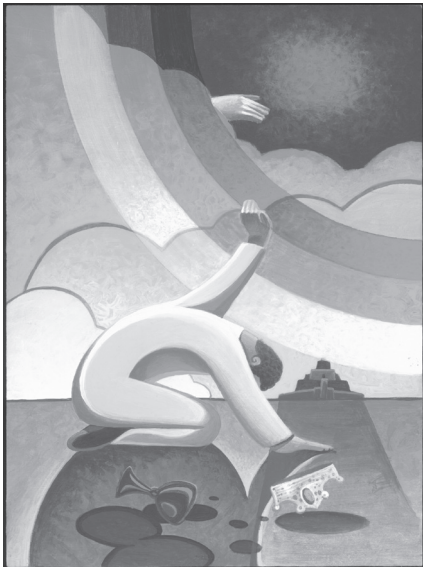


# Achron



## A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE FOUNDER



Dispersed over the centuries to all corners of the earth, the Jewish people absorbed elements of its host cultures while, miraculously, maintaining its own. As many Jews reconnected in America, escaping persecution and seeking to take part in a visionary democratic society, their experiences found voice in their music. The sacred and secular body of work that has developed over the three centuries since Jews first arrived on these shores provides a powerful means of expressing the multilayered saga of American Jewry.

My personal interest in music and deep abiding commitment to synagogue life and the Jewish people united as I developed an increasing appreciation for the quality and tremendous diversity of music written for or inspired by the American Jewish experience. Through discussions with contemporary Jewish composers and performers during the 1980s, I realized that while much of this music had become a vital force in American and world culture, even more music of specifically Jewish content had been created, perhaps performed, and then lost to current and future generations. Believing that there was a unique opportunity to rediscover, preserve, and transmit the collective memory contained within this music, the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music was founded in 1990. This project would unite the Jewish people's eternal love of music with their commitment to education, a commitment shared by the Milken Family Foundation since our founding in 1982.

The passionate collaboration of many distinguished artists, ensembles, and recording producers has created a vast repository of musical resources to educate, entertain, and inspire people of all faiths and cultures. The Milken Archive of American Jewish Music is a living project, one that we hope will cultivate and nourish musicians and enthusiasts of this richly varied musical genre.

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Lowell Milken

The Milken Family Foundation was established by brothers Lowell and Michael Milken in 1982 with the mission to discover and advance inventive, effective ways of helping people help themselves and those around them lead productive and satisfying lives. The Foundation advances this mission primarily through its work in education and medical research. For more information, visit [www.milkenarchive.org](http://www.milkenarchive.org).

## A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



The quality, quantity, and amazing diversity of sacred as well as secular music written for or inspired by Jewish life in America is one of the least acknowledged achievements of modern Western culture. The time is ripe for a wider awareness and appreciation of these various repertoires—which may be designated appropriately as an aggregate “American Jewish music.” The Milken Archive is a musical voyage of discovery encompassing hundreds of original pieces—symphonies, operas, concertos, cantorial masterpieces, complete synagogue services, and folk, popular, and Yiddish theater music. The music in the Archive—all born of the American Jewish experience or fashioned for uniquely American institutions—has been created by native American or immigrant composers. The repertoire is chosen by a panel of leading musicians, musicologists, cantors, and Judaic scholars who have selected works based on or inspired by traditional Jewish melodies or modes, synagogue or other liturgical functions, language, Jewish historical subject matter, role in Jewish celebrations or commemorations, and content of texts (biblical, literary, etc.), as well as their intrinsic musical integrity.

The initial dissemination to the public of the Archive will consist of fifty CDs devoted to particular composers and musical genres. In this first phase of the project, more than 200 composers in recordings of more than 600 works are represented. Additional components of the Archive, planned for release at a future date, include rare historical reference recordings, expanded analytical background information, contextual essays, and a special collectors edition—according to historical, religious, and sociological themes.

The Milken Archive is music of AMERICA—a part of American culture in all its diversity; it is JEWISH, as an expression of Jewish tradition and culture enhanced and enriched by the American environment; and perhaps above all, it is MUSIC—music that transcends its boundaries of origin and invites sharing, music that has the power to speak to all of us.

Neil W. Levin

Neil W. Levin is an internationally recognized scholar and authority on Jewish music history, a professor of Jewish music at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, director of the International Centre and Archives for Jewish Music in New York, music director of Schola Hebraica, and author of various articles, books, and monographs on Jewish music.

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## About the Composer

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Composer and violinist JOSEPH ACHRON (1886–1943) belongs to the school of musicians, ethnologists, folklorists, and other intellectuals in Russia who, during the first decade of the 20th century, attempted to establish a new Jewish national art music based on ethnic, as well as religious, heritage. Intrigued and encouraged by both the Russian and the more recent Russo-Jewish national-cultural pursuit of folklore, that coterie formalized itself in 1908 as the *Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksmusik* (The Society for Jewish Folk Music) in St. Petersburg. Branches followed in Moscow, Riga, Odessa, and other cities. Its name, however, is misleading. Although the initial phase of its activities centered around harmonizing and arranging Jewish folk music collected from various parts of the Russian Empire, its long-range purpose was more artistic than ethnological. Its second transitory stage involved shaping such arranged folk material for concert rendition, and in its ultimate stage, it aimed at original composition of works—based on or inspired by that Jewish heritage—which its members saw as accumulating eventually to become a national Jewish art music. Musical publication was therefore an important part of the Society's efforts, and it founded its own press, which in fact published three of Achron's early works.

To some extent, the “Russification” path among Russian composers and in the Russian classical music world became a model for a Jewish counterpart. But the mission espoused by the *Gesellschaft* composers also had been kindled and bred by a number of deeper forces operating among the Jewish intelligentsia in the Russian sphere, including the awakening of a national consciousness, the revival of Hebrew, the interest in a secular Hebrew as well as Yiddish literature, and, of course, Zionism, with its cultural and historical ramifications. Underlying these currents were the powerful cultural forces of the movement known as the *Haskala*—the Jewish “Enlightenment”—which had sought to implant secular culture and literature, humanistic thought, and western European-style social liberalism within eastern European Jewry. Indeed, the middle-class intelligentsia's very embrace of “the folk” and its music was one manifestation of a liberal worldview fostered by the *Haskala*.

Achron's brief *Gesellschaft* experience turned out to be his guiding inspiration for much of his artistic life. Though a relative latecomer to the group, he was one of the leading musical personalities to come out of its milieu.

Achron was born in Losdzey (Łozdzieje), in the Suwalki region of historic Lithuania (then part of Russian Poland; now Ładzijai, Lithuania), into a comfortable middle-class family. His father was an amateur violinist as well as a lay ba'al t'filla (amateur precentor or cantor). Joseph's younger brother, Isidore, was an accomplished pianist who later became Jascha Heifetz's accompanist for a time in America. The family moved to Warsaw, where Joseph began violin lessons at the age of five. He soon emerged as a child prodigy, and at seven years old he wrote his first known composition—a lullaby for violin (an unpublished manuscript now in the British Museum). He made his debut at the age of nine (reviewed in a St. Petersburg newspaper) and his first tour at thirteen, which took him to many European parts of the Russian Empire: Kiev, Odessa, Łódź, Białystok, Gdno, and to St. Petersburg, where he played at the Imperial Palace at a birthday celebration of the czar's brother, Grand Duke Michael. On that occasion he was presented with a gold watch by the czar's mother, Czarina Maria Fedorovna.

In 1898 the family relocated again, to St. Petersburg, where Achron entered the conservatory with monetary assistance from the grand duke and joined the class of the legendary violin teacher Leopold Auer, whose other students included Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Efrem Zimbalist, Nathan Milstein, and Tascha Seidl. Achron also studied composition with Anatoly Lyadov, best known today outside of Russia for his descriptive orchestral pieces and for his rejection of Diaghilev's commission for a *Firebird* ballet score, which then went to Stravinsky and launched his brilliant career.

By the time Achron graduated from the conservatory, in 1904, he had written a dozen compositions. He demonstrated an affinity for Judaic themes well before his *Gesellschaft* association. His *Variations on Kamarinskaya*, op. 12, for example, has a theme and variations (no. 9) marked “Hebraïque.” He went to Germany for three years, where his concerts met with great success. His performance of Beethoven's violin concerto with the Leipzig *Gewandhaus*, conducted by Arthur Nikisch, incorporated his own cadenza. On his return to St. Petersburg, he became increasingly interested in composition, and he studied orchestration with Maximilian Steinberg, Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law. Analysts of Achron's music have observed that of all the Russian composers, Scriabin exerted the most influence on his work. On Scriabin's death, in 1915, Achron wrote an Epitaph (op. 38) in his memory.

Achron considered himself primarily a violinist and a composer, hopeful for inclusion in the general mainstream of

Russian music. However, around 1911 he became attracted to the work and mission of the Gesellschaft circle, intrigued by its reactions to the musical assimilation of many Russian-Jewish composers who demonstrated an obliviousness to Jewish roots. Solomon Rosowsky (1878–1962), president of the main St. Petersburg section of the Society, became friendly with Achron after hearing him play, introducing him to the Gesellschaft's activities and its discovery of Jewish heritage and folklore as a source of artistic creativity. Achron joined the Gesellschaft that year and later became chairman of its music committee. Rosowsky was his mentor, a relationship that continued throughout their lives after both had moved to the United States.

Achron's first composition following his joining the Gesellschaft was his Hebrew Melody for violin and piano (op. 33, 1911) based on a theme he remembered hearing in a Warsaw synagogue in his youth. It remains his most famous piece, part of the standard repertoire of virtually all concert violinists and a frequent encore number. It has been played and/or recorded by Heifetz, Milstein, Elman, Henryk Szeryng, and Itzhak Perlman, and it usually provides the primary recognition of Achron's name in the classical music world. It was first performed in St. Petersburg in 1912 at a ball-concert given by an adjutant to the czar, where Achron played it as an encore after a program of classical works. The immediate success of Hebrew Melody actually changed the course of Achron's musical life, since from that point on, he devoted a significant part of his energies and gifts to music with Jewish connections. His next piece was a ballad on Hebrew themes for cello and piano, Hazzan (op. 34). A number of pieces related to Jewish themes followed: Three Pieces on Jewish Folksongs; Hebrew Dance; Hebrew Lullaby; Dance Improvisations; Variations on El yivne hag-alil, for piano; and To the Jewess.

Achron became preoccupied with developing a "Jewish" harmonic and contrapuntal idiom that would be more appropriate to Jewish melodies than typical Western techniques, but he opposed the notion of an artificially superimposed "Jewish style." He was convinced that any possible stylistic development of a Jewish national art music required an evolutionary course, just as Western music had evolved over centuries. In his essay "On Jewish Music," he wrote that any serious Jewish art music must "be developed by gradual assimilation" and that if Jewish composers were to express their own Jewish experiences musically, the creative product would be "welcome and accepted as an important and integral part of music as a whole." That is, any Jewish national art music—music pertaining to Jewish experience as a people—must first stand as music, and then as a subset of cultivated Western music, rather than the reverse. In this he presaged misunderstood

sentiments articulated decades later by composer Hugo Weisgal, who said that for serious music to be "Jewish," it first had to be "good music." Achron rejected as naive any chauvinistic perceptions of "purity" and "authenticity." "Such purity does not and cannot exist," he wrote. "This is as true of art as of life's other constituents, since inter-influences are not only unavoidable but desirable."

During the First World War, Achron served in the Russian Imperial Army and saw action at the Western Front. He then joined the music corps of the Russian army and was headquartered in Petrograd. After Russia's exit from the war and during the first few years following the October Revolution, he continued his performing career and began to solidify his reputation as a composer. In 1922 he moved to Berlin, where, with a few other émigré colleagues, he tried to replant the Gesellschaft, which had disbanded after the Revolution. Among his major works of that period is Children's Suite, based on motives of biblical cantillations. Achron became increasingly attracted to both biblical cantillation and secular Jewish folksong as sources for compositions, but unlike many of his colleagues, he grew less interested in Hassidic music as a mine from which to draw.

While in Berlin, Achron became interested in the work of the Habima (Hebrew) theatrical studio, which inspired his original score for Belshazzar. His Berlin experience proved to be short-lived, and in 1924 he went to Palestine for several months, as did many former Gesellschaft associates. That visit had a profound effect on his subsequent music, both spiritually and in terms of various melodies, modes, and cantillations he heard for the first time. He came to America in 1925—first to Chicago, and then New York for nine years. Although he devoted himself ever more diligently to composition during those years, he still performed frequently. At an eightieth birthday tribute to Leopold Auer at Carnegie Hall, Heifetz, Zimbalist, and the honoree played Achron's cadenza in their performance of a Vivaldi concerto for three violins (a concert that also included performances by Sergei Rachmaninoff, Joseph Hoffman, Ossip Gabrilowitch, and other supreme giants of the music world of the time).

In New York, Achron wrote several scores of incidental music for productions at Maurice Schwarz's Yiddish Art Theater, building on his Berlin experiences with Habima and the Teatron Eretz Israeli. Among the plays for which he wrote music were Goldfaden's The Tenth Commandment, Leivick's The Golem, Sholom Asch's The Witch of Castille, and two by Sholom Aleichem: Kiddush hashem and Stempenyu. The score for the last was later reworked into a piece for violin and piano with the same title, premiered by

Joseph Szigeti, and later programmed by Jascha Heifetz.

Also in New York, Achron wrote his one serious synagogue work, a complete Sabbath evening service according to the American Reform format. It was commissioned by Temple Emanu-el—where the music director, Lazare Saminsky, had also been part of the Gesellschaft circle in Russia—and it was published in 1932.

In 1934 Achron moved to Los Angeles, which was then playing host to a significant group of émigré composers, intellectuals, and performers, such as Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Schoenberg, Toch, Zeisl, Mann, Stravinsky, Rubinstein, Heifetz, and Piatigorsky. Achron became part of that circle, and like many fellow émigré composers, he took advantage of opportunities for involvement in film scoring (in his case, with minimal success) and playing in studios. He also became active in some of the intellectual organizations of Jewish musical life there.



Achron with Otto Klemperer, Hollywood, December 1936.

Achron completed his second (1936) and third (1937) violin concertos in Los Angeles, the latter on a commission from Heifetz, and he played the premieres of both with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Otto Klemperer. Unlike the Concerto no. 1, written in New York in 1925, neither of those utilized any Jewish material or purported to be Judaic art works. Although the second concerto received favorable reviews, some saw in the third a loss of the charm and inspiration so evident in the first. Indeed, at that point in his life Achron was attempting to join the avant-garde, a forced theoretical approach to crowd out his natural inclination toward emotional freshness.

Achron's opera is considerable, comprising chamber and orchestral works; solo piano pieces; violin pieces in addition to the concertos; songs and choral settings; eight cadenzas for Paganini, Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven, Vivaldi, and Haydn concertos; and at least thirty-three known violin and piano transcriptions of songs and piano miniatures by such composers as Grieg, Brahms, Liszt, Rameau, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Schumann. Found

among his papers and other effects were sketches for a planned seven-movement symphonic work.

All of Achron's Judaically related music was indelibly affected by his association with the Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksmusik. It reflects both his and the Gesellschaft's central thesis that creation of a genuine "Hebrew music" was possible. In spite of the argument that by the 20th century, Jews had been without national roots for too long and therefore could no longer resurrect an individual musical character, Achron insisted that it was still possible to ferret out and define at least some national characteristics of style, especially since some of the fundamentals of ancient Hebrew music could be traced through continuous usage (especially biblical cantillation and modal motifs), even allowing for transmutation and acculturation over time. To those opponents who posited the argument that the length and geographical breadth of the Diaspora—and its crystallization of host influences—precluded a freely created Jewish national music, he replied in an interview that "the same thing could be said about any music at the time of its creation. Always and everywhere, dependence upon others precedes the liberation of one's own artistic idiom and self-determination. In the first 'real Russian' compositions (Glinka), for example, we find Italian influences." In stating further that a valid Jewish art music must actually incorporate at least some of the acculturated aspects in order to go beyond the narrowness of pre-Diaspora elements, he demonstrated a profound understanding of the issue both historically and aesthetically.

Achron's artistic path as a composer was thus partly a life-long search for a new language of musical expression. Over the course of that search he underwent a series of stylistic transformations, ranging from mid-19th-century Romantic idioms to some of the most important forces in 20th-century Western music—from Russian nationalist and French Impressionist schools even to some of the post-tonal influences of the Second Viennese School. But underlying much of his work, overtly or not, was his preoccupation with Jewish elements. Arnold Schoenberg referred to Achron as "one of the most underestimated of modern composers." Albert Weisser, the first thorough historian of the Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksmusik phenomenon, offered one explanation: "Achron's music stood, as it were, between two poles, the specifically Jewish public and the general musical audiences; and it could not be wholly accepted by either."

—Neil W. Levin

## Violin Concerto no.1, op. 60

Violin Concerto no.1, op. 60 was written mostly in 1925 and completed and orchestrated the following year. It is the first large-scale work following Achron's immigration to the United States. It is also the first known concerto, for any instrument, with a movement based entirely upon the actual musical substance of authentic biblical cantillation (as opposed to programmatic or pictorial biblical depictions).

The concerto is divided into two movements: I. Allegro Moderato and II. Improvisations sur deux thèmes yéméniques (Improvisations on Two Yemenite Themes). The first movement is constructed and derived directly from fifteen individual motives of traditional biblical cantillation systems—or tropes—known as ta'amei hamikra (lit., the meaning or sense of the verse recitation), the musical punctuation patterns indicated by signs or accents above or below words or syllables. These symbols denote the established intonations and vocal accentuations for communal reading of specific sections of the Holy Scriptures. The formulaic systems comprise series of specific motives of unmetred pitches whose rhythms merely correspond to the natural rhythm of the words and are repeated throughout a biblical passage or section in varying orders and combinations and sequences. Their original purpose pertained more to precision of grammatical punctuation, syntax, and accentuation than to musical rendition, although it is generally presumed that some form of quasi-singing always accompanied public biblical reading even in the first millennium, if not before. These accentuation patterns evolved into motives of a chantlike vocal rendition based on the natural rise and fall of the voice in accordance with the prescribed punctuation. The aesthetic product is a logogenic chant somewhere between cadenced speech and nonmetrical singing.

Together with ancient psalmody, biblical cantillation forms the oldest historical layer of all Hebrew liturgical music, possibly with some roots in Jewish antiquity. The versions of the Ashkenazi realm, which Achron has utilized in this concerto, probably date at least to the Middle Ages, with subsequent evolution and variation, leading to specific eastern and western European variants intact to this day. Many of the Gesellschaft composers were particularly intrigued by biblical cantillation as one of the chief potential

sources of Judaic melos for a new modern national music, and Achron turned to its wellsprings for many of his instrumental compositions.

The cantillation systems vary in content among the principal established geographical traditions: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Persian, Yemenite, Bokharan, etc. In each of those rites, with some exceptions, there is a distinct cantillation pattern of motives for each of the communally read biblical books: the Torah for Sabbaths, other holy days, rosh hodesh (the new month), and certain weekday services; the Haftara (prophetic portions of the Bible) for Sabbaths and other holy days; M'gillat ester (the scroll of the Book of Esther) for Purim; Shir hashirim (Song of Songs) for Passover; Ruth for Shavuot; Kohelet (Ecclesiastes); and Eikha (the Book of Lamentations). Eikha is chanted in its entirety on Tisha b'Av, the fast day on the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av, which commemorates and mourns the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem (as well as the fall of Bar Kokhba's fortress, Bethar, in his stand against the Romans, and the Spanish Expulsion in 1492). According to tradition, both Temples were destroyed on the same date, nearly six centuries apart.

Of the fifteen cantillation motives used by Achron in this first movement, the most prominently featured ones are from Eikha, which, despite other various cantillation motives interspersed throughout, gives the movement an overall spirit of connection to Lamentations and Tisha b'Av. When audiences first heard Leonard Bernstein's use of Eikha motives sung in his Jeremiah Symphony, they were often fascinated with his discovery of their potential value for classical composition. Most people did not realize that Achron had seized upon the same cantillation for a similar purpose decades earlier, albeit for instrumental rather than vocal rendition.

One of the most recognizable motives of other cantillations here, apart from Eikha, is the final sof pasuk (end of the passage), the cadential formula for concluding each portion of the Torah according to the eastern European (Lithuanian) variant. This recurs at various points in the orchestra and in solo violin passages. Also conspicuous is an entire phrase more commonly associated with the traditional Ashkenazi rendition of the kiddush for the Three Festivals, but which itself is derived from cantillation. This is particularly emphasized in elegiac solo violin passages. Yet another transparent motive that is associated with one of those Festivals, Shavuot, and also derived from cantillation—the incipit of the so-called akdamut tune in its eastern European version—is given triumphant expression in orchestral passages, sometimes in combination with other unrelated motives.

The concerto opens with a strident, almost hoarse brass statement of the most ubiquitous Eikha association, the identifying initial motives for the first words of the Book of Lamentations. That motive is immediately taken up by strings with high woodwinds, and then by the full orchestra. This immediately conveys a sense of desolation and conjures up the image of the national and religious calamity that was the destruction of the Temples and of Jerusalem. Those who recite Eikha annually will hear in their minds its unsung opening text, which accompanies those motives: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was [once] full of people? How she has become as a widow! She, that was great among the nations!"

The various cantillation motives that follow are often interwoven with each other; elongated and abbreviated; stated, modulated, and restated; augmented and reduced; developed and fragmented. But they are nearly always recognizable and employed in such a way that practically each passage somehow relates to the others. There is little if any extraneous or secondary material, so that everything, including the counterpoint, appears to grow out of the original cantillation. Although cantillation motives are by definition both brief and small cells of only a few pitches each, Achron broadens and embellishes some as a developmental device. This is especially effective in the extended, florid cadenza-like virtuoso violin passages. Toward the end of the movement, three principal motives—by now familiar—are heard contrapuntally and almost simultaneously among the solo violin, the low strings, and the full orchestra.

The second movement is based on two secular or quasi-secular Yemenite Jewish folksongs, which Achron undoubtedly heard for the first time during his sojourn in Palestine. Their use here represents another of the Jewish musical sources typically mined by Gesellschaft-associated composers: authentic indigenous Jewish folksongs from the various lands of the Diaspora where Jewish communities had resided for long periods.

The first of the two folksongs, stated unharmonized and in full by the orchestra at the outset, is known as Eshala elohim (I Will Ask God) and is typical of the Yemenite folk-tune genre in its lean, crisp phrases, narrow range, and decisive rhythm. The song also reflects the Gesellschaft's basic Zionist orientation in its perception of a Jewish national art music, with its lyrics: "We shall go up to [settle] our land, with song and rejoicing." The second tune has not been located in any noted collection and is not generally known today.

Achron himself described his manipulation of the two

tunes as "jugglery"; they both interchange and sometimes work polyphonically together. Although nothing is actually left to improvisation, the overall character suggests a feeling of improvisatory flights of fancy, almost as if some passages had been left to the soloist. There are spontaneous bursts of emotion as the continuous variations unfold with an almost primitive flair.

Achron dedicated this concerto to Jascha Heifetz—his world-famous colleague, friend, and enthusiastic supporter. Even before orchestrating the work, Achron introduced it himself to Serge Koussevitsky, accompanied by Nicholas Slonimsky. It received its premiere performance in 1927 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Koussevitsky, played by the composer. Some of the Boston critics seemed befuddled by the very notion of basing a concerto on such patently Judaic material, and most glossed over it, as they felt unable to assess it. The significance of the cantillation-based structure eluded most of them, yet the critics for *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, the newspaper of émigré Russian Jews, made an interesting observation in referring to its "Dionysian imbalanced exaltation" and its wide range of emotions—"from restless mysterious meditation of strongly religious character to dizzying Dervish-like ecstasy."

The concerto received a few subsequent performances—in New York, Vienna (with Louis Krasner), Kraków, and Tel Aviv—but it then fell more or less into oblivion, although many violinists knew of it and expressed interest over the years in its revival. By the time the Milken Archive determined to record it, the full orchestral score was nowhere to be found, and the project came close to being abandoned. After much perseverance, the score was located, stuck away for decades in an old storage area of its Vienna publishers. Even then, not all the instrumental parts remained, and some had to be re-extracted.

This first concerto is clearly the most inspired of the three he wrote, as well as the most tightly constructed. It is both brilliantly scored for the orchestra and, though technically demanding for the soloist, full of opportunity for meaningful, even profound virtuoso display. Immediately following his conducting of the Berlin recording session in 1998, the renowned Joseph Silverstein, himself an internationally acclaimed violinist, offered an arresting if fanciful speculation: "Had Achron remained in Russia after the Revolution (as did some of his Gesellschaft colleagues) instead of emigrating, and had he still written the same concerto there in the 1920s (certainly the first movement would have been possible), this might well have been the modern Russian violin concerto introduced to the west by David Oistrakh on his first visit to the United States to



open the Soviet–U.S. Cultural Exchange in the midst of the cold war in 1956, instead of the Shostokovich concerto; and then this Achron concerto would have joined the standard repertoire.”

Apart from its obvious intrinsic musical merits, Achron’s first violin concerto also serves as an ideal illustration of the Gesellschaft’s national-cultural mission. From an artistic standpoint, it exemplifies composer Hugo Weisgall’s general assessment of Achron’s music: “In his best music he succeeds, like Janáček and Bartók, in making the idiom of the particular serve as the language of the universal!”

Achron’s juxtapositions of these two differently based movements within a single work may amount to a dialectical pairing of opposing ideas: the sacred against the secular; the older European melos against the “new” (for Europeans) and exotic discovery of the Jewish orient in the Yemenite tunes; gloom against joy; unmetered against metrical Jewish music traditions; and the perpetual acceptance of lamentation over Jerusalem’s destruction and exile against the new optimistic and assertive Zionist mission of return and rejuvenation. Whether these contradictions provide an intended subtext for the piece remains, of course, a matter for interpretation.

## The Golem (Suite)

One of the most persistent legends in western and central European Jewish folklore, frequently reinvented and recycled since the early Middle Ages, surrounds a mysterious mythical creature known as a golem. Although anything even approaching humanly wrought magic is clearly prohibited in Judaism, the long path of Jewish history has not been without the emergence of natural human inclinations toward folk superstitions and magical beliefs. Indeed, it has often been the task of responsible rabbinic leadership to eradicate those notions. Some of the golem legends, however, are further complicated by serious mystical and philosophical ramifications that raise them above simple folk magic—in certain cases to the level of metaphor, as opposed to physical reality or actual power.

Generically, a golem (also homunculus) is a creature, usually quasi-human, i.e., made artificially through the magic of holy names—a phenomenon hardly exclusive to Jewish legends and common to the magic lore of various ancient cultures. The holy name involved in most of the Jewish golem legends is, of course, that of God—the unpronounceable tetragram of His actual Name, which connects to mystical ideas about the creative power of Hebrew letters, words, and speech. The word “golem”

derives from its single mention in the Bible (Psalm 139: 16), which led first to its Mishnaic description of a fool and then to the Talmudic usage as an unformed and imperfect entity—in philosophic terms, matter without form—which it acquired only in later versions. On a basic theological plane, it might simply signify body without soul, but the deeper connotations in early Talmudic and Midrashic legends often concern secret powers of intuition derived from the primordial clay, i.e., the earth, from which a golem is artificially fashioned.

The medieval form of golem legends may have been generated by Talmudic and Midrashic references to a mystical book citing the creative power of letters—of God’s name and even of the Torah. In that conception, various transformations and reorderings of the letters could contain secret knowledge of creation on an internal level. While in the early part of the Middle Ages some saw in this a hidden guide to magic procedures, in the later medieval period the ideal of a golem creation became more symbolic and theoretical. In the 12th and 13th centuries, there arose among the pietist sect known as *hasidei ashkenaz* the notion of golem creation as a mystical ritual. Yet that was also the beginning of the idea of the golem as an actual creature, even though the mystics insisted that it had only symbolic meaning—spiritual experience of ecstasy without practical benefits or consequences.

In the ensuing centuries, the various golem legends solidified as the image of a creature whose animation usually depended upon the “holy” letters in physical contact with



Members of the cast of *The Golem* with H. Leivick (center) and Joseph Achron (right), New York, 1931.

it—and in a particular order. The golem also took on the character of a creature who could serve its creator in practical terms, but could also be vaporized by removal of the life-giving letter(s). Various kabbalistic opinions on the nature of a golem—whether it could have power of speech or intellect—vary.

By the 17th century, by most accounts, golem legends were no longer carefully guarded secrets of clandestine rites, but were commonly known. The golem in relation to the concept of total power over the elements that can cause utter destruction dates to the 16th century (Elijah of Chelm; d. 1583), but most golem legends after that had certain features in common: 1) some type of life could be ignited in the creature by placing the four letters of God's name in its mouth or on its arm, the removal of which would cause its death; 2) there are parallels to contemporaneous non-Jewish legends of a humanly created alchemical being; and 3) the golem may serve its creator, but once created, it can develop independent or quasi-independent dangerous powers and can wreak havoc, especially by continuing to expand in size, to the point where it must be disintegrated back into primordial dust by removing either the tetragram or one of three letters that had otherwise been placed on its forehead. (Those three letters spelled "truth," but removal of the first letter left the word "dead.")

The most recent and best-known golem legend is the one connected to 16th-century Prague, where the fashioning of the creature is ascribed to Rabbi Judah Lowe (The Maharal). The Prague legend has no historical basis, either in the city or vis-à-vis Rabbi Lowe. The story developed only after his death, and its attribution was transferred from Elijah of Chelm to Rabbi Lowe possibly as late as the second half of the 18th century, according to some estimates. By that time, golem legends had also come to assign to the creature powers of protecting Jews from persecution. The Prague golem became especially attached to the city's Altneshul (Old-New Synagogue) and to certain parts of its rituals, and there are even reports to the effect that Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* was inspired by his visit to that synagogue. The Prague golem was said to have been fashioned out of clay, into which the divine tetragram was inserted—making it obedient to Rabbi Lowe's will. Eventually it grew to menace the entire city, and he was forced to remove the four letters and thereby return the golem to ordinary clay.

Beginning in Germany in the 19th century, golem legends have been the subject of countless literary and art forms, and modern interpretations have often been superimposed in modern Hebrew and Yiddish literature. In the 20th century, the golem references have invariably concerned the

Prague golem, which has generated plays, ballets, operas, abstract compositions, novels, poems, and even films.

In 1931, during his New York years, Achron wrote incidental music for H. Leivick's *The Golem*, produced by the Yiddish Art Theater, for which he scored music for only four instruments—trumpet, horn, cello, and piano. The play was produced initially (in Hebrew) in Moscow by Habima, the famous Hebrew theater troupe that was a studio of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater, which is regarded as the foundation for modern professional Hebrew theater. (It later became the National Theater of Israel.) Music for that production had been composed by Moses Milner, one of Achron's fellow *Gesellschaft* members. It is possible that Achron saw the Hebrew version while he was in Berlin, since Habima was temporarily in residence there at that time, and he had some involvement with its Berlin studio. But he is not known to have created any music for it until its Yiddish staging in New York.

On the whole, Achron's music proved too sophisticated even for the audiences at the Yiddish Art Theater, who, despite their interest in serious theater (as opposed to the lighter entertainment of the so-called Second Avenue variety), preferred more inconspicuous incidental music. He therefore reworked some of those scores for concert use. For *The Golem* suite, he selected five fragments of the original incidental score and rewrote them for an atypical chamber orchestra (piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, two horns, three trumpets, trombone, tuba, percussion, harp, piano, six cello, and six double basses), but without violins or violas. The movements he extracted depict the creation of the golem, its rampage, the fatigued wanderer, the dance of the phantom spirits, and the petrifying of the golem.

The suite has an interesting structural scheme. The "golem theme" in the first movement is repeated in the last, but in exact retrograde—musically describing the creature's disintegration into the clay from which it had come. The harmonies in the last movement, too, mirror the initial statement of the first movement. However, those structural devices are employed only as unifying techniques, seamlessly accomplished so that the listener is unaware of them.

*The Golem* suite was premiered by no less an internationally acclaimed maestro than Fritz Reiner (to whom the piece was dedicated) at the Second International Music Festival in Venice in 1932. Unlike Stempenyu, which became one of his best-known works, *The Golem* fell into virtual obscurity and received no further performances until the Milken Archive's recording and its related performance by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Gerard Schwarz at the Musica Judaica Festival in Prague in 2000.

## Two Tableaux from the Theatre Music to Belshazzar

In the Book of Daniel, the biblical Belshazzar is the last king of Babylon and the son of Nebuchadnezzar, who was king at the time of the Babylonian captivity and destruction of Jerusalem. The biblical story contains a dramatic scene at a banquet given by Belshazzar for his court, where they committed further desecration after the fact by singing worshipful praises to idols and drinking wine from sacred vessels that had been looted from the Temple in Jerusalem. When the image of a mysterious hand appeared and wrote four cryptic words on a wall—mene mene tekel ufarasin—Daniel was summoned to decipher them. He translated them for the assemblage as a warning to Belshazzar of the impending fall of Babylon. Indeed, in the biblical account, Belshazzar was killed the same night and was succeeded by Darius of Mede as the ruler of the known world's largest empire. (According to more historical documents and accounts, Babylon was conquered by Cyrus, the king of Persia. Also, it is now accepted that Belshazzar was not actually Nebuchadnezzar's son, although he appears to have been regent of Nabonidus, the last historical king.)

The Belshazzar story has inspired numerous literary, visual, and musical works over the centuries. Although it was viewed in the Middle Ages in relation to the concept of the Antichrist, with Belshazzar as its precursor, from the Renaissance on, interest in the story focused on its sheer dramatic parameters rather than its theological significance. Among the many important literary works of the modern era are Lord Byron's poem *Vision of Belshazzar*, which he included in his 1815 publication of *Hebrew Melodies*, and Heinrich Heine's *Belsazar* (1827). Among the most famous musical works are Handel's oratorio *Belshazzar* (1745) and William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* (1931).

In 1924, living in Berlin immediately following his emigration from Russia, Achron wrote the incidental music for a play entitled *Belshazzar*, which was produced in Hebrew that same year by the TAI—Teatron Eretz Israeli. Authorship of the play is credited to one Henia Roche, whose identity remains unclear. Scholars of Jewish theater in Germany during that period have offered varying suggestions regarding its origin and the question of whether Roche was the playwright or the translator of an earlier German play. According to one account, the play was found in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. Menahem Gnesin, its director for the TAI production, claimed that he first discovered it in Hadoar, a Hebrew literary journal in which it did appear in 1904. More recently it has been claimed that the play was actually by Heinrich Heine (who wrote the earlier poem on the Belshazzar story), that the name Roche was used as a

pseudonym, and that the version in Hadoar was a translation from the German.

During his American period, Achron created an independent concert work from two scenes of his original score, which he rewrote and reorchestrated for large orchestra in 1931 under the present title. The lavish scoring calls for twenty-eight wind instruments, harp, and a large section of assorted percussion—in addition to strings. The work climaxes with the startling scene at Belshazzar's feast.

Neil W. Levin

## About the Performers

The son of Portuguese immigrants, American violinist ELMAR OLIVEIRA was nine when he began studying the violin with his brother John, and he later continued his studies with Ariana Bronne and Raphael Bronstein at the Hartt College of Music and the Manhattan School of Music. The only American violinist to win the gold medal at Moscow's Tchaikovsky International Competition, he was the first violinist to receive the coveted Avery Fisher Prize, and he also won first prizes at the Naumburg and Dealey competitions.



He appears throughout the world and has premiered works by such composers as Charles Wuorinen, Joan Tower, Andrzej Panufnik, Benjamin Lees, Leonard Rosenman, Hugh Aitken, and Richard Yardumian, and has performed infrequently heard concertos by Alberto Ginastera, Einoujuhani Rautavaara, and Joseph Joachim. Among his many recordings is the Grammy-nominated performance of Barber's *Violin Concerto* with Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony. Of special significance are a CD featuring Oliveira performing on some of the world's greatest violins (fifteen by Stradivari and fifteen by Guarneri "del Gesu") and his recording of short pieces spotlighting rare violins from the Library of Congress collection.

## THE BARCELONA SYMPHONY/NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF CATALONIA

(Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya) was founded in 1944 as the Municipal Orchestra of Barcelona, and under the leadership of the Catalan composer-conductor Eduard Toldrà it became an integral part of the

city's cultural life. Since that time, the orchestra, which aspires to promote classical music—and the works of Spanish and Catalan composers in particular—has presented an annual cycle of concerts and performed with many internationally renowned soloists. In 2002 Ernest Martínez Izquierdo became its music director.

The orchestra has given many premieres over the years and made numerous recordings, featuring the works of Monsalvatge, Roberto Gerhard, d'Albert, Falla, and Bartók, among others. It has toured Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Korea, and Japan; has performed in Romania at the George Enescu Festival; and was recently invited to appear at the Pablo Casals Festival in Puerto Rico. Since April 1999 its home has been the modern concert hall l'Auditori.

## THE CZECH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1894, when the orchestra of the National Theatre, Prague's chief opera house, organized a series of concerts. Dvořák conducted the first one, in 1896. In 1901 the Czech Philharmonic became an independent orchestra under the conductor-composer Ludvík Celanský. Its other conductors, up to 1918—when Czechoslovakia became an independent country following the First World War and the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—included Oskar Nedbal (1896–1906) and Vilém Zemánek (1902–06). In 1908 Mahler conducted the orchestra in the world premiere of his Seventh Symphony. Other celebrated musical figures who appeared with the orchestra in its early decades include Rachmaninoff, Grieg, Ysaÿe, and Sarasate. Vaclav Talich, its director from 1919 to 1941, brought the Czech Philharmonic into the ranks of Europe's finest, and it was with him that the orchestra made its first recordings. Talich's successor, Rafael Kubelík (1942–48), had made his debut with them in 1934, when he was only twenty-eight. Another in the orchestra's unbroken line of illustrious maestros, Karel Ančerl, its next chief conductor (1950–68), enlarged the repertoire to include many important 20th-century compositions. The orchestra's recording activity also increased during this period, earning it a number of coveted international prizes. During the long tenure of chief conductor Václav Neumann (1968–90), the orchestra achieved international renown for its distinctive sound and interpretative style—and especially for its incomparable performances of Czech music. Since then, under Neumann's successors—Jiří Belohlávek (1990–92), Gerd Albrecht (1993–96), Vladimír Ashkenazy (since 1998), and its principal guest conductor and longtime collaborator, Sir Charles Mackerras—the Czech Philharmonic has further increased its international stature, with extensive tours and an ever widening repertoire.

## THE RUNDfunk-SINFONIEORCHESTER BERLIN

The Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin (Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra) was founded in 1923 as the first radio orchestra in Germany. Its repertoire spans more than three centuries, but since its founding, the ensemble has been especially dedicated to contemporary works. Many of the greatest composers of the 20th century have performed their own music with this orchestra, either as conductors or soloists, among them Hindemith, Honegger, Milhaud, Prokofiev, Strauss, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Weill, and Zemlinsky—and more recently Krzysztof Penderecki, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Berthold Goldschmidt, and Udo Zimmermann. Since 1956 the orchestra has performed in twenty countries, including China and Japan. It also records extensively for DeutschlandRadio, founded in 1994, and many of its recordings have been awarded the German Record Critics' Prize. In 2002 Marek Janowski succeeded Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos as principal music director.



GERARD SCHWARZ, one of the leading present-day American conductors, was born in Weehawken, New Jersey, in 1947. He began piano lessons at the age of five and trumpet at eight, and he attended the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, and New York's High School of Performing Arts. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at The Juilliard School, during which time he also played with the American Brass Quintet and then joined the New York Philharmonic, succeeding his former teacher, William Vacchiano, as co-principal trumpeter.

Within a few years Schwarz found himself increasingly attracted to conducting, having made his debut as early as 1966 with the Erick Hawkins Dance Company, which he served for a time as music director, and in 1977 he resigned from the Philharmonic to pursue a full-time podium career. In 1977 he cofounded the New York Chamber Symphony (originally the "Y" Chamber Symphony), serving as its music director for twenty-five seasons. From 1978 to 1985 he was music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and in 1981 he established the Music Today contemporary music series in New York, serving as its music director until 1989. In 1982, he became director of Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival. In the course of two decades he brought the Mostly Mozart orchestra to the Tanglewood and Ravinia festivals and on annual tours to Japan as well as on PBS Live from Lincoln Center telecasts; in 2002 he became its emeritus conductor.

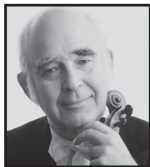


In 1983 Schwarz was appointed music adviser of the Seattle Symphony, and he was named principal conductor the following year and music director in 1985. He has brought the orchestra worldwide acclaim, not least through its more than eighty recordings, which have received numerous Grammy nominations. In 2001 he also became music director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, one of the world's oldest orchestras.

Schwarz has established an important reputation in the theater, which began with his 1982 debut conducting Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Washington Opera at the Kennedy Center. He made his Seattle Opera debut in 1986 conducting Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and since then he has led performances with the San Francisco Opera, the Juilliard Opera Theater, and St. Petersburg's Kirov Opera.

In 1994 Schwarz was named Conductor of the Year by Musical America. His many other honors include the Ditson Conductors Award from Columbia University, and honorary doctorates from The Juilliard School, Fairleigh Dickinson University, the University of Puget Sound, and Seattle University. In 2000 he was made an honorary fellow of John Moores University in Liverpool, and in 2002 he received the ASCAP award for his outstanding contribution to American contemporary music. Schwarz is a founding member of Music of Remembrance, an organization dedicated to remembering Holocaust victim musicians. He is also an active member of Seattle's Temple De Hirsch Sinai and has lectured on Jewish music there and at various Jewish Federation events, both local and regional.

Hailed by colleagues as a "complete musician" in a career already spanning half a century, JOSEPH SILVERSTEIN has been called one of the most accomplished and versatile American violinists of his generation. Born in Detroit in 1932, he went to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where his teachers included Veda Reynolds and Efreim Zimbalist. Later he worked with Mischa Mischakoff, the concertmaster of Toscanini's NBC Symphony Orchestra.



After graduating from Curtis in 1950, Silverstein became a member of the Houston Symphony, and he joined the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1955 as its youngest member. In 1959 he won the silver medal at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, and the following year he was awarded the prestigious Naumburg Prize. He was named the Boston Symphony's concertmaster in 1962, and he held that position for twenty-two years, often appearing with the orchestra as a soloist and, since 1971, serving as assistant conductor. In 1964 he founded and became music director of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

In 1980 Silverstein became music director of the Worcester (Massachusetts) Symphony Orchestra, and he served as principal guest conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra from 1981 until 1983, when he was appointed music director of the Utah Symphony. He held that position until 1998, when he was made conductor laureate. "As a conductor," Silverstein has remarked, "I try to provide the players with what I feel I needed from the conductor when I was in the orchestra." He is chairman of the faculty of the Tanglewood Music Center and since 1972 has held posts as associate professor of music, first at Yale University and later at Boston University. Silverstein has been awarded honorary degrees by numerous American universities and conservatories.

## Joseph Achron (1886–1943)

### Violin Concerto no. 1, op. 60 (1925)

Publisher: European American Music/Universal-Edition

Recording: Jesus Christus Kirche, Berlin, Germany, July 1998

Recording Producer: Wolfram Nehls

Recording Engineer: Henri Thaan

Assistant Recording Engineer: Brigitte Siewert

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin

Co-production with DeutschlandRadio and the ROC Berlin-GmbH

### The Golem (Suite) (1931)

Performance materials provided courtesy of  
the Edwin S. Fleischer Collection

Recording: Rudolfinum, Prague, Czech Republic, September 2000

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Bertram Kornacher

Recording Project Manager: Paul Schwendener

### Two Tableaux from the Theatre Music to Belshazzar (1924/31)

Performance materials provided courtesy of  
the Edwin S. Fleischer Collection

Recording: Centre Cultural de Sant Cugat, Barcelona, Spain,  
January 2000

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Bertram Kornacher

Recording Project Manager: Paul Schwendener

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**BACK  
COVER**