), sued for divorce in 1932. Her actions were encouraged by the fact that Robeson had fallen in love and planned to marry Yolande Jackson, a white Englishwoman. Jackson, whom Robeson called the love of his life, had originally accepted his proposal but later called the marriage off. It was thought by some who knew the Jackson family well that she was strongly influenced by her father, Tiger Jackson, who was less than tolerant of Robeson and people of color in general. With his marriage plans cancelled, Robeson and his wife came to an understanding regarding their relationship, and the divorce proceedings were cancelled.[43]

Robeson returned to New York briefly in 1933 to star in the film version of *Emperor Jones* before turning his attention to the study of singing and languages. His stay in the United States was a short one due to his treatment by the racist American film industries and because of criticism by blacks regarding his role as a corrupt emperor. Upon returning to England, Robeson eagerly immersed himself in his studies and mastered several languages. Robeson along with Essie became honorary members of the West African Students' Union, becoming acquainted with African students Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, future presidents of Ghana and Kenya, respectively. It is also during this time that Robeson played at a benefit for Jewish refugees which marked the beginning of his political awareness and activism.

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[43] Jackson, Kenneth T., and others, eds. *Dictionary of American Biography.* Supplement Ten, 1976--1980. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995.

Robeson's inclination to aid the less fortunate and the oppressed in their fight for freedom and equality was firmly rooted in his own family history. His father William Drew Robeson was an escaped slave who eventually graduated from Lincoln College in 1878, and his maternal grandfather, Cyrus Bustill, was a slave who was freed by his second owner in 1769 and went on to become an active member of the African Free Society. Recognizing the heritage that brought him so many opportunities, Robeson, between 1934 and 1937 performed in several films that presented blacks in other than stereotypical ways. He acted in such films as *Sanders of the River* (1935), *King Solomon's Mines* (1937) and *Song of Freedom* (1937).

On a trip to the Soviet Union in 1934 to discuss the making of the film *Black Majesty,* Robeson not only had discussions with the Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein during his trip but was so impressed regarding the education against racism for schoolchildren that he began to study Marxism and Socialist systems in the Soviet Union. He also decided to send his son, nine-year-old Paul Jr., to school in the Soviet Union so that he would not have to contend with the racism and discrimination Robeson confronted in both Europe and America.[44]

Robeson continued acting in films confronting stereotypes of blacks while receiving rave reviews for his success in singing "Ol' Man River" in the 1936 film production of *Show Boat.* He also embarked on a more active role in fighting the injustices he found throughout the world. Robeson co-founded the Council on African Affairs to aid in African liberation, sang and spoke at benefit concerts for Basque refugees, supported the Spanish Republican cause, and sang at rallies to support a

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[44] Williams, Michael W., ed. *The African American Encyclopedia.* New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1993.

democratic Spain along with numerous other causes. At a benefit in Albert Hall in London, Robeson is quoted in Philip Foner's *Paul Robeson Speaks* as saying "The artist must elect to fight for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice. I had no alternative." This statement echoed a clear and focused direction of Robeson's personal and professional life.

In 1939 Robeson stated his intentions to retire from commercial entertainment and returned to America. He gave his first recital in the United States at Mother AME Zion Church Harlem where his brother Benjamin was pastor. Later on in the same year Robeson premiered the patriotic song "Ballad for Americans" on CBS radio as a preview of a play by the same name. The song was so well received that studio audiences cheered for 20 minutes after the performance while the listening audience exceeded the response even for Orson Welles's famous Martian scare program. Robeson's popularity in the United states soared and he remained the most celebrated person in the country well into the 1940s. He was awarded the esteemed NAACP Spingarn Medal (1945) as well as numerous other awards and recognitions from civic and professional groups. In the American production of *Othello* (1943), Robeson's performance placed him among the ranks of great Shakespearean actors. The production ran for 296 performances--over ten months--and toured both the United States and Canada.[45]

Robeson's political commitments became foremost in his life as he championed causes from South African famine relief to support of an anti-lynching law; in September 1946 he was among the delegation that spoke with President Harry S Truman about anti-lynching legislation. The meeting was a stormy one as Robeson adamantly urged Truman

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[45] "Robeson Receives Posthumous Grammy." *New York Times*, February 25, 1998.

to act, all the while defending the Soviet Union and denouncing United States' allies. In October of the same year when called before the California Legislative Committee on Un-American activities, Robeson declared himself not a member of the Communist Party but praised their fight for equality and democracy. This attempt at branding him as un-American was successful in causing many to distrust his political commitments. Regardless of these events, Robeson decided to retire from concert work and devote himself to gatherings that promoted the causes to which he had dedicated himself.

In 1949 Robeson embarked on a European tour and in doing so spoke out against the discrimination and injustices that blacks in American had to confront. His statements were distorted as they were dispatched back to the United States. Although Robeson got mixed responses from the black community, the backlash from whites culminated in riot before a scheduled concert in Peekskill, New York, on August 27, 1949; a demonstration by veteran organizations turned into a full-blown riot. Robeson was advised of this and returned to New York. He did agree to do a second concert on September 4 in Peekskill for the people who truly wanted to hear him. The concert did take place but afterwards a riot broke out which lasted into the night leaving over 140 persons seriously injured. With such violence surrounding Robeson's concerts, many groups and sponsors no longer supported him.

By 1950 Robeson had received by so much negative press that he made plans for a European tour. His plans were abruptly halted because the United States government refused to allow him to travel unless he agreed not to make any speeches. With no passport and denied his freedom of speech abroad, Robeson continued to speak out in public forums and through his own monthly newspaper, *Freedom*. Barred from all other

forms of media, his own newspaper became his primary platform from 1950 to 1955. His remaining supporters encompassed the National Negro Labor Council, Council on African Affairs, and the Civil Rights Congress. The NAACP openly attacked Robeson while other black organization shunned him in fear of reprisals. Undaunted by these negative responses, Robeson traveled the United States encouraging groups to fight for their rights and for equal treatment. Even though he suffered from health as well as financial difficulties, Robeson held firm to his convictions and published in 1958 his autobiography *Here I Stand* through a London publishing house.

On May 10, 1958, Robeson gave his first New York concert in ten years to a packed Carnegie Hall. When the concert was over, he informed the audience that the passport battle had been won. From 1958 to 1963 Robeson traveled to England, the Soviet Union, Austria, and New Zealand. He was showered with awards and played to packed houses throughout his travels. After being hospitalized several times throughout his trip due to a disease of the circulatory system, Robeson returned to the United States. Much had changed since the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and school integration were in full enactment. Robeson was welcomed on his return by *Freedomways,* a quarterly review which saw him as a powerful fighter for freedom. A salute to Robeson was given in 1965 which was chaired by actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee along with writer James Baldwin and many other admirers.[46]

Eslanda "Essie" Robeson died of cancer in 1965 at the age of 68 and Robeson went to live with his sister Marian in Philadelphia. He remained in seclusion until he died

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[46]Southern, Eileen. Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982.

there on January 23, 1976; on his 75th birthday four days later a "Salute to Paul Robeson" was held in Carnegie Hall. Paul Leroy Robeson's funeral was held at Mother AME Zion Church in Harlem before a crowd of 5,000.

On February 24, 1998, Robeson received a posthumous Grammy lifetime achievement award. His honors are numerous, as Robeson's life is being depicted through exhibits, film festivals, and lectures. Upon the centennial of his birth on April 9, 1998, at least 25 U.S. states and several countries worldwide hosted celebrations of his life and work in every conceivable manner.

Paul Robeson was truly a man who saw a commitment to the oppressed, and particularly black people, as a much more profound calling than the accolades he received for his astonishing talents. His extraordinary voice and engaging acting abilities would have undoubtedly brought him more fame, fortune, and approval than the activist role he pursed instead. It is because of this clear vision of justice that he is remembered as a great American and a great citizen of the world.[47]

[47] John Henrik Clarke. Paul Robeson. Biography Resource Center. Gale Group, Inc., 2001

**Jerome Hines,** 1921-2003, "The Born Again Basso"

"Jerome Hines was born in Hollywood, California. Only twenty-five, he has graduated from the University of Caliornia at Los Angeles, taught chemistry there for a year, worked as chemist for an oil company, and has appeared with the San Francisco Opera Company and as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic." For his Met audition on March 18, 1946, Hines had performed selections from *Boris Gudonov*, *Aida*, and *Faust*; the comment on the audition card in Archives reads, "Excellent voice, etc. - good element." His debut was in an all-Italian language performance with Ezio Pinza singing Boris Godunov that according to Irving Kolodin in *The New York Sun* was "what is locally called a 'revival' - meaning that some rehearsal time has been expended and the worst of the scenery patched." Mention of Hines came at the end of the review: "There was some able singing in smaller roles by Martha Lipton (the Nurse), Jerome Hines, making his debut as a remarkably tall Sergeant, and Anthony Marlowe as the Simpleton." A more substantial review appeared in *The New York Times* in December when he sang Méphistophélès in *Faust*: "The loftiest tones in the score were easily and freely emitted, with more of the facility expected of a baritone than of a true bass. Much can be expected

of a singer, who found it possible to deliver 'Le veau d'Or' with the vigor and skill Mr. Hines brought to its measures, and the general merits of his performance in a role still somewhat beyond him." [48]

Who could have predicted from his sixteen performances in 1946-47, divided between *Boris* and *Faust*, and his forty-five in 1947-48 of ten roles ranging from the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni* to Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Swallow in *Peter Grimes*, that one of the great Metropolitan Opera careers was under way? He was the Grand Inquisitor in Rudolf Bing's opening night *Don Carlo* and in the same 1950-51 season progressed to Philip II as well as Sarastro in *Zauberflöte*. Within eight years of his debut as the Sergeant he assumed the title role in *Boris*. *The Herald Tribune* described his voice: "It is a true bass-baritone, a rich and vibrant instrument that rolls low and sweeps high with no unnatural colorings and contortions. Ease in the singing, in fact, was a shining feature of the evening. No forcing, no grunting or barking was necessary to paint a picture or sustain a mood. There was, moreover, the benefit of an English enunciation that was clear and understandable, and at no time distorted...."

His forty-five roles include most of the great ones for bass voice: Don Giovanni, Wagner's Gurnemanz, King Marke, and Wotan, Verdi's Padre Guardiano, Fiesco, and Zaccaria. His forty-one seasons, a record for leading artists at the Met, concluded with Sparafucile in Rigoletto on January 24, 1987. The junior high school student who had been rejected by the glee club because his voice didn't blend had become one of the most important singers in Met history.

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[48] RT. Debut of Jerome Hines. Metropolitan Opera Archives. November 21, 1946.

Hines made a strong public testament of his Christian beliefs when he wrote the autobiographical story about his faith and the role it played in his operatic career called, "Jerome Hines: This is My Story, This is My Song." The book explains how he discovered his Christian faith and how it helped him to overcome fatigue, illness, and voice strain. It also tells the story of how he was inspired by God to write and star in an opera about the life of Jesus titled, "I am the Way." To prepare for the role of Jesus, he was inspired to conduct mission work in the skid rows of America, a duty that he continued to perform throughout his career. He made many recordings of Christian hymns, oratorio, and spirituals in addition to the many operatic appearances in his career. He was also very involved in teaching voice— writing two books on vocal technique, "Great Singers on Great Singing," and "The Four Voices of Man," maintaining a private voice studio, directing his own opera company in New Jersey, and raising funds for young struggling opera singers. He retired from the opera house in 2001, shortly after his wife of 48 years, Lucia Evangelista, a soprano, passed away after an extended debilitating illness. Hines told friends that he expected to rejoin her soon in the other world. He passed away on February 4' 2003.

## Sidor Belarsky, "The Russian Robeson"—

## How he became a "Voice of the People"

**Israeli opera company to perform at former Nazi concentration camp**

**ERFURT -- The only opera company in Israel has started preparations to give a performance of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* at the former Buchenwald concentration camp, a German theater manager said on Tuesday.**

The New Israeli Opera Tel Aviv has accepted a proposal that it should stage the opera at the camp in 2007 in conjunction with the Erfurt Theater in eastern Germany, the theater's general manager, Guy Montavon, said.

The authorities that manage the memorial at the Buchenwald Camp were in favor of the proposal that could help to improve relations between Israel and Germany, Montavon said.

"It should contribute in a small way to the reconciliation between the two peoples," Montavon said.

He said that he wanted to set the opera between two giant death masks of Germany's best-known cultural figures, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich von Schiller, to illustrate how much cruelty took place so near to Weimar, the city where they lived and worked.

The choice of *Fidelio* is not coincidental - its theme is about liberation of prisoners.

The project is the brainchild of Giancarlo del Monaco, an Italian director with close links to the Erfurt theater whose mother was Jewish. Many of his relatives died in the Nazis' concentration camps.

Hanna Munitz, the general manager of the Tel Aviv opera, was born near Buchenwald to parents who both survived internment in the camps.

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Today, performances of *Fidelio* are recognized as a powerful musical response to the holocaust. In 1944, shortly after the discovery of the Nazi death camps, Arturo Toscanini created a cast for an American radio broadcast of Fidelio including the legendary Jan Peerce and Sidor Belarsky accompanied by the NBC Orchestra. At that time, both singers had already clearly established themselves as celebrities in both the operatic and Jewish music scene.

Arturo Toscanini recorded the opera once before with a German cast in 1933. During the eleven years that had past between 1933 and 1944, however, Toscanini's attitude towards the Germans had changed significantly, particularly after Hitler had come to power. Toscanini refused to participate with any orchestra or musician who was sympathetic to the Nazi agenda, and instead placed prominently Jewish artists into the forefront of the classical music world.

Why was it important for Toscanini to use Jan Peerce and Sidor Belarsky in this recording? Was he making a political statement in response to the discovery of the Nazi death camps? Or was his selection of these two well-renowned artists merely coincidental? One may scour through the personal letters and archives of Arturo Toscanini to find this answer, but based upon generalizations of the character of this man, one may assume with a relatively high degree of certainty that he was, in fact, being quite clever in making a national statement of freedom by embracing the Jewish personalities of Peerce and Belarsky. There were many other famous tenors and bassos who could have sung the roles with equal proficiency, but it is likely that Toscanini had an overarching political statement to make through the casting of this opera.

The subtlety of producing political statements through the writing and casting of opera is not unique to Toscanini. Operas have had profound messages embedded within them that are often overlooked by the greater public, yet are written about by musicologists and historians. John Bokina in *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze*, clearly outlines the political messages imbedded within Beethoven's *Fidelio*. "In spite of a number of details that do not quite fit, Ludwig van Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* is a sensuous representation of a crucial shift in the history of political ideas: the virtuous republicanism of the later Enlightenment and the French Revolution. From the time of the ancient Roman republic, republicanism has been compatible with a number of non-monarchical constitutional arrangements that provide for citizen participation in government."

Bokina points out the relationship between Beethoven (1770-1827) and Mozart (1756-91), remarking that "what divides the two composers are the French Revolution

and its transformation of Enlightenment political ideas." Beethoven was nineteen years old when the Bastille fell. Beethoven undertook a lifelong, "fastidious" search for suitable opera librettos, and considered many of Mozart's greatest operas to be unsuitable for the overarching themes that they represented, declaring the "moral bankruptcy of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas." He declared his "aversion" for the "frivolous" subjects of these works, claiming that the latter was so "scandalous" that it "debased" art. On the other hand, he detected a new moral value in *Die Zauberflöte*. Because Beethoven sought for opera libretti that exhibited exemplary stories of moral values, he only completed one operatic work, *Fidelio*.

Beethoven drew upon the "rescue operas" of Mozart's French contemporaries to create *Fidelio*. The "rescue operas" were normally based upon real life situations and people, usually drawn from current events. *Fidelio* is an adaptation of John Nicolas Bouilly's drama *Leonore, ou L'amour conjugale.* The play was based on an actual incident from the Reign of Terror, although the action was transferred from France to Spain. The opera contrasts three pairs of moral and political values: self-interest and patriotism, inconsistency and fidelity, and tyranny and republicanism.

Sidor's character, Rocco the jailor, according to Bonika, represents the transcending of self-interest to the upholding of heroic patriotism. Rocco, through his basso buffo, provides a contrast to the usually aristocratic hero (Florestan, who was sung by Jan Peerce), and due to his self-interest, is easily persuaded by a pouch of gold to agree to murder Florestan, who had been held in prison for over two years. Rocco eventually defies these orders, however, and agrees only to dig the doomed prisoner's grave.

How appropriate and brilliant it is if Toscanini had planned and depicted these two central characters as Jews in light of the unfolding of the tragedies of the holocaust and the wrongful imprisonment and slaying of millions of Jews. Perhaps in Toscanini's mind, Rocco the character may have represented exactly who Sidor Belarsky was— a Russian defector who sought money and opportunity in the United States and rejected communism with stalwart resolve. It is even more appropriate for Toscanini to have cast Jan Peerce as the wrongfully imprisoned Floristan who is at last saved from death by the republic. As the heroic tenor, Jan Peerce, whose Jewish and operatic identity were synonymous, would provide the ultimate statement in light of the current events of World War II.

Who would have thought that Toscanini could have turned a French "rescue opera" into a commentary on the Holocaust by aligning himself with Jewish singers? If this is so, Toscanini may have very well turned a French "rescue opera" into a courageous true story where Don Fernando represents the United States, Don Pizarro represents the Nazi regime, Rocco represents a greedy guard of the Concentration Camps, and Floristan represents the Jew that has been wrongfully imprisoned and ultimately rescued from death.

There are other operas that Sidor and other Jewish operatic bassos have sung that have political commentary of Jewish significance attached to them. Whether they are coincidental or intentional are beyond the scope of this thesis, but a few examples will be briefly discussed. The purpose of this commentary, like the commentary detailed above, is to reveal an historical trend in the use of the bass voice in opera to create stereotypes that may have shaped the setting of voices in the synagogue.

This historical inquiry begins with the examples from the *M'shor'rim* and Bach's *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland, BVW 61*, a work composed for Advent (see analysis and libretto on p. 43.) As early as Bach's cantatas, one can see how the bass voice is valued in German culture. *"Sie, Sie,"* the bass recitative, represents the voice of Christ, who knocks on the door of a home that he hopes to enter and be a guest for dinner (a scene reminiscent of Eliyahu Hanavi from our Passover tradition.) Already, the German-Christian tradition dramatically associates the bass voice with the "Voice of God," or the "Priestly Voice."

Bach emphasizes an image of Christ knocking on the door of a Gentile, as personified by the bass voice in a short, one page recitative. One may hear the actual knocking of Christ immediately through the viola pizzicato that remains constant throughout the recitative. Bach also melodically paints the sound of knocking through the words in a figure that outlines a vii diminished chord beginning on "vor der Tür," and a similar downward moving ii dimished chord on "und klopfe an," that is further emphasized by staccato markings in the voice part.

He supports the voice with a progression of chords that begins in the key of e minor and transitions to the key of G major on the words, "Tür auftun." It appears that this transition may have been intentional word painting for Bach, since he was so full of metaphors in his use of musical language.[49] One may safely say that when Bach was setting this short transitional phrase, he was wishing to emphasize the redemptive image of Christ opening the door to the Gentile's home by passing from a minor to Major key relationship. Likewise, the two instances of word painting, on "und klopfe an" and "Tür

[49] Hofstadter, Douglas. Gödel, Escher, Bach. Basic Books, NY January 1, 1999.

auftun" both reach the highest pitch levels of the recitative, middle C. This is followed by a downward moving figure on "zu dem werde Ich eingehen," painting an image of Christ descending upon the Gentile after the door has been opened." What follows is a rhythmically symmetrical yet melodically inverted sequence, as repeated in the ascending figure, "und das Abendmahl mit ihm halten." The words, "und er mit Mir" and the final words, "dem werde Ich" are retrograde inversion, or mirror images of one another. The relationship between God and Gentile is vividly and sophisticatedly portrayed through this seemingly simple and very short recitative. God is painted as a voice that calls out and physically visits the home of the Gentile, offers a redemptive change of harmony in the middle of the Cantata, and then mirrors his image as that of man. In this one page, which acts as a relatively simple transition from the beckoning cry of the tenor's aria to the more puritanical aria for the boy soprano, while one may think that Bach set the bass voice as a supportive role, the voice is far more important than one might have initially imagined.

Meanwhile, for the *M'shor'rim*, the bass functions merely as a wordless, secondary accompaniment in a trio that ultimately supports a chazzan, who was normally a lyric tenor voice. Coincidentally, the *m'shor'rim*, with their boy soprano, tenor, bass, and choir vocal arrangement, identically matches Bach's vocal arrangement for *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland*—boy soprano, tenor, and bass with choir. The primary difference between the two of them is that the cantata has musical instrumentation and polyphonic choral arrangements, while the *M'shor'rim* are monophonic and without instrumentation. At the same time as the cantata and the *m'shor'rim*, however, some synagogues in Germany justified the creation of "orchestras" that would play

accompaniments to the prayers for over an hour during Kabbalat Shabbat. This tradition of playing musical instrument on Friday for Kabbalat Shabbat started in Prague at the last decade of the 17th century and ended in about 1793. The first half of the 18th century was indeed Bach's time. However, while these two parallel musical traditions existed around the same time, it is doubtful that Bach was ever influenced by the music of the *m'shor'rim*. The restrictions placed upon Jews living in Bach's region of Germany were such that they were not allowed to enter the common grounds of the cities. While it is questionable whether Bach had ever visited a synagogue with the *m'shor'rim*, accounts of the M'shor'rim and their artistry were certainly made by non-Jews:

"At my first entrance, one of the priests [cantors] was chanting part of the service in kind of an ancient *canto firmo*, and responses were made by the congregation in a manner which resembled the hum of bees. After this, three of the sweet singers of Israel, which it seems are famous here...began singing a kind of jolly modern melody, sometimes in unison, and sometimes in parts, to a kind of *tol de rol*, instead of words, which to me, seemed very farcical. One of these voices was a falset, more like the upper part of a *vox humana* stop in an organ, than a natural voice.... The second of these voices was a very vulgar tenor, and the third was a *baritono*. The last imitated, in his accompaniment of the falset, a bad bassoon.... At the end of each strain, the whole congregation set up such a kind of cry, as a pack of hounds when a fox breaks cover. It was a confused clamour, and riotous noise, more than song or prayer.... I shall only say,

that it was very unlike what we Christians are used to in divine service." – Description of a non-Jew after attending an Ashkenazic service in Amsterdam (c. 1775)[50]

Of course, many Christians knew about this style, but only in places where such style was prevalent. Non-Jews living in Munich and other places in Southern Germany or in England would have made similar observations as this one from Amsterdam. However, in the North East where Bach lived, such contact with the Jewish community would not have existed.

Such commentary, however, regardless of the locale, sets the stage for later generations of anti-Semitic and anti-Germanic dialogue, as best exemplified through the works of Richard Wagner (1813-1883) and Jacques Halévy (1799-1862). Wagner particularly held Halévy in high esteem, describing him as "frank and honest; no sly, deliberate swindler like Meyerbeer." Wagner also noted, "I have never heard dramatic music which has transported me so completely to a particular historic epoch." Musicologists remark upon the relationship between these two composers, since Wagner is recognized as the fiercest anti-Semite of the musical world, and yet his relationship to Halévy was one of respect and admiration.

Oddly enough, some musicologists speculate upon the possibility that Wagner was inspired to write *Die Meistersinger* upon seeing Halévy's *La Juive*. It is said that while Wagner was exiled from Germany, he saw *La Juive* premiere in Paris in 1836. Shortly afterwards, he began writing *Die Meistersinger*, which he finished and performed nearly twenty years later. *La Juive* was still a triumphantly successful opera at that time, and was not the seldom-performed piece that it is today. Some theorize that Wagner even

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[50] Charles Burney, *the Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Provinces* (London, 1775), vol. 2, pp. 229-30; found in Goldberg p. 60

copied the opening of the first act of *La Juive* when composing his opera, particularly since both operas open in a church with an organ and feature a chorus singing in the distance. *Die Meistersinger* takes place in Nuremburg, Germany in the early 16th century, while *La Juive* is set in Switzerland in the early 15th century when the Austrians ruled and persecuted the Jews.

Regardless of what musical nuances are used, and regardless of what scenes bear resemblance, if one were to examine these operas in terms of what overall statements were made by these two particular composers, one may come to some startling conclusions regarding vocal stereotypes of the German verses the Jew. In *La Juive*, Halévy paints the Cardinal as one of the lowest, most stately bass roles in the repertoire, while painting the father, Eliezer, as a high tenor who wails in the same tessitura and style as a *chazzan*. The father pleas and prays like a Jew in an emotive cry for God's presence while the Cardinal represents the Christian "Voice of God." The Cardinal demands that Eliezar accept the Christian faith in exchange for the sparing of his daughter, Rachel's life. Eliezar refuses. The Cardinal decrees a final judgment that puts Eliezer's daughter to death as punishment for a forbidden interfaith relationship.[51] As it turns out, Eliezer had adopted the girl as an infant, after saving her from a burning building— the Cardinal unwittingly sent his own daughter to death in a boiling cauldron of oil. Halévy brilliantly projects a political message through this opera and its amazing turn of events. Beyond the obvious message of forbidden interfaith relationships, Halévy makes a very strong case against assimilation. Furthermore, the allegory of the Cardinal's daughter being saved from a fire as an infant by a Jew evokes a mirrored

[51] Hallman, Diana R. "Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France: the Politics of Halevy's La Juive."

image of baby Moses being saved from a stream by an Egyptian. The Cardinal represents Christianity, and according to Halévy's masterpiece, Christianity has severed its ancestry to Moses by imposing its new covenant upon the faith of the Jews.

Wagner, on the other hand, utilizes the bass-baritone voice of his operas to serve an entirely different purpose. The objective of Wagner's music is to create a new, elite, German identity. This is most apparent for anyone who has read his many prose works concerning the purpose and philosophy of his music and his analysis of the music of German composers of previous generations. Wagner hearkens back to the early generations of German music— the *Minnesang* and *Meistergesang,* to create his own *"Shalshelet Hakabelah,"* proving his inheritance and definition of the superior German musical legacy. Two operas indicative of Wagner's objective are *Tannhauser* and *Die Meistersinger*. *Tannhauser* is a dramatization of a real Tannhauser, a famous *Minnesang* of the 13th century whose adventurous wanderings became the subject of legend, and whose Crusade and involvement in a singing competition at the Wartberg were subjects for Wagner's opera. *Die Meistersinger* is a depiction of the legendary Hans Sachs, the famous Meistersinger of Nuremburg who was the most accomplished singer of his time and who introduced the art of the *Meistergesang* to the church as a follower of the doctrines of Luther.

While *Tannhauser* is written with the legend of the man in mind rather than with particularly overt anti-Semitic propoganda, it is clear that Wagner utilizes this story, as he did with the older legends of the *Nibelungen*, to establish the framework for a progression of a Germanic cultural elite. Jews use this same Minnesinger legend in various ways to serve as reflections of their own Jewish identities. In the article, *Sabotaging the Text:*

*Tannhauser in the Works of Heine, Wagner, Herzl, and Peretz*, Leah Garrett documents the evolution and metamorphosis of the myth of Tannhauser as it came into contact with Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), and I.L. Peretz (1852-1915). The transformation of Tannhauser serves as a model of how Jewish writers adapt outside sources and how Wagner utilized the legend, each serving his own artistic and political purposes.[52]

In Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, however, musicologists are far more concerned about the underlying anti-Semitic messages embedded within the plot than the obvious remarks on the superiority of the German musical tradition. Wagner writes on September 5, 1866 in a letter to Ludwig II, "Die Meistersinger is entirely new ... In it I smile with deepest scorn on my stupid enemies..." Who were these enemies Wagner speaks of? Of course, they were the Jews. While even some prominent Jewish musicologists deny the association of Wagner's operas with anti-Semitism, the only way in which they may substantially argue this point is by separating Wagner from his art. One must read his article, *Judentums in Music*, and deny that any of his sentiments towards Jews were ever reflected in his operas. One must listen to his music and acknowledge that in addition to writing all of the musical scores, he personally wrote all of the libretti, made specific demands for staging, lighting, and costuming, and created an entire festival to surround his music, which was forged and promulgated in tandem with his personal ideologies, and then attempt to understand Wagner's characters without reference to messages of anti-Semitism. His political views and his art were one and the same, as expressed in his

[52] Garrett, Leah V. "Sabotaging the Text: Tannhauser in the Works of Heine, Wagner, Herzl, and Peretz" Jewish Social Studies - Volume 9, Number 1, Fall 2002 (New Series), pp. 34-52

vast collection of prose writing. He publicly expressed his thoughts in a magazine, and those who were aware of his music were even more conscious of his anti-Semitic and German nationalist agenda.

Specifically, the role of Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger* has been recognized as a stereotypical Wagnerian portrayal of a Jew. As the Marker of the Meistersinger competition, Beckmesser's job is to judge and keep time for the singing competition. In Beckmesser's attempt to serenade the woman who is to be the prize for the competition, Hans Sachs, the prototypical German, takes the opportunity to take time and judge for Beckmesser. Wagner decided to cast both Hans Sachs and Beckmesser as bassos. They are of two different types, however. Hans Sachs is a dramatic bass-baritone who is taken very seriously, while Beckmesser is considered to be a basso-buffo. The tessitura, however, for Beckmesser, is far too high to be considered a legitimate bass role. Instead, the bass is demanded to stretch his range much higher than normal, causing the sound to be somewhat nasal and forced in nature. Hans keeps time with a hammer while cobbling his shoes, but only keeps time when he feels that Beckmesser is not singing well. His melodies are not terribly original, and his lyrics and use of language are not highly regarded by Hans Sachs. Beckmesser is laughed off of the stage. A substantial number of musicologists perceive Beckmesser's character to be a Wagnerian representation and ridicule of the chazzan.

If Beckmesser is not a chazzan, he is, at the very least, a representation of a Jewish critic. Hanslich, a contemporary critic of Wagner, was known to be half-Jewish. In Wagner's mind, and the mind of anyone bearing his extreme level of anti-Semitism, one who is half-Jewish is spiritually Jewish. In a letter advising Rudolf Freny on how to

play the part of Beckmesser, Wagner tells him, "Model yourself on some famous critic or other." Therefore, in Wagner's depiction of Beckmesser, he takes the opportunity to not only personally insult his Jewish critic, but he insults the music of the Jewish people in the process. Ultimately, Hans Sach's protégé wins the music competition, and in his final words of the opera, Hans Sachs declares the greatness of the German Art-tradition as superior to all other traditions: "Beware, Evil tricks threaten us: if the German people and kingdom should one day decay, under a false foreign rule soon no prince will understand his people any more; and foreign mists with foreign vanities Would darken all our German days; what is German and true were soon forgot, Did they not live in Master's art I say to you, Honour your noble Masters, Thus you will shun disasters; If you hold them close to your heart Then may depart The fame of ancient Rome We have at home Our sacred German art!"

Even Richard Wagner's great grandson, Gottfried Wagner, a musicologist and fierce opponent of anti-Semitism, confirms these messages as inherent to his operatic works. He often lectures on the subject of anti-Semitism and Wagner, and is very clear to point out the ramifications of the events of Wagner's personal life as a young man upon his life mission of anti-Semitism and German nationalism. The following is an excerpt of a radio transcript from Radio National's "The Spirit of Things," on June 25, 2000 that yields astonishing questions of Wagner's childhood identity:

> "I would like to start the discussion of Wagner and the Jews, starting with the question of his own identity, with the question of the father. And the question of the father is, who was really Richard Wagner's father? Was it Freiderich Wagner who died only nine months after Richard Wagner was born, or was it Florian and Ludwig Geyer who then was, his adopted father, Richard Wagner carried the name of Geyer till he was 14 years old.
> This is extremely important and we really want to come along in a more profound way. So Wagner makes it very clear, I think not many people know that, called himself until he was 14, till his adopted father, or might be even his real father, because this question never can be resolved, that all the different international scholars, there is not yet the key, it might be so Wagner himself in his autobiography gives rather a lot of material to the speculation that Geyer might have been his father. He speaks very warmly about this Ludwig Geyer.

> Having had the name of course Richard Geyer until he was 14, it is rather interesting to come a little bit close on the discussion. Geyer as we know first of all, was a typical German-Jewish name, first point. Second point, where did Richard Wagner grow up in the city of Leipzig? In the Jewish quarter... How did Richard Wagner look like even all his life? He had a very intensive nose, so now, why do I tell you all that? Because when he was mocked at in school as the little Jewish Richard, from the Jewish quarter Amproule, which certainly you know is part of all the later on for this kind of Wagner's self-hatred, and even in the figures I talked about, he did not know about his father even in the works of Wagner we have figures who ask about their father.
> There's the opera Seigfried, there is the opera Tristan, there's Parsifal, there are many figures who have the question, Who was my father? It is very important to understand why. My direction is to ask why was Wagner such a fierce anti-Semite before he developed other, more, let's say complex discussion, next step to understand. So little Richard Geyer certainly was humiliated, because coming out of this quarter. Might be also because of being Jewish because also he played with Jewish kids."

Could Wagner have been born from the Jewish lineage of the Geyer family? It is also true that Wagner encoded the heading of his autobiography with the emblem of a vulture. The German word for vulture is *Geier*, which is likely a play upon his family name. Could Wagner's great admiration for Halévy's work on La Juive been emphasized by the fact that the opera's entire plot pivots upon the question of the identity of whether Rachel was the daughter of Eliezer the Jew, or the Christian Cardinal? Might it be that Wagner personally identified with this opera, or could it even be that Halévy wrote the opera with Wagner in mind? Was it self-hatred of a disturbed childhood that caused his obsession with anti-Semitism and German nationalism? These questions are much larger than the scope of this thesis, but if what Gottfried Wagner said is true, then a Jew may have played an incredibly prominent role as an anti-Semite and eventual political tool for the Nazi regime in the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The irony of these political messages is further emphasized by the fact that many of the most famous Wagnerian bass-baritones come from a Jewish heritage. Friedrich Schorr, Alexander Kipnis, and George London are recognized as three of the greatest bass-baritones of the 20$^{th}$ century, and each of them have very strong ties to Judaism, yet each of them defined their careers as performers of the works of Wagner in full

cognizance of Wagner's political messages. They were all exceptionally gifted interpreters of Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*. For Friedrich Schorr, it was relatively easy, since his father, Mayer Schorr, was a famous Reform cantor with a baritone voice, but happened to be a great admirer of Wagner's music. Friedrich is still considered the greatest Wagnerian bass-baritone in history, and is referred to as the definitive interpreter of his music for later generations of Wagnerian bass-baritones. For Alexander Kipnis, his dark bass voice and prominent position as a Wagnerian singer in German opera houses saved him from the fate that many other Jewish musicians could not escape. George London, on the other hand, changed his name from Burnstein to avoid the anti-Semitism prevalent in the European opera houses where he had firmly established his career. Several other bassos featured in this thesis were well known for their Wagnerian interpretations as well.

Like George London, Sidor Belarsky had changed his name. According to his memoirs, it was in honor of his wife, Clara, and his daughter, Isabell. However, it is noted that Sidor had also performed as Isidor Belarsky before performing in California. That time he changed his name for purposes of show business and ease of pronunciation. However, when it came time for Sidor to daven in the synagogue, he would return to his *mame loshen* and resume the title, Chazzan Yisroel Lifshitz or even Chazzan Yisroel Brown with his extended family's surname. Apparently, this was done in respect to the orthodox congregations that he had served, and in respect to his wish earlier in his operatic career to maintain a career as a chazzan separate from his career as an opera singer. It wasn't until he came out with the many recordings of Yiddish folk songs that he was openly recognized as Sidor Belarsky the Jewish basso.

Sidor Belarsky, while certainly capable of singing Wagnerian roles, did not build or define his career in this way. Instead, his operatic roles ranged from many of the great Russian operatic roles to the Cardinal in La Juive, Rocco in Fidelio, and many others. Leon Lishner, another basso who recorded Yiddish songs, defined his operatic career upon the Christian works of Menotti, performed as a Wagnerian, and only served as a cantor occasionally for High Holiday services while living in Seattle. Lishner, however, was very strongly connected to the Holocaust, and paid many tributes to it in his recordings and concerts. There were other bass cantors who had dual careers as Wagnerians. One notable one was Cantor Lechner, who served Central Synagogue immediately prior to Richard Botton for over 37 years and had performed some supporting Wagnerian roles at the Metropolitan opera.

It should be noted, at this point, that the music of Wagner had some influence upon the music of the synagogue, particularly in the earlier part of the 20th century in the United States. Reform congregations, around the turn of the century, in an effort to maintain their German identity in America, commissioned large synagogue works, often composed by non-Jews, to be performed regularly at Sabbath services. They involved large chorus works with organ, and the cantor's parts were normally scored for bass-baritone in the bass clef. Analysis of the pieces from that generation demonstrate a derivative style of composition that could be best described as works representing the peak of Romanticism. Stephen S. Wise Synagogue of Cincinatti commissioned Hugo Grimm, a well-known composer of church and large symphonic works, to write a large synagogue service. The music is clearly Wagnerian in its use of harmonies, while some of the rhythmic figures are reminiscent of Verdi, and the extended cadences and

transitions are symphonic in nature, recreating the grandiosity of opera in the grand cathedral-like structures of Classical Reform congregations.

This was the type of music that Classical Reform Jews could easily identify with, and it was representative of the tradition of German music that Wagner had worked so hard to define and exalt throughout his life. The German Jew, in an effort to achieve normalization, felt empowered by this type of music, and by hearing the same bass-baritone voice— the heroic figure of Wagner's operas and the formidable, majestic religious figure of Halévy's opera, the Jews of the Classical Reform further juxtaposed themselves as different from their Eastern European counterparts. The divergent taste of the Eastern European Jew for the sound of the lyric tenor voice, is summarized by A.Z. Idelsohn:

> "An essential consideration in East European *chazzanuth* is the *voice* of the *chazzan*. Like other Orientals, the Jew has preferred what he called a *sweet* voice, which meant to him a lyric tenor with nasal quality, rather than the powerful voice of a heroic tenor, baritone, or bass. At best, the heroic voice was designated as the "roar of the lion," whereas a lyric tenor usually had all the qualities required to move the heart of the Jew, by its natural sweetness and by its facile execution of the most ornamental coloratura, which art was called *Kelim* (instruments, implements). This lyric quality the Jew loved in instruments, the violin becoming his favorite. *Singing* he termed *han-im* (to sweeten), and King David he called *neim zemiroth*, he who sweetened the songs (compare the Greek *melos*). As a matter of fact, the great *chazzanim*, with the exception of very few, were tenors; if baritones, they "tenorized" their voices."[53]

[53] Idelsohn, A.Z., "The Synagogue Song of the Ashkenazim," chap. in Jewish Music in Its Historical Development (New York: Tudor Publishing Company 1948), 129.

The Classical Reform basso-chazzan needed not to "tenorize" their voice, since they were after an entirely different aesthetic; one that modeled a more Protestant, stately prayer service. It seems that as previously eluded to in the examination of *La Juive* and *Meistersinger*, there are two entirely different theological concepts that are emphasized in the model of prayer that is "Jewish" verses the model of prayer that is "Christian." In "Jewish" worship, the objective of the *chazzan* is to pray to God on behalf of the congregation. It often pleads and cries, yearning for resolution in a world that is fragmented. In "Christian" worship, the objective, as in the Bach Cantata, *Nunn komm der Heiden Heiland*, and most Oratorio and operatic models of the supernatural voice—God, Satan; Villian, or Priest, is to create the "Voice of God," that one might hear the awesome power of the supernatural.

Jerome Hines, the famous Metropolitan Opera celebrity, utilized his Evangelical Faith and commanding stature and formidably deep bass-baritone to emphasize the "Voice of God" throughout his career. He depicted himself as someone who always listened to that voice which led him, the voice of Christ. Jerome Hines dedicated his entire life to the Evangelical cause, even as an opera singer, and made many recordings of spirituals and other Christian songs.

Sidor Belarsky, however, did not emulate this form of worship when he was davening for the high holidays. In his own words, in letters to his beloved Bellotchke, he depicts himself as an emissary for the Jewish people on High Holidays, pleading on their behalf. This, combined with Sidor's Russian, *cheyder* educated background, made Sidor identify solely with traditional *chazzanut*. In the synagogue, he sang the works of Israel Alter, normally a capella with a choir, but only performed with an organ when recording

them. He only served Orthodox and right-wing Conservative congregations that did not allow instruments on *Shabbatot* or other holidays. For a complete reference of his recordings and publications, one may reference Jeffrey Cohen's Master's Thesis from JTS on Sidor Belarsky.

Sidor Belarsky, according to Isabell, played an important role in Israel Alter's life, having helped him get settled in NY on his way from Johannesburg, South Africa. The two of them were close friends, and Sidor enjoyed singing Alter's music. Alter's music is wonderful for Sidor Belarsky because it combines plaintive, florid aspects of Eastern European Chazzanut with a tessitura and style that Sidor Belarsky could easily identify with. While he davened traditional music very slow, this practice seems to be somewhat typical of lower voiced cantors and more common as a performance practice of Sidor's generation. A recording of Emil Kacmann, another bass cantor whose biographical information was unfortunately too difficult to access for this thesis, features the works of Israel Alter. Kacmann also sings Alter in a very slow tempo, arranged in a comfortable bass key that like Sidor, rarely passes the D or E above middle C.

Sidor, however, was not best known for his cantorial music recordings. Nor was his career solely defined as an operatic singer. Instead, he made himself famous for his many recordings and concert performances of Jewish folk songs. Sidor was singing during a period that Jewish tenors like Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker had the limelight as concert performers of traditional chazzanut. Sidor sang in a way that transported the listener back to the Old World. He was best remembered for the simple folk songs that related the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of simple Jewish people. He, like Paul Robeson (who were both born in 1898 and both died within one year of one another),

capitalized upon the mission of their people. For Robeson, it was the mission of equality for the African American and social justice for 'all of God's chillin.' For Sidor, it was the recognition of the Holocaust and the creation and settlement of the State of Israel. While Robeson was accused of his ties to Communism, Sidor blatantly defied his communist home by defecting to the United States.

Paul Robeson defined his singing career upon the Negro spiritual, but also sang in Yiddish and the languages of all people who were oppressed. Sidor Belarsky also sang Negro spirituals early in his career. This practice may have ended when he performed a recital of Afro-American Spirituals in 1931 at Town Hall in New York, but was given a bad review in the New York Evening Post. Apparently, in light of the social atmosphere of the times, it was inappropriate for Sidor to make use of such repertoire and the music was not something that he expressed naturally. However, in light of the fact that Paul Robeson had sung the Partisan's song, Kaddish, Russian folk songs, and a number of other Yiddish songs during World War II, it seems obvious that Sidor was, like Jerome Hines and other bassos of that generation and generations to come, attempting to emulate the new role that Robeson had created for the basso. "The Voice of the People."

Robeson and Hines were both featured and warmly welcomed by the Russians as performers, while Sidor never returned to his homeland. While Sidor was certainly proud of his Russian heritage, as is evident from the many performances of Russian art songs, folk songs, popular songs, and opera arias, he made it very clear that his political leanings were indisputably Capitalist; even though he sang for organizations that were more secular and Socialist in their affiliation, like the Workman's Circle, Histadrut, and the National Committee for Labor Israel. His movie, "Shalom Yisrael," was created by

Histadrut and featured Sidor singing popular Israeli and Yiddish folk songs throughout Israel with settlers of *kibbutzim* to Yemenite labor camps, and tree planting in Eilat to boat rides on the Kineret. All the while, he invited the communities he was visiting to join him in song. From the video, from Rocco, his greatest operatic achievement, and from his renditions of the folk songs of the Jewish people, one may quickly see how his charisma and capacity to capture the sentiment of his people allowed him to be the "Voice of the People."

## Conclusion

As this thesis attempts to demonstrate, though further analysis and additional supporting examples would be helpful, there is a progression of history related to the definition of the Jewish voice as that of a sweet tenor voice, while the definition of the Priestly voice is presented as a bass-baritone. Classical Reform congregations were keenly aware of this definition, and made efforts to define their tradition from Eastern European tradition by contrasting their service and the voice that represented their people's prayers a deeper, lower, and more defined manner.

This definition is also defined in many examples from operas, though only a few were offered for analysis in this thesis. What is clear, however, is that German operatic tradition makes great use of the bass voice as a "Voice of God" whether for purposes of good or evil. It is a voice that makes a tremendous statement on a stage, and since Classical Reform congregations had the objective of recreating the drama of prayer, they made use of the stereotype created by German operatic tradition.

Sidor Belarsky followed the Eastern European tradition of cantorial music, and did not partake in the customs of the Classical Reform synagogue. He lived during a period of incredible importance in the history of the Jewish people. He was already established as a Jewish opera singer at a time when two enormous events, the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, were on the conscience of Jewish people throughout the world. While he had a relatively successful career as an opera singer, his ultimate fame rested upon his ability to relate to common people. His secular nature, and

sentiment and knowledge of old Yiddish folk songs made him popular at a time when Jews wished to feel empowered by hearing a strong basso sing the songs of their people.

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