

# Cover Art

## Helfman



## 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.

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, I founded the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music in 1990.

The passionate collaboration of many distinguished artists, ensembles and recording producers over the past fourteen years 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 repertoire.

Lowell Milken

## A MESSAGE FROM THE 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 more than 600 original pieces by some 200 composers—symphonies, operas, cantorial masterpieces, complete synagogue services, concertos, Yiddish theater, and folk and popular 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 musical and Judaic authorities who have selected works based on or inspired by traditional Jewish melodies or modes, liturgical and life-cycle functions and celebrations, sacred texts, and Jewish history and secular literature—with intrinsic artistic value always of paramount consideration for each genre. These CDs will be supplemented later by rare historic reference recordings.

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, music director of Schola Hebraica, and author of various articles, books, and monographs on Jewish music.*



## MAX HELFMAN (1901—1963)

|  |       |  |       |
|--|-------|--|-------|
| <i>Di Naye Hagode (1948)</i><br>(A Choral Tone Poem of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising)   | 42:17 | <i>Hag Habikkurim (1947)</i><br>(Festival of First Fruits—A Pageant for Shavuot)   | 17:30 |
| 1. Narration   | 1:40  | 24. I. EL HAKFAR   | 2:20  |
| 2. MA NISHTANO   | 5:06  | 25. II. URU AḤIM   | 3:04  |
| 3. GEBENTSHT   | 1:15  | 26. III. SALLEINU AL K'TEFEINU   | 1:06  |
| 4. RIBOYNE-SHELOYLEM   | 4:07  | 27. IV. ATZEI ZEITIM OMDIM   | 1:36  |
| 5. Narration   | :21   | 28. V. SHIRAT HASHOMER (Holem tsa'adi)   | 2:21  |
| 6. A LINDER APRIL  | 3:37  | 29. VI. BAGALIL (Alei giva)  | 2:15  |
| 7. VET KUMEN?  | :31   | 30. VII. HAZZOR'IM B'DIM'A   | :33   |
| 8. VET KUMEN? (continued)  | :38   | 31. VIII. SHIR LANAMAL   | 1:50  |
| 9. Narration   | :14   | 32. IX. EL HAKFAR (Reprise)  | 2:21  |
| 10. UN OYB S'VET NOR A MINYEN FARBLAYBN  | 1:57  | <i>Coro Hebraico</i><br><i>Neil Levin, conductor</i>   |       |
| 11. DI SHLAKHT   | :34   |  |       |
| 12. ZEY ZAYNEN GEKUMEN   | 4:18  | <i>The Holy Ark (Torah Service), excerpts (1950)</i>   | 12:16 |
| 13. Narration  | :31   | 33. VAY'HI BINSO'A   | 1:31  |
| 14. DOS YINGL  | 2:12  | 34. BARUKH SHENNATAN TORAH   | :37   |
| 15. Narration  | :26   | 35. ADONAI, ADONAI   | 4:59  |
| 16. DI FON   | 4:05  | 36. VA'ANI T'FILLATI   | 1:10  |
| 17. DER TOYT   | 1:53  | 37. KI LEKAḤ TOV / ETZ ḤAYYIM / HASHIVEINU   | 3:57  |
| 18. Narration  | :24   | <i>Cantor Raphael Frieder</i><br><i>Slovak Chamber Choir</i><br><i>Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra</i><br><i>Samuel Adler, conductor</i> |       |
| 19. SHFOYKH KHAMOSKHO  | :53   |  |       |
| 20. Narration  | :27   |  |       |
| 21. RUM UN GEVURE  | 2:01  |  |       |
| 22. Narration  | :31   |  |       |
| 23. AZA DER GEBOT IZ   | 4:22  |  |       |
| <i>Theodore Bikel, narrator</i><br><i>Choral Society of Southern California</i><br><i>Los Angeles Zimriyah Chorale</i><br><i>Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra</i><br><i>Nick Strimble, conductor</i> |       |  |       |

## About the Composer



Composer, choral conductor, and educator **MAX HELFMAN** (1901–63) was born in Radzin (Radzyn), Poland, where his father was a local teacher and cantor in whose choir he sang as a child. He arrived in America at the age of eight and soon became a sought-after boy alto in New York orthodox synagogue choirs. At the Rabbi Jacob Joseph Yeshiva school on New York's Lower East Side, he acquired a traditional religious education, but little else is known about his childhood or teen years other than that his musical gifts became ever more apparent. He began experimenting with choral conducting and even composition on his own, and eventually he studied at the Mannes College of Music. Although he never had a formal university education,

8.559440

Helfman became a self-taught intellectual, familiar with the canon of both secular Jewish and Western literature and philosophy.

By 1928 he was offered a position as organist and choirmaster at Temple Israel in uptown Manhattan, succeeding the learned conductor and composer Zavel Zilberts. Helfman had no organ training, but he quickly acquired that skill through private lessons. At that time he began his long association with the temple's cantor, David Putterman, for whom he began composing and arranging special settings. When Putterman left soon afterward to become the cantor of the Park Avenue Synagogue, Helfman accepted a position as choir director at Temple Emanuel in Paterson, New Jersey, where he organized an amateur choir that eventually grew into a respected and well-known concert chorus in addition to a liturgical choir for services. He held that post until 1940.

When he was twenty eight, he was awarded a three-year fellowship at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where he studied piano with Ralph Leopold, composition with Rosario Scalerò, and conducting with Fritz Reiner. He also became music director of the Paterson branch choir of the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle). Its repertoire then consisted almost entirely of nonreligious Yiddish songs, often related to that organization's social action agenda and working people's orientation (yet still fundamentally American). This musical niche constituted one important part of Helfman's work for the remainder of his East Coast career. But the variety of his choral activities from that point on suggests either a true diversity in his choral interests and a catholicity of tastes or, conversely, an evolution in his own orientation.

Until his permanent relocation on the West Coast, in 1952, he was also actively involved with religious music, conducting sophisticated Reform High Holy Day services at the Washington Hebrew Congregation; at a traditional Conservative synagogue with the famous virtuoso cantor David Roitman; at many of the Park Avenue Synagogue's special annual services of new music; and, beginning in 1940, for the chorus and

4



music program at Newark's prestigious B'nai Abraham, where he found it fulfilling to work with Abraham Shapiro, an important cantor of the time, and with that synagogue's esteemed scholar, author, and rabbi, Joachim Prinz, who had been one of Berlin's leading rabbinical personalities. From the late 1930s on, he turned much of his attention to new settings for Sabbath, High Holy Day, and Festival liturgies, as well as for other services. His choral pantomime *Benjamin the Third*, based on a story by the famous Yiddish author Mendele Moykher Sforim, was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1938, as was his complete Sabbath service, *Shabbat Kodesh* (Holy Sabbath) in 1942. For a two-year period he also directed the Handel Choir of Westfield, New York, where he concentrated on classical—especially Baroque—repertoire.

Still, no consideration of Helfman can ignore his involvement as director of New York's largest unabashedly leftist Yiddish chorus, the *Freiheits Gezang Verein*, which he took over in 1937 and which combined with some smaller choral groups of similar ideological sympathies to form the Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus. Founded as a worker's chorus in the 1920s by Jacob Schaefer following his initial establishment of a similar chorus in Chicago (accounts and dates vary), its internal orientation and its acknowledged public persona were "left-wing Yiddishist" at the minimum—far to the left of the more benignly socialist organizations such as the Workmen's Circle or the Labor-Zionist Farband and their choruses. The Jewish People's Philharmonic Chorus was loosely federated under the national umbrella of the Jewish Workers Musical Alliance, which included *Freiheits Gezang Verein* affiliates in nearly thirty cities, directed by such conductors as Paul Held, Eugene Malek, Vladimir Heifetz, and Mendy Schein.

By the end of the 20th century, many of the aging alumni of *Freiheits* choruses from that era (at least through the 1950s) often preferred to remember them as "humanistically" oriented groups of "the folk." But in fact they were commonly, if informally, known all during that period as the "communist Yiddish choruses," or at least communist-leaning—labels they

made no particular effort to reject or protest. That phenomenon must be understood in the context of the times, which involved general working-class concerns, utopian sentiments, and, especially during the 1930s, simply antifascism—but not necessarily political or ideological anti-Americanism or even anticapitalism. For some, the interjection "people's" in the name was indeed a euphemism for actual communist sympathy, as it was in the world generally, whether naively or consciously deliberated. For others it simply signified a "folk chorus" whose repertoire was folk theme, folk literature, and folksong based.

What that "communist/leftist" identification actually meant—the degree to which those choruses actually represented political or party commitment—poses a complicated question that has yet to be studied on a scholarly plane. On one level, naive embrace even of the Soviet Union as a "new order" and especially as the bulwark against the Fascists was certainly evident in some of the programmed concert selections. But no one has ever ascertained the actual voting patterns of the choristers. It is entirely possible that for many chorus members it was more a kind of cultural communism on an emotional plane than a political commitment that attracted them.

Nor is there any way to know Helfman's motivation behind his directorship of the *Freiheits* chorus—to what extent it reveals any particular sympathies, or to what extent it represented anything more than a job and another good choral opportunity. At the time, it was considered a fairly prestigious position in New York circles, one held previously by no less an artist than Lazar Weiner. Jacob Schaefer too had been well respected musically, despite whatever political leanings he may have had. Nonetheless, the association did unfairly color some people's views of Helfman and his music for a number of years, at least until he more or less shelved not only the chorus but most of his Yiddishist interests in favor of Zionist and Hebrew cultural perspectives.





In 1938, a year after he assumed directorship of the Freihheits chorus, Helfman also became the head of the Jewish Workers Musical Alliance. In that capacity he supervised the work of other affiliated choruses, as well as the Alliance's music publication department, which issued choral arrangements of Yiddish folk and worker's songs and other settings in folio form as well as various compilations. Between 1937 and 1940 he published serially his own compilation, *Gezang un kamf* (Song and Struggle), which included choral arrangements of labor movement songs, songs of international proletarian class struggle, popular folksongs, and even some militant curiosities, all of which reflected the concert repertoire of the Freihheits chorus.

In 1945 the Histadrut Ivrit of America and the American Zionist Youth Commission established a Jewish Arts Committee to promote Zionist/Palestinian-oriented Hebrew culture and arts in the New York area. Its underlying goals were to mobilize, stimulate, and effect an ongoing dialogue with artistic life in Jewish Palestine, to attract American Jewish youth to Zionist ideals through the medium of artistic expression, and to establish ties between the two communities. Helfman was appointed the Arts Committee's artistic director, working closely with its chairman, Rabbi Moshe Davis, and conducting yet a new choral ensemble, the Hebrew Arts Singers.

This new youth-targeted chorus and the Arts Committee's focus on a Hebrew national cultural expression and the nationalist perspectives associated with Zionism were fundamentally different from the worldview articulated in much of the Freihheits choral music, and from its Yiddish idiom. For Helfman, this new endeavor marked the beginning of a different artistic as well as pedagogic direction, one that was to culminate in his most significant overall contribution.

That Jewish Arts Committee experience brought Helfman into contact with the profound idealist and educator Shlomo Bardin, the executive director of the American Zionist Youth Commission. The relationship was to have far-reaching consequences for Helfman. Bardin had

emigrated to Palestine from the Ukraine in 1919 and had come to the United States to study at Columbia University. There, he made the acquaintance of Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who was known for his deep concern about Jewish youth and university-age students and their alienation from Judaism, partly as an unavoidable consequence of the appropriate freedom of the university experience. The challenge as Brandeis saw it was to find a way to make Judaism meaningful to this new American generation while in no way detracting from its full participation in American society and culture. A similar challenge had faced an earlier German Jewry as it sought to reconcile Jewish life and identity with modernity, not always with satisfactory results.

The Zionist example and its accompanying optimistic and youthful spirit offered a potential creative antidote to that feared disaffection. This struck a chord in Bardin, though he returned to Palestine and founded the Technical High School in Haifa (part of the Technion). But when he was unable to return home to Palestine from a second visit to the United States, in 1939, Brandeis inspired him to establish a cooperative-type institute based on the cultural aura and idealistic spirit of the kibbutz, also incorporating some elements of a Danish Folk High School that Bardin had witnessed. His first step was to seek a highly competent faculty that was committed to Jewish consciousness and was also gifted with the ability to inspire a genuine desire for Jewish identification. Reinforced in his instinct by Cantor Putterman's recommendation, Bardin engaged Helfman to be the music director.

The Yiddish musical idiom was relevant neither to the goals nor the student makeup of the Brandeis Camp. Instead, the musical program there was to relate to the new and exciting endeavor in Palestine (and soon Israel)—music evoking the return to an ancient homeland, and songs about building the new society. This reoriented Helfman's entire attitude and focus. For him, the music of Jewish identity shifted from songs of Jewish proletarian class struggle to the music of Israel, of Zionism, and of the new land. Much of his creative effort from then on was devoted to





Helfman conducting at the Brandeis Camp

composing and arranging according to a Near Eastern and Hebrew Palestinian melos.

Helfman began his work at the Brandeis Camp's Winterdale, Pennsylvania, location. When the camp at Santa Susana, California, near Los Angeles, was established, in 1947, he went there, and composer Robert Strassburg took over the Pennsylvania post. By then there were three camps, the third in Hendersonville, North Carolina. In 1951 the two eastern locations were closed, and the California camp became the focus of all energies. Although it offered and encouraged all the performing arts, the musical activities directed by Helfman constituted for many students the most enduring and memorable part—as recalled half a century later by many.

In Bardin, Helfman found an ideal partner and fellow advocate. "Music unites people," Bardin proclaimed. "It is stronger than words." What Helfman tried to

create there was what he called a Jewish Renaissance through music, which he perceived as the ideal mediator between tradition and identity on one hand and rational modernity on the other. He underscored that view in many of his lectures:

Some think there is a wall between Jew and gentile; but the real wall is between the Jew and himself: the young Jew who has been running away from his heritage and in doing so has turned his back on a rich creative past.... They will argue with you—but you cannot argue with a song or with a dance.

Helfman conducted choirs and ensembles, inspiring enthusiastic participation with his infectious personality. He wrote and arranged secular music for the students; and he composed modern, youth-oriented prayer services, later issued as the *Brandeis Sabbath Services*. Through all these activities, the students became conversant with the rich musical atmosphere, dance expressions, and song repertoire of the *yishuv*—the Jewish settlement in British-mandate Palestine—and of modern Israel.

Almost immediately Helfman envisioned yet another project: a sort of "Jewish Interlochen," or Jewish version of Tanglewood within the Brandeis framework, where artistically gifted Jewish college-age youth could be trained for leadership within the cultural life of American Jewry. Such an institute would create, provide, and disseminate programs and materials expressive of a Jewish ethos and would fulfill the cultural needs of the contemporary Jewish community. It would also provide a forum for established Israeli and other Jewish composers to share their knowledge and experience with young American artists. This project was aimed not at amateurs or general students, but at those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were already technically accomplished young composers, writers, performers, conductors, and dancers.

Helfman's and Bardin's dreams thus came to pass with the establishment of the Brandeis Arts Institute, which



opened in the summer of 1948 and was held for five consecutive summers concurrently with the regular Brandeis Camp. The distinguished resident-artist faculty for music included such major figures as Bracha Zefira, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Julius Chajes, Eric Zeisl, Heinrich Schalit, Alfred Søndrey, Izler Solomon, Ernst Toch, and many others. (Important figures from the worlds of dance, drama, and fine arts were also in residence.) Among the young composers who eventually became prominent contributors to American music, and for whom that experience was in many cases a turning point in their outlooks, were Yehudi Wyner, Jack Gottlieb, Charles Davidson, Gershon Kingsley, Raymond Smolover, and Charles Feldman.

The Brandeis Arts Institute lasted only through the summer of 1952, but Helfman directed the music program at the Brandeis Camp for seventeen years. During that time he influenced and inspired an entire generation of young people and sparked its awareness of the breadth of Jewish music. He continued to compose as well, for media apart from camp performances. His theatrical scores from that period include music for Itzik Manger's new version of Abraham Goldfaden's early Yiddish operetta *Di kishfemakheren*, and for *The Rabbi and the Devil*—an adaptation of a story by Yehuda Leib Peretz. He also collaborated with Ted Thomas on the Hanukka operetta *It's a Miracle*, and on *Purim Carnival*, for which he wrote all the songs. He wrote a number of art songs, including *Two Hannah Szenesh Poems*, *Spanish Serenade* (poetry by Yuri Suhl), and *Five Little Songs About God and Things*—as well as songs for wedding ceremonies.

Helfman was not one of the most prolific composers, partly because he could never quite determine his own artistic priorities and partly because in many ways he was first and foremost a pedagogue who devoted his time and energy to his work with youth and to lecturing. He continually allowed his passion for choral organizing and conducting to take precedence over composing. Many of his pieces remain in manuscript; he even once remarked that his reason for leaving so many works

unsubmitted to his publisher was simply that he could not take the time to write out clear copies. However, his estimable body of works—especially his synagogue music—reveals a carefully calculated use of classical techniques in a completely fresh-sounding guise, with a sense of polish and refinement. All his liturgical music has an absolute aura of originality, yet wherever appropriate, it contains references to traditional modes, motifs, and patterns. As an artist, he relied on these traditional elements as seeds, not as confinements. His own words on the subject are revealing: "Originality is the most important quality of a composer. It is not achieved by breaking with the past, but by building on it and using it as a foundation." Nearly every one of Helfman's liturgical works is a miniature masterpiece, and together they form one of the most significant contributions to the American Synagogue.

In 1954 the West Coast branch of Hebrew Union College—the College of Jewish Studies in Los Angeles—opened a department of sacred music, ostensibly for cantorial and cantor-educator training. Helfman was appointed to direct it, remaining until 1957, when Cantor William Sharlin replaced him. (The enrollment of matriculating students was always relatively small, and the program did not include ordination or investiture.) Helfman was also the music director during the 1950s at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, one of the nation's largest Conservative synagogues, where he frequently presented concerts of sacred music prior to services.

In 1958 he was invited to establish a department of fine arts at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles and to serve as its dean. He invited Robert Strassburg to serve as assistant dean, and together they devised an ambitious program with a faculty that included such distinguished artists as Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Benjamin Zemach, Søndrey, and Roy Harris, and such prominent guest lecturers as Lukas Foss and Roger Wagner. It was to have some connection to its parent institution, the Seminary College of Jewish Music at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, especially with regard to graduate degrees. Hugo Weisgall, chairman of the music faculty at the Seminary in New York,





did have some correspondence with the University of Judaism concerning prospective graduate students and their projects, and in fact some serious work was accomplished. Cantor Philip Moddel's valuable monograph on Joseph Achron, for example, began as his dissertation there. But the department never materialized on the level Helfman and Strassburg had envisioned.

Helfman kept no central repository of his own works and no reliable catalogue; nor did he even date most of his manuscripts. After his premature, sudden death at sixty-two, many of his unpublished compositions and sketches had to be collected from a number of sources—a process that remains uncompleted. To this day Helfman manuscripts are occasionally discovered in archives, although some were published posthumously in the late 1960s. Some of his works may be lost permanently. At first glance, Helfman represents a cluster of contradictions:

- Helfman the master liturgical composer whose pieces reveal the deepest nuances of prayers, yet who was not terribly religious in the traditional sense;
- Helfman the conductor of one of the most left-wing, antinational Yiddishist choruses and the arranger of songs extolling the passions of an international workers' order, yet the champion of Zionist and Jewish nationalist and modern Hebrew culture;
- Helfman the advocate of Jewish identity for youth, yet Helfman the universalist.

Viewed in perspective, these were not contradictions, but the tensions that strengthened his art.

Composer Jack Gottlieb remembers him as "a Pied Piper; a Svengali—a shaper of men." Rabbi William Kramer summed up the Helfman phenomenon: "Max was a happening, and he caused other people to happen." Helfman's biographer and student, Philip Moddel, carried it one step further: "Max Helfman was an American happening."

—Neil W. Levin

## Program Notes

### DI NAYE HAGODE

*Di naye hagode* (The New Haggada, or The New Narrative) is a dramatic choral tone poem—cantata based on Itzik Fefer's epic Yiddish poem about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—*Di shotns fun varshever geto* (The Shadows of the Warsaw Ghetto). The term *haggada*, which translates generically as "narrative," is most commonly associated with the specific fixed narrative that is recited and reenacted at the Passover seder—the annual home ritual in which the ancient Israelites' exodus from Egypt, their liberation from bondage, and their embarkation on the path to a new, independent national as well as religious identity are recounted and celebrated. Helfman, who is presumed to have adapted Fefer's words for his choral texts as well as for the English narration, took the title from the multiple appearances of this phrase within the poem. The *hagode* reference gave the piece a heightened historical and moral significance—not only because the uprising and the Germans' final liquidation of the ghetto occurred during Passover, in 1943, but also because liberation, national survival, and, especially, the impetus for remembrance and undiluted recollection acquired a new and even more immediate meaning for the Jewish people in the post-Holocaust world. Just as all Jews are required annually to recall and relive the events of the exodus from Egypt, and just as they are obligated to transmit the story to their children in each generation, so did Fefer exhort his people to tell *this* story—if for no other reason than perpetually to pay homage to the brutally murdered Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto who died with the collective honor of resistance: "Forever blessed are they who remember the graves.... And whoever does not maintain the wrath [against the Jews' murderers] shall be forever cursed."

There were nearly 400,000 known Jewish residents of Warsaw—about a third of the city's overall population—when the German army entered the





city on September 29, 1939, following its invasion of Poland on the first of that month. (Some estimates place the numbers even higher, to include those who had concealed or abandoned their identities.) Even before the Germans began to construct the ghetto and commence deportation and murder, they segregated the Jewish population by requiring identifying armbands, marking Jewish-owned businesses, and prohibiting Jews from using public transport. Forced labor and confiscation of Jewish property followed soon after. In April 1940 the Germans began constructing a wall that, by the following October, would enclose the established ghetto into which all Warsaw Jews (and those whom the Germans perceived as Jews) and Jewish refugees from other provinces were required to reside. Initially, about 400,000 Jews were forced into the ghetto, and by July 1942 its population is estimated to have grown to half a million. Intense overcrowding left thousands of families homeless, starvation and disease were rampant, and child beggars and smugglers roamed the streets. Leaving the ghetto without permission was punishable by death. By the summer of 1942, more than 100,000 Jews are believed to have died within the ghetto itself, in addition to many thousands of others who had already been deported and subsequently murdered in slave labor camps—all prior to the outright deportations to actual death camps for wholesale annihilation.

A number of groups within the ghetto were involved in the active resistance. The most prominent of these were the Zionist organizations that represented various shades of nationalist political philosophy, along with the General Jewish Workers' Union (the Bund) and the smaller, communist-leaning Spartakus. Political underground groups in the ghetto secretly disseminated information on German plans and strategies. They documented events for posterity; issued clandestine periodicals in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish; and prepared for armed resistance. The first underground Jewish paramilitary organization, Swit, was formed in Warsaw as early as December 1939, even before the construction of the ghetto, by Jewish

veterans of the Polish army, most of whom were Revisionist Zionists. In 1942 a second underground militant organization was formed by a coalition of four Zionist groups together with the communists. The Bund formed its own fighting organization, Sama Obrona (Self Defense), but when the mass deportations to the Treblinka death camp began, in July 1942, none of those resistance groups had yet succeeded in acquiring arms.

The president of the *Judenrat* (the Jewish council in each German-created ghetto that was established to organize, regulate, and administer life therein and to carry out German directives), Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide rather than accede to the German orders to cooperate in the deportations. His successor, however, did obey the German orders. (Although the *Judenrats* and their presidents have often been condemned as collaborators—operating, at best, under self-made delusions that resistance was futile and that their acquiescence could buy time to save at least some people—the entire episode is as complex as it is painful to confront. Some council members were convinced that they had no alternative, and there is also evidence that some of them secretly assisted resistance groups.) The number of deportees ranged from 5,000 to 13,000 daily. By September 1942, the combined number of Jews who had either been murdered in the ghetto or deported to Treblinka is estimated at 300,000—out of about 370,000 residents prior to the commencement of those deportations less than two months earlier. After that, the Germans restricted the number of remaining ghetto inhabitants to 35,000.

The leaders of several Jewish underground movements then created the combined Jewish fighting organization known as Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa—ZOB—to resist further deportations. By that time, the Germans' genocidal intentions (as opposed to harsh wartime measures or casualties) were exposed—no longer exaggerations or rumors—since a few escaped Treblinka inmates had managed secretly to return with the news of the planned full-scale

annihilation. As 1942 drew to a close, the ZOB, joined by the Bund, scrambled to intensify preparations for armed resistance. Some weapons were smuggled into the ghetto with the aid of Polish underground organizations on the outside; other arms were acquired on the black market. Homemade firearms were also manufactured in secret underground workshops, and bunkers and tunnels were created.



*D'ror* No. 4 (11), cover, May 1947 issue, published in Łódź, dedicated to the resistance fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

When the Germans reentered the ghetto in January 1943 for their next round of deportations and for its eventual liquidation, they encountered unanticipated armed resistance. They succeeded in destroying the hospital and shooting its patients, and they deported everyone in the hospital and many other ghetto residents. But this time the underground organizations succeeded in forcing the German units into four days of intensive street fighting. Eager to avoid the potential contagion and encouragement that might result in similar resistance among cordoned Jewish populations elsewhere under German occupation—and throughout Poland—once word would reach them of the spirit of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, the Germans temporarily retreated to a tentative suspension of the deportations, relying instead on the trickery of “voluntary” recruitment for putative labor camps. During that period, about 6,000 additional Jews were sent to Treblinka nonetheless, and about 1,000 more were murdered within the ghetto.

Despite the short-lived cessation of physically forced deportations, life within the ghetto was all but frozen. Unauthorized Jewish presence in the streets was forbidden, punishable by death. The ZOB, along with the other underground Jewish organizations (twenty-two fighting units in all), continued to prepare for further armed resistance in anticipation of the Germans’ inevitable return. The moment arrived on April 19, 1943, on Passover, when the Germans—this time prepared with armored vehicles as well as artillery—moved in for a final assault. At first they were repulsed, even suffering casualties. When they resumed their advance—only to fail to prevail in the open street engagements—they set fire to the houses, block by block. Large numbers of Jews were burned to death, while many of those hiding in the bunkers met their end by grenade and gas attacks. The Jewish underground forces continued on the offensive, attacking German units at every opportunity, until the ZOB headquarters fell to the Germans on May 8, 1943, in a battle that took the lives of at least 100 Jewish fighters. Eight days later, General Jurgen Stroop, who had changed his name in 1941 from Joseph to be perceived as “more Aryan” and who



The Tlomackie Synagogue in Warsaw, prior to 1943

had commanded the so-named “Great Operation” (*Grossaktion*) since April 19, reported the successful and complete liquidation of the ghetto. To mark his victory, the grand synagogue on Tlomackie Street was blown up and leveled. This, one of Europe’s most famous and most elaborate synagogues, its pulpit home to some of the greatest cantors of the century, was a symbol of Warsaw Jewry’s former prosperity and cultural sophistication. (After the war, an office building constructed on the site was plagued with insoluble structural and technical problems; a rumor persisted in Warsaw that the “ghosts” of the ghetto had indelibly sabotaged the new building.)

In the ensuing months, some Jewish units continued sporadically to fight, while the Germans attempted to pursue and kill any remaining Jews hiding among the ruins of the ghetto. By August 1943, however, the fight was over. In the last two weeks of the full-blown resistance (from April 29 until the date of the reported German victory), the Germans acknowledged their losses at 16 dead and 85 wounded, although historians have suspected that their casualties were significantly greater. The official German report also stated that they had killed and deported a combined total of 56,000 Jews in the final month of the uprising. Stroop was later sentenced to death by an American military court at Dachau. He was extradited instead to

8.559440



Members of the Jewish resistance captured by SS troops during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

the new Polish People’s Republic, where he was also wanted as a war criminal. He was tried in 1951 in the Warsaw district court, and hanged on the site of the former ghetto that same year.

\* \* \*

Soviet Yiddish poet Itzik Fefer (1900–1952) fashioned his homage to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its victims in the form of an extended poetic work centered around the story of a lone boy who miraculously survived the battle. It was published in the United States by the left-leaning Yiddishist organization IKUF (Yidisher Kultur Farband—the Yiddish Cultural Organization) in 1945, and it came to Helfman’s attention shortly thereafter. It was not published in the Soviet Union until 1946.

Fefer was one of the most prominent poets of the Stalin era, and one of the group of Jewish poets—along with David Bergelson, David Hofshtein, Peretz Markish, and others—who were arrested, tortured, and murdered by the NKVD in Stalin’s anti-Jewish purges of the postwar terror. He was born in Shpola, in the Kiev district of the Ukraine, and he joined the Bund at the age of seventeen but left it two years later to join the Communist Party. That same year (1919) his writings began to appear in the Kiev Yiddish periodical *Komunistische fon* (Communist Flag), and his first

12



collection of poems, *Shpener* (Splinters), was published in Kiev in 1922 by Vidervuks (New Growth), an association especially geared to the young generation of Yiddish writers, which had its own publishing arm. Indeed, the Yiddish literary historian Zalman Rejzen [Reisen] assessed that first major effort of Fefer's as "expressing the lyrical joy of the new generation," and he compared him favorably with the proletarian Yiddish poet Izi Kharik, together with whom, he felt, Fefer had "placed himself at the top of the group of Yiddish writers in the U.S.S.R., which has looked to the *shtetl* and introduced into Jewish literature sensibilities of the ordinary folk."

In general, Fefer's poetry has been characterized as "simple language" (*proste*), or "common speech"—literature that spoke to the masses of Yiddish readers in the years immediately following the Revolution who could not relate so easily to the more sophisticated and avant-garde writings of the much smaller Yiddish intelligentsia of that time. He spoke in proletarian-tinged terms about "organizing the blossoming worker writers'" and of "the worker soldiers in the artists' army."

Fefer actively promoted the official party line and the proletarian cause in nearly all his writings, as well as in his extraliterary activities as an apparatchik involved with state-sponsored and state-sanctioned committees and organizations. Much of his poetry—its artistic merits aside—directly served the interest of Soviet communist ideology and of the Stalin regime and its cult of personality. *Stalin*, in which he glorified the de facto dictator (whose megalomania is now acknowledged) as a teacher and a visionary, became one of his best-known poems, though he was hardly alone among Soviet Yiddish poets in those sentiments. ("When I say Stalin—I mean beauty / I mean everlasting happiness. . .")

As a Jew under a regime that we now know to have been violently anti-Semitic on various levels at various times, Fefer's political and ideological alignment must be understood not simply as personal

and professional survival, but in the context of the natural leanings and loyalties of much, if not most, of the mainstream of Soviet Jewry—especially in the years prior to the end of the Second World War. For a long time—despite the Great Terror of the 1930s and despite periods of restriction and forced abridgment even of secular Yiddish educational and cultural activity—much of that Jewish mainstream, which included the indoctrinated proletarian circles, remained committed to the professed ideals of the party, as well as to Stalin as their leader. For those Jews, Stalin and the party represented the bulwark against the Fascist threat; an assurance of continued advancement of the "new order"; an almost messianic antidote to the perceived ills, decadence, and built-in inequities of Western bourgeois societies; protection from so-called nationalist-imperialist and capitalist regression; and a defense against alleged plots to undermine Soviet security and the communist cause. Thus, for the proletarian Yiddish writers, the vitality and continuation of Yiddish literature itself was inextricable from communism. Fefer's work is permeated typically with collective rather than personal concerns and with the prevailing principle and tone of continuous revolution. Serving the Revolution was inseparable from serving its authorities. For most of the world—including much of Soviet society—the undiluted truth about Stalin did not emerge until after his death, and then, publicly, only after Premier Nikita Khrushchev's revelations in the 1950s of the grisly details, beginning with his famous "secret speech" to the 20th Party Congress in 1956.

Even earlier, however, when many party loyalists and even overtly pro-Stalinist sympathizers—including those in America—had begun to hear of the brutal purges and their accompanying murders, and even after word of the renewed post-1948 anti-Jewish campaign had started to spread, some people refused to reconsider their past assumptions. Often in the face of overwhelming evidence, some remained loath to condemn or even criticize the very regime they had championed for so long. When the tide turned ominously against leading Soviet Jewish





cultural figures such as Fefer, little or no pressure from the outside was exerted on their behalf; and circulating reports of their impending doom were often dismissed by communist apologists as typical anti-Soviet rumormongering. Others excused the persecutions as “excesses” or aberrations, rather than considering them as inevitable by-products of Soviet totalitarianism.

During the early years of Stalin’s ascendancy, his policies appeared—for whatever self-serving reasons of Realpolitik in view of the significant numbers of Yiddish speakers and readers—to encourage secular Jewish (viz., Yiddish) cultural institutions, beginning with his commissariat during the first Soviet government. Only later were those policies reversed through a series of suppressions, purges, and liquidations of the bulk of those institutions, leaving only token remnants—such as a Yiddish art theater in Moscow or a few Yiddish periodicals that harnessed themselves to the party line—as “show” propaganda and public relations instruments.

In 1926 Fefer became an instructor in the Yiddish section of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. In 1927 he was one of the founders of the Ukrainian Association of Yiddish Revolutionary Writers (soon afterward the Yiddish Section of the All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers), whose journal, *Prolit*, he co-edited; and later he was an official spokesman for Yiddish literature on the boards of the unions of Soviet and Ukrainian writers. He also was a co-editor of *Di royte velt* (The Red World), and he edited the *Almanac of Soviet Yiddish Writers* in 1934. He survived the great purges and the terror of the 1930s, remaining in favor and receiving various Soviet medals.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, in June 1941, Fefer became the secretary of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (EAK) in Moscow—in addition to serving at the front with the Red Army, in which he attained the rank of lieutenant colonel. The Committee was established in order to promote the cause internationally of the Soviet Union’s life-

and-death struggle in its “Great Patriotic War” against Germany, and to garner increased material as well as moral support for its military effort and for the Red Army. From its own communist perspectives, of course, the need for such intensified support went beyond the contemporaneous strategic planning of the Western Allies for victory against the Axis powers, which would be followed by rebuilding a defeated Germany not only as a postwar Western ally, but as a liberal democracy. One of the primary objectives of EAK and other similar Soviet anti-Fascist committees, therefore, was to lobby for the opening of a second front, which became the mantra of Soviet sympathizers in the West. Stalin saw EAK as a convenient vehicle for seeking Jewish support in the West—a tactic that he and the party viewed as distasteful but temporarily useful. They presumed that Jews, especially in America, had the collective financial means to lend significant material assistance and also that they possessed a potential influence over government and military policy that, of course, they never actually had. But the presumption was enough for Stalin to permit and even tentatively encourage theretofore forbidden contact with the West and with its Jewish leadership—contact that would later be used against EAK members and other Soviet Jewish emissaries after the war as evidence of anti-Soviet activity, nationalist sympathy, and even espionage. Also, Stalin presumed that knowledge of Germany’s war against the Jews would contribute to Western Jewry’s desire to aid the U.S.S.R.

In 1943, together with the famous Soviet Yiddish actor and de facto spokesman for Soviet Jewry, Solomon Mikhoels, Fefer made an official visit to England, Canada, Mexico, and the United States on behalf of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Gatherings such as the mass “peace rally” at the Polo Grounds in New York were attended by enthusiastic Jewish as well as general procommunist crowds and workers’ groups. Fefer also spoke out publicly in New York about German atrocities against European Jewry—something that was not much mentioned openly then in America by the mainstream Jewish leadership, partly so as not to provide ammunition to those American





Fefer, Robeson, and Mikhoels at the Soviet Consulate, New York City, summer 1943

anti-Semites, pro-Fascists, and isolationist antiwar factions who might welcome “proof” that the American war effort in the European theater was indeed the result of Jewish and “international Zionist” instigation on behalf of European Jewry.

During the war, when some of the Soviet restrictions against patently Jewish literary expressions were relaxed, at least in part to facilitate Jewish cooperation and support, Fefer wrote his poem “*Ikh bin a yid*” (I Am a Jew), which has been described not only in terms of expressing Jewish pride, but as a “sample of Soviet Jewish patriotism.” In his 1946 poem “Epitaph” he spoke of being buried in a Jewish cemetery, and he articulated the hope that he would be remembered as one who had “served his people.” These works, together with *Di shotns fun varshever geto*, appear to represent an awakening and intensification of Fefer’s Jewish consciousness. The extent to which they contributed directly to his persecution and eventual execution is not entirely clear. It is known, however, that “*Ikh bin a yid*” was quoted in 1952, in connection with the prosecutorial proceedings against the Jewish

Anti-Fascist Committee, as evidence of his “nationalist deviation.” In any case, by 1948, despite official party line denials of anti-Semitism (and its technical constitutional illegality in the U.S.S.R.), Stalin had come to fear any thriving Soviet Jewish culture as a serious threat—ranging from mere furtherance or fertilization of the Yiddish language (now deemed far less necessary to the party in view of the vastly reduced Yiddish readership) to Jewish cultural preservation or solidarity. And those who, like Fefer, had contact with the West during the war were now suspected of being irrevocably tainted potential recruits as enemies of the state. Once the Soviet Union had prevailed in the war, EAK, now no longer useful to the regime, was considered a liability as a perceived representative of Soviet Jewry. It was disbanded in 1948, and many of its leaders were executed. Apart from concealed or “mysterious” deaths, subsequent kangaroo trials of fifteen people linked to EAK resulted in thirteen of them being executed by firing squad in 1952.

By the time the State of Israel was established in 1948 and recognized by the Soviet Union, Fefer had embraced the Zionist cause as an appropriate concern of world Jewry; and he even credited Soviet heroism during the war with contributing to the ultimate realization of Zionist political aspirations. This could only have magnified the precariousness of his situation. As a foreign policy strategy, the U.S.S.R. supported Israel’s founding as a reduction of British imperial influence and as a potential ally. But within the U.S.S.R., Zionist sympathy and enthusiasm for the new state were read more clearly than ever as dangerous Jewish nationalism and potential disloyalty. Having already lost his benefit to the regime, Fefer’s combination of Yiddishist cultural nationalism and Zionist sympathy had to have signaled a sense of Jewish particularity that might only impede the mandated progress of accelerated assimilation.

Fefer was arrested in December 1948 and held at the infamous Lubyanka Prison. When Paul Robeson, the famous American black singer, actor, and social activist, as well as avowed communist and Stalin



admirer, visited the Soviet Union in 1949 on one of his periodic concert tours, he insisted on seeing Fefer, whom he had befriended on earlier visits as well as during the 1943 EAK mission to the United States (Robeson had also appeared at the Polo Grounds “peace rally”). Although it is assumed that he did not know for certain of Fefer’s arrest, he had begun to suspect that Fefer might be in danger. According to his son’s account, Robeson later admitted that he sensed anti-Semitic vibrations and that these were becoming transparent locally in the press, and he became concerned about the fate of his friends among the Jewish literary and artistic circles. Mikhoels had been murdered the previous year, on Stalin’s orders (although Stalin’s role was only suspected then). Fefer was taken out of prison for a day and brought to Robeson’s hotel room for an unguarded visit. Knowing that the room was bugged, the two spoke neutrally, but Fefer made it clear to Robeson—through handwritten notes (which Robeson later destroyed), coded gestures, and other unmistakable body language—that reports of the new terror were true, that many other Jewish cultural figures had been arrested, and that he himself was doomed to eventual execution. When Robeson returned to the United States, however, he refused to acknowledge that there might be any anti-Semitic campaign in the Soviet Union, much less that Fefer was in trouble: “I met Jewish people all over the place,” he told the press, “[and] I heard no word about it [anti-Semitism or danger for Jews].” Fefer was in fact returned to Lubyanka Prison. He was shot, probably on August 12, 1952, after being accused of Jewish nationalism and of spying for America.

Even after Khrushchev’s secret speech in 1956, Robeson refused to sign any statement concerning Fefer’s fate or their visit. (He did, however, tell his son what had actually happened, on condition that it be kept secret until well after his death.) Despite his genuine feelings of friendship for Fefer, Robeson was one of those who could not bring themselves to criticize the Soviet Union, or even Stalin, regardless of the undeniable revelations—clinging to the dogma that, on balance,

both still represented a force for universal peace and justice. (Moreover, Robeson held the unsurpassable conviction that the Soviet Union somehow represented the hope of the future for American blacks and the key to reversing their subjugation, predicting in the midst of the cold war, in a tone almost calmly suggestive of incitement, that American blacks would therefore refuse to fight in any war with the Soviet Union.) “He believed passionately that U.S. imperialism was the greatest enemy of progressive mankind,” wrote Paul Robeson Jr. “In such a context Paul [Sr.] would not consider making a public criticism of anti-Semitism in the U.S.S.R.” Thus there was no lobbying in America to save Fefer, and his murder, which was not even substantiated until later, went relatively unnoticed there outside Yiddishist circles. By the time of Khrushchev’s revelations, Fefer could still be viewed, by those who wanted to do so, as just one of the many victims of Stalin’s personal paranoia rather than as an indication of any inherent fault in the Soviet system. Following the rejection of Stalinism in the U.S.S.R., Fefer was “rehabilitated,” and parts of his works were published there in Russian translation.

It is now widely accepted that Fefer was an informer for the NKVD for a number of years and that, as a defendant himself, he cooperated with the state in implicating fellow EAK members at their trials. Thus, some post-Soviet era revisionist considerations tend to compromise his reputation; but the entire issue is intertwined both with the paranoia of the times and with what we know to have been state and secret police duplicity and fabrication. For one thing, Fefer, like the other defendants—who confessed and then retracted—was subjected to torture. For another, although archives have been unsealed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, documents such as those that purport to describe Fefer’s role with the police and in the trials are highly questionable, as they were created by the secret police. In any event, it is also now generally believed that Fefer’s death sentence had already been determined before those trials began.





\* \* \*

*Di naye hagode* does not, as the title otherwise infers, take the form of a refashioned or alternative Passover Haggada or seder per se, along lines parallel to alternative formats created in America by such secular Jewish groups as the Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) or the Labor Zionist Farband, or by kibbutzim in Israel—who reinterpreted and reimagined the Passover narrative and the entire seder ritual in nonreligious terms according to their own particular national, social, cultural, or historical ideologies. It does, however, seize upon and develop—musically and dramatically—the poet's suggestion that the German war of annihilation against the Jews and the heroic Jewish resistance constitute a seminal turning point in the history of the Jewish people, in which that history has become forever altered to address new heroes and to include a new focus. In that sense, the piece might be viewed as a poetic reconsideration and reinterpretation of the conventional Passover narrative, as well as of the role of collective memory in it.

Like the original poem, Helfman's work emphasizes solemn celebration of Jewish heroism over the centuries-old perception of Jews as helpless, submissive victims—over whose fate future generations agonize. And it proposes that a fitting memorial is perpetual outrage at the perpetrators rather than mourning for the murdered resisters. Unlike reliance on Divine miracles in the biblical account, this work extols human courage and resoluteness as the path to liberation and as a worthy memorial. For Fefer and Helfman, as for many nonreligious or religiously disaffected but culturally identified Jews, this type of narrative seemed more relevant, more real, more galvanizing, and even more worthy of remembrance than the events of the Bible. It might be assumed from a theoretical-historical perspective that in ancient Egypt, the Israelites could have chosen to remain slaves while still surviving physically. In the Holocaust, however, the Jews' doom was sealed not by what they agreed or refused to do, and not by their beliefs or actions, but simply by virtue of the fact that they were Jews. In that context, upon which *Di naye hagode* focuses, only

heroic armed resistance—despite the obviousness of its certain eventual failure—could have even the chance of modifying that doom and paving the way for some form of ultimate Jewish survival. “Death will overtake us in any event,” rang the call to arms of the United Partisans Organization, “but this is a *moral* defense; better to fall in the fight for human dignity—to die as free fighters—than to live for a little while by the grace of the murderer.” Many if not most in the Resistance knew they could not prevail, but as one survivor recalled, “there is great honor to be celebrated in this resistance without victory—in the decision that requires the strongest moral convictions.”

*Di naye hagode* reflects some of the formal structure of a standard Passover Haggada—most overtly in the first musical number, *Ma nishtana*. The seder ritual, which was based originally on the Greek symposium format, is infused with a quasi-Socratic question-and-answer approach, whereby the story of the exodus from Egypt is related, discussed, and amplified in response to questions posed by the participants—especially the children. By tradition, the youngest person at the seder, representing the youth of each generation, commences the process by asking the “Four Questions”—a formula that refers to four of the basic features of the seder and opens with the words, *ma nishtana halayla haze mikol haleylot?* (Why and how is this night different from all other nights?) Fefer transformed that part of the Haggada into a central question to be asked on each anniversary of the Uprising, prompting the recollection of the events. Here, Helfman employs the most widely known chant pattern in Ashkenazi tradition for this text—the chant formula known as *lern-shtayger* (study mode), which is used in Talmudic study and recitation to facilitate the memory of text passages. He even sets up the question-answer element with the response of the women's voices at a different pitch level. The words at the end of the sixth number, *A linder april* (A Mild April), refer to the beginning of the established narrative in answer to those Four Questions: *Avadim hayinu l'faro b'mitzrayim* (We were slaves of the Pharaoh in Egypt...). Here, of course, they apply to the contemporary incarnation.



The prophet Elijah, who will arrive to herald the coming of the Messiah, is an important element of the traditional seder ritual. He is said to visit every seder and to take a sip of the special goblet of wine reserved for him at each table, and the participants open the door for him and express their hope that he will arrive soon. Thus in the seventh number, *Vet kumen?* (Will He Come?), the chorus asks whether a savior ("the prophet") will come to the ghetto. "The white-robed fathers" in an ensuing passage of the narration refers to the *kitl*—a white garment, representing holiness, which is worn in many customs by the "head of the household" who presides over the seder. And the reference to "the queens of each

house" refers to their wives, traditionally perceived as the "Passover queens."

After opening the door for Elijah at the beginning of the second half of the seder, those gathered around the table pronounce the words *shfokh hamat'kha al hagoyim asher lo y'da'ukha ... ki akhal et ya'akov* (Pour out Your wrath on the nations who have rejected You . . . for they have sought to destroy the people Israel). This is a natural expression in the context of this work, and reference to it recurs a few times.

*Di naye hagode* received its world premiere in 1948 (in its unorchestrated version) at New York's Carnegie Hall. The occasion was the twenty-fifth anniversary concert



Dancers Herbert Kummel and Jeanie Turnoy with choreographer Gertrude Kraus and other students at the Brandeis Camp  
8.559440



of the Jewish Peoples Philharmonic Chorus, conducted by the composer. (Inexplicably, the chorus—essentially the same one Helfman had begun directing in 1937—billed itself then as the People’s Philharmonic Choral Society, although it subsequently returned to its earlier name.) That performance also included an important dance component and staging by Benjamin Zemach, the eminent choreographer and creator of modern Jewish dance forms. Dance was also part of subsequent performances in Montreal (1949), in Los Angeles at the Wilshire-Ebell Theater (1950) where it was sung by the Jewish People’s Chorus, and in Santa Monica, California (with full orchestra), among other venues. The work was featured by the Jewish Peoples Philharmonic Chorus in its 1964 memorial tribute to Helfman, performed at New York’s Town Hall.

As a composer, Helfman was essentially a miniaturist who excelled in the smaller forms. More than once he expressed to close associates and friends his regret that he had never written, or had the patience to complete, a magnum opus. Of all his works, however, *Di naye hagode*, with its overall musical-structural arch, its sense of inspired artistic unity, and its judicious balance, probably comes closest to that wish. Indeed, the consensus among those familiar with his music has long been that this was Helfman’s most ambitious and most powerful work.

## HAG HABIKKURIM

Helfman’s choral pageant *Hag habikkurim* (Festival of the First Fruits) is a suite of original arrangements of modern Hebrew songs that were sung in Palestine during the decades prior to independence—as well as during the early years of the State of Israel—by the Jewish colonists and pioneers who, imbued with Zionist ideals of national return and reconstruction, had gone there to reclaim, rebuild, and resettle the land as a Jewish national home. These songs, which represented the new Zionist-oriented spirit of national rejuvenation, cultural renaissance, and agricultural revival, and which also provided a link to Jewish antiquity, were created or adapted for the most part by songwriters, composers,

and poets who were active in the *yishuv* (the Jewish communal settlement in Palestine under the British Mandate). Helfman stitched them together into a quasi-dramatic and multimedia presentation that, ideally, also includes dance, costumes, processions, pantomime, spoken lines, and a narration (now a bit dated) by Ruth Bardin, the wife of Shlomo Bardin (director of the Brandeis Camp). This pageant offers a capsule history of the pioneers’ constructive accomplishments from the earliest wave of immigration in the 19th century until the late 1940s. The pageant was conceived as an American reflection—and not necessarily an actual replica—of the spring harvest kibbutz festival, *hagigat habikkurim*, which, even long after independence, was usually reenacted during or on the pilgrimage Festival of Shavuot as a kind of secular substitute celebration for that religious holiday. Shavuot is known in the liturgy as *hag habikkurim*, from the references in Exodus 23:16, 34:22; Leviticus 23:16–17; and Numbers 28:26.

*Bikkurim*, or “the first fruits,” refers historically and biblically to the portion of each season’s harvest, including the first grains to ripen each season, that—in accordance with biblical pronouncements and legal injunctions—were required to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem as a sacrifice by every Israelite who had the means of agricultural production. Detailed ceremonial procedures for the offerings of the first fruits are found in Deuteronomy 26:1–11, although there are discrepancies between certain aspects of the rites as described therein and other references in Leviticus. In antiquity, considerable ritual and pageantry accompanied the offerings of the *bikkurim*, which constituted both a personal obligation and a festive public celebration. During the Second Temple era, the pilgrimage to the Temple to offer the *bikkurim* could occur anytime between the Festivals of Shavuot and Sukkot—i.e., between late spring and autumn (Mishna Bikkurim 1:3).

Kibbutz festivals, such as the one corresponding to Shavuot (*hagigat habikkurim*), originated during the 1920s and 1930s in Palestine. They were instituted partly as an educational experience, especially for





the children, and partly out of a desire to recapture, if not to reinvent, the agricultural parameter of religious Festivals and holidays in antiquity (viz., up until the destruction of the Second Temple), thereby reestablishing an inseparable historical as well as spiritual association between the Jewish people and the land. Each of those kibbutz festivals acquired secular aesthetic traditions of its own. Dating to the early Zionist settlements, those traditions were heavily reliant on singing songs and dancing dances of modern Israel, and they also incorporated symbolic representations of biblical-era (and even prebiblical) agricultural and life-cycle rites.

In biblical times, however, Shavuot (also translated literally as the Feast of Weeks, in reference to the fact that it occurs seven weeks after the Festival of Pesah—Passover) marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the spring wheat harvest. According to scientifically oriented biblical criticism and studies, Shavuot probably originated earlier as a midsummer agricultural festival, borrowed from pagan practices and transformed into a manifestly Jewish observance.

In postbiblical rabbinic Judaism, when the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish dispersion precluded the pilgrimages and the sacrificial rituals, Shavuot acquired its other primary motif of celebrating the anniversary of the giving and receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai following the exodus from Egypt. In that way the Shavuot celebration remained linked, as is Sukkot, to Passover and to the exodus, and it became known in the liturgy also as *zman mattan toratenu* (the time of the giving of our Torah). The three Festivals acquired a special synagogue liturgy—some parts of which applied to all three, while each of these holy days also inspired additional unique prayers and liturgical poems. Each Festival also accumulated its own particular religious customs, traditions, and extra-synagogal observances. The earliest unambiguous references to Shavuot as the anniversary of the giving of the Torah date to the 3rd century. For observant Jews, therefore, Shavuot is one of the principal religious holidays on the liturgical calendar—along with

Pesah; Sukkot; and the *yamim nora'im* (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur: the Days of Awe, or the High Holy Days). A colorful and informative account of the processions and ceremony surrounding the *bikkurim* offerings in the time of the Second Temple is given in the Mishna (Bikkurim 3:2-9)—the first part of the Oral Law, which forms the basis for the Talmud. People would gather overnight in the public squares of the various towns in each district, and in the early hours of the morning they would begin their pilgrimage to Jerusalem with the call "Arise, and let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord, our God." At the head of their procession was an ox, its horns wrapped in gold and silver, its head adorned with olive branches. The procession would be accompanied by instrumental musicians playing the *halil* (a flutelike instrument). People of means would bring the *bikkurim* in baskets made of silver and gold, while those who could not afford such aesthetic luxury brought the first fruits in simple wicker baskets, and they gave the baskets to the priests in the Temple along with the fruit offerings. There appears to have been no concern expressed that those unable to afford the expensive baskets might feel inadequate or shamed, and there was no attempt to level the procedure (as Jewish Law has done with regard to other matters) by stipulating simple baskets for all. Yet when it came to the required individual recitals of the confession (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) as the fruits were given to the priests—acknowledging that God alone had redeemed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, expressing gratitude to Him for having brought them to their "promised" land—it was eventually determined that every person repeat the confession as read to him by the priest. This change of procedure was implemented to avoid embarrassment for those who might not know the text. Perhaps, even if subconsciously, it was a harbinger of an important aspect of Jewish values in rabbinic Judaism—the fact that ignorance, but not financial modesty or even poverty, was legitimate cause for shame. (The official reason, however, was, more simply and practically, that those who did not know the text might avoid the offerings altogether if they were required to recite that biblical passage from memory.)





The collective procession was met at the outskirts of Jerusalem by Temple prefects and treasurers who escorted the pilgrims to the Temple Mount while the populace cheered. At the Temple Mount, a Levitical choir welcomed them by singing Psalm 30: "I will extol You, O Lord, for You have raised me up, and have not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me..." Those who lived near Jerusalem brought fresh fruits, which the Mishna interpreted as representing the seven species that grew in abundance in the Land of Israel as mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8—wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olive trees, and honey (here meaning dates). Those who lived farther away brought dried fruits.

Most kibbutzim, especially prior to the 1960s, were socialist oriented to varying degrees and completely secular in their avoidance of even modernized religious observances or any synagogue-related rituals of worship (although there were a few kibbutzim of religiously orthodox Jews as early as the 1930s). Their modern festival of *hagigat habikkurim*, therefore, replaced the traditional religious Shavuot observance. It was designed to evoke aesthetic ceremonial parameters of the ancient Temple pilgrimage and to recast them in the form of joyous expressions of modern Zionist aspirations, struggles, optimism, and progress—symbolizing reconnection to the land after nearly two millennia and underscoring national rebirth. In many cases the children would march in a procession, carrying agricultural produce. An additional element often included donations to the Jewish National Fund (the Keren Kayemet L'yisra'el)—the worldwide Zionist organization established in 1901 to purchase land in Palestine from Arabs, Turks, or other owners. Such donations from kibbutz members were, of course, necessarily modest by comparison with the JNF's support by philanthropists from abroad and structured fund-raising campaigns. But it enabled each person, including the children, to feel part of the effort directly; and it mirrored the sacrificial plane of the *bikkurim* offerings in antiquity.

Helfman fashioned this choral pageant in 1947, not specifically for Shavuot celebrations, religious

or secular, but as a more general expression and exposition of the modern Hebrew culture that was then both vibrant in—and emanating from—Palestine and the incubating State of Israel. His primary intended audience was American Jewry—especially its younger generations—and the pageant participants themselves. The work was performed at the Brandeis Camp under his direction during a number of summers from then on and through the 1950s.

Indeed, *Hag habikkurim* is an indicator of Helfman's own shift of focus. From the universalist, usually antinationalist view of a new Jewish and world order, which his earlier Yiddish chorus espoused, Helfman reoriented himself to the newer, seemingly more youthful and equally nonreligious approach to Jewish renaissance. Formerly he had conducted and arranged or edited such songs as *Gezang fun ershtn mai* (Song of the First of May), in reference to the annual May Day celebration of the International Workers' Order; *In kamf* (In Struggle), one of the most internationally famous hymns of Jewish labor movements; *Birobidzhan*, about the Jewish autonomous region in the Soviet Union; *Zhankoye*, the name of a utopian commune in the Soviet Union; *Mayn tzavoe* (My Testament), which refers to the "freedom flag ... stained red with the blood of the working man"; *Mayn rue platz* (My Grave), one of the best known of the so-called sweatshop songs; *Oktober*, referring to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia; *Negershe vig lid* (Negro Lullaby), in solidarity with oppressed blacks; and even *Di royte armye balade* (The Red Army Ballad). Now the repertoire he championed involved songs that spoke of a Jewish national-cultural identity: leaving the cities to settle in Palestine and rebuild the land; armed kibbutzim watchmen who guarded against Arab marauders; "ascending to Mount Zion" with biblical references; and the heroism of the nationally committed pioneers.

At the same time, the work is a vivid illustration of the modern Hebrew cultural orientation of the Brandeis Camp (as well as of its Arts Institute), and of its educational principle, which held that Jewish identity for young Americans could be reinforced





by drawing inspiration from the music and dance of modern Israel. Works such as *Hag habikkurim*—and the emphasis in general on Hebrew songs and dances of Jewish life in the *yishuv* and then the young state—provided a vehicle for study of that new culture and for a fresh approach to Jewish identity for Americans, regardless of political affiliation. At the same time, there was a mutually beneficial aspect with regard to the organizations dedicated more directly to Zionist advocacy. The principal Zionist agencies (with whom Justice Brandeis, although personally supportive of the Zionist enterprise, had disagreed politically on the wisdom of making the cause an American Jewish communal obligation, preferring instead that financial and political support be a matter of privately solicited donations) hoped that such aesthetic exposure, even if purely cultural at first, would eventually attract some of the youth to actual political involvement and physical commitment in the form of *aliya*—immigration.

*Hag habikkurim* was premiered in 1947 by the Hebrew Arts Singers, conducted by Helfman, under the auspices of the Jewish Arts Committee. In addition to the subsequent summer performances at the Brandeis Camp, the piece was presented many times throughout the country—by secular Jewish choruses in concert versions; by synagogue schools, sometimes in connection with graduation exercises, which could include some if not all of the processional and even dance components; by Zionist youth organizations; and by combined youth and children's choirs and dance ensembles at annual all-city spring Jewish music or arts festivals, which brought together people from dozens of congregations and schools from numerous neighborhoods and suburbs of a single city.

Yet another ripe opportunity for performances of *Hag habikkurim*—especially during the 1950s and 1960s, when its aesthetic content was still perceived as exotic by American Jewry—was provided by confirmation ceremonies in nonorthodox American synagogues. Confirmation had been instituted originally in German Reform and Liberal synagogues as part of their early-19th-century modernization efforts. Even the term

itself was borrowed from Christian nomenclature. In America, too, it became a teenage rite of passage in Conservative as well as Reform synagogues, serving as a vehicle for commitment to Jewish life. In the American Reform movement it functioned at one time as a substitute for the abandoned bar mitzvah procedure, but it remained in force even after most Reform congregations either reclaimed or fashioned their own versions of bar mitzvah. By the end of the 20th century, however, confirmation had become virtually extinct in Conservative congregations. Because confirmation was linked on the calendar with the Festival of Shavuot, the services acquired their own spring-flavored rituals and customs. Some form of student-produced pageantry became a common feature, and a work such as *Hag habikkurim* offered an affective prefabricated vehicle that combined the desired elements of pageantry with an excursion into modern Hebrew song.

Helfman wanted this work to be suitable equally for children's, youth, and adult amateur ensembles. He therefore offered alternative arrangements, ranging from unison to three-part SSA (for adult women's as well as children's voices) to suggested alternations between men's and women's voices. But the SSA voicing was the preferred as well as the most frequently employed format, and it has been followed in the present recording. The publication more or less fixed this particular selection of songs, but prior to that, performances—including those under Helfman's own direction—often comprised alternatives from a larger pool that included his other Hebrew Palestinian song arrangements.

These eight songs function here not only in terms of the musical parameter of the *bikkurim* pageant per se, but also—more generally—as an illustrative cross section of the broad repertoire of *halutz* and *aliya* songs that achieved significant popularity both in Palestine and among Zionist circles abroad during the decades between the 1920s and the 1950s. All of them relate in some way to the reclamation and rebuilding of the ancient land; to the reestablishment of a Jewish communal structure there; and to the forging of a revitalized national spirit in the context of 20th-century Zionist sensibilities and aims.





Mordechai Zeira's *El hakfar* is both the opening and the concluding musical number of the pageant. (It is misidentified in the published score as *Adama*, an unrelated song whose melody is also by Mordechai Zeira.) The words, by Emanuel Harusi [Novopograbelsky] (1903–79), urge Jews from urban and even cosmopolitan walks of life to forgo their present lives and lifestyles and “return” instead to the land to plow the fields. Harusi, who was born in Nikolayev (now Mykolayiv, Ukraine) in the Russian Empire, emigrated to Palestine in 1924 and worked directly in agriculture and on construction sites in connection with draining swamps. In 1928 he was a cofounder of the satiric theater *Hamatate* (The Broom), in Tel Aviv. Zeira [Grebin] (1905–68) was born in Kiev and emigrated to Palestine in 1924, where he composed his first song in 1927. His songs in general reflect modern Israel's history and development and are considered to be at the core of *shirei eretz yisra'el*—the adopted folksong genre of modern Israel, also known as “songs of the Land of Israel.”

The melody of *Uru ahim* was composed by Emanuel Amiran [Pugatchov] (1909–93), who was born in Warsaw, spent much of his youth in Russia, where he studied with Joel Engel, and emigrated with his family to Palestine in 1924, where he eventually established a solid reputation as a composer and music educator. In addition to his numerous songs—many of them especially geared to children and to teaching about holidays—his catalogue includes symphonic and chamber music, as well as film scores. His concert choral setting of *ki mitziyon*, based on a biblical quotation (Isaiah 2:3: “For out of Zion shall come forth the teachings of the Torah.”), achieved broad recognition outside Israel and even became a staple in the concert repertoire of the renowned Robert Shaw Chorale. The words to *Uru ahim* are a pastiche of excerpts from biblical phrases that Amiran probably extracted and stitched together.

*Salleinu al k'tefeinu* is probably the best known of all the songs that were created originally and expressly for school *hagigat habikkurim* celebrations. Very shortly after this practice was established by

the Jewish National Fund in 1929, a kindergarten teacher asked Levin Kipnis (1894–1990)—who was born in Ushomir, Volhynia, the Ukraine, and came to Palestine in 1913—to write a *bikkurim*-related song for her own class. Kipnis, a prizewinning pioneer in the creation of modern Hebrew children's literature, furnished her the lyrics, which she then gave to her neighbor, the composer Yedidia Admon [Gorochov] (1894–1985) to write the melody. Admon was born in Yekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), the Ukraine, and came to Palestine as a youth in 1906. He studied there with the renowned musicologist Abraham Zvi Idelsohn at the Teachers Seminary in Jerusalem, and he later pursued advanced composition studies abroad—including studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. His music is suffused with influences of Arabic and Bedouin folksong, which he heard throughout his formative years in Palestine.

*Atzei zeitim omdim* appears to be the accepted American variant of *Atzei shitim omdim* (Acacia Trees Standing Upright), an anonymous folksong based on two biblical references to the native acacia trees in the Land of Israel. The song symbolizes the pioneers' aspirations to similar strength in—for the first time in nearly two millennia—their own land. From the earliest appearance of this song in American youth circles and schools, the *shitim* was changed to *zeitim* (olive trees, which convey more or less the same image) because of the obvious tendency for American children to fixate mischievously on a scatological double entendre of the former. Other examples abound in alterations of text underlay in American songsters, where transliterations have been altered to avoid similar problems. For example, the word *b'reshit* has generally been spelled *b'resheet*, despite its violation of the transliteration system used elsewhere in the very same song or piece. In America, therefore, this song has generally been known and printed in various collections as *Atzei zeitim omdim*, which still comes as a surprise to Israelis who never had firsthand experience in American schools.

Zeira's song *Shirat hashomer* is a setting of lyrics by Yitzhak Shenhar [Shenberg] (1902–57), a poet, playwright, translator, and editor who was born in





Volochisk, in Volhynia, the Ukraine, and came to Palestine in 1921. The song refers to the *shomrim*—the guards who stood watch on kibbutzim during the night to protect the sleeping residents against the ever-present danger of raids by marauding Arab attackers.

The melody of *Bagalil* is by Kiev-born Nahum Nardi [Narudetzky] (1901–77), one of the illustrious and prolific songwriters and composers in the *yishuv*. Following his settlement in Palestine, in 1923, he became fascinated with its indigenous Near Eastern modes and musical flavors, which he incorporated into his numerous songs as well as larger compositions. His long-standing artistic collaboration with the Palestinian-born Yemenite Jewish singer Bracha Zefira (also his wife) influenced the oriental Jewish character of many of his songs—some of whose eventual popularity accorded them the status of folksongs. The genesis of *Bagalil* dates to the mid-1930s, when Nardi and Zefira were attracted to a shepherd's tune they heard being played by an Arab villager on his flute as they walked through the Arab village of Sumail, near Tel Aviv. Realizing its potential for their song recitals, they adapted it to a text by Avraham Broides that had been published in a local newspaper.

Mattityahu Shelem [Weiner] (1904–75), who was born in Zamosc, Russian Poland, and settled in Palestine in 1922, wrote the words as well as the melody of *Hazzorim b'dim'a*. The song relates a passage from Psalms (126:5) to the emerging signs of the pioneers' agricultural success.

*Shir lanamal*, another of Zeira's well-known songs, was written in 1936 to celebrate the building of the new port at the ancient site of Jaffa, adjacent to Tel Aviv.

The spontaneity and freshness of these arrangements show Helfman in his most transparent artistic element—preserving and emphasizing the natural euphoria and optimistic spirit of the songs through judicious manipulation, without obscuring their innocence or folk character. As a group, they provide an example of Helfman's ability to apply inventive—and even

restrained polyphonic—treatment to simple melodies. At the same time, the playful imagination in the accompaniments elevate the songs from simple folk monody to an unpretentious artistic plane, highlighting their Near Eastern and Mediterranean elements.

The published version of *Hag habikkurim* also included a suggested choreography by Katya Delakova, specifically geared to untrained dancers, reflecting the early idealism of the new state and depicting the pilgrims from the four corners of the Land of Israel as they offered the *bikkurim*—among them, orange and grape harvesters from Judea, fishermen from Galilee, and wheat growers from Emek (the Jesreel Valley). Helfman envisioned that individual casts would also create their own movements according to their abilities. While Delakova's choreography was, as its introduction emphasizes, more a matter of movement than actual dance, it provides a useful context for the songs, and in conjunction with the narration it sets up a framework for our understanding of the role and significance of the songs within the pageant.

## THE HOLY ARK—ARON HAKKODESH

The section of the synagogue service that includes the biblical readings—the Torah and *haftara* portions (assigned readings from various books of the Prophets)—together with the surrounding introductory and concluding liturgy based on biblical and medieval sources, is known as the Torah Service. On Sabbath, Festival, and High Holy Day morning services, this Torah Service is more elaborate and extensive than on other occasions where there are biblical readings. With its degree of formality and even minor pageantry, together with its musical parameter, this liturgy constitutes a central and, in some aesthetic respects, a self-contained feature of those holy day morning services. The biblical cantillation systems according to which the Torah and *haftara* readings are intoned represent the oldest layers of fixed synagogue musical tradition, with possible roots in antiquity, although those systems





vary to different degrees among the established rites (Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Yemenite, Persian, etc.). But the surrounding texts, unlike many other portions of the regular liturgy, have no specific canonized prayer modes (*nusah hat'filla*), fixed melodies, or modalities attached to them, and they are thus an invitation for free musical interpretation and expression—whether in solo cantorial renditions, formal choral settings, congregational tunes, or a combination of all three forms. In the modern era, beginning in Europe at least as early as the second quarter of the 19th century, these prayer texts—which form and accompany the *seder hotzat hatora* (the order of service for removing the sacred scrolls from the ark) and the *seder hakhnasat hatora* (returning them to the ark), and their respective professionals among the congregation—have acquired hundreds of melodies as well as formal musical settings in a wide variety of styles; and they have been addressed by virtually every synagogue composer in each era, geographical area, and tradition of worship. In America, however, until the 1930s, composers and cantor-composers treated sections of these texts for the most part individually rather than as components of a larger single musical piece.

*The Holy Ark*—Aron Hakkodesh, a formal movement setting of major parts of the Torah Service as a cohesive yet heterogeneous and kaleidoscopic artistic expression, is one of Helfman's most important and most enduring liturgical works. Completed in 1950, it emphasizes the dramatic elements both of the individual constituent texts and of the overall mood of this section of the Sabbath or Festival morning worship. Infused with biblical cantillation motifs (overtly, for example, in the opening setting, *Ein kamokha*—not included on this CD—or in *Vay'hi binso'a*), restrained and stylized cantorial idioms in the solo vocal lines, some actual melodic references (in particular, *Va'ani t'fillati*, which the composer labeled “after an old melody”), and an abundance of purely original material—all treated with harmonic imagination and fresh choral techniques—it falls partly under the rubric of sacred art music. The work as a whole thus can be viewed as exceeding the functional boundaries of the synagogue worship

context to become a concert rendition, especially in this orchestrated version. (In principle, the orchestration is merely an expansion of the organ part; and a handful of adventurous nonorthodox congregations have even experimented with orchestrated services.) At the same time, however, these settings—which are, by the composer's intention, also separable from the whole as independent renditions—were composed with the equal expectation of functional use in synagogue services. Indeed, some of them are among standard repertoires in American synagogues to this day—including traditionally oriented synagogues, where they are sung successfully a cappella. *Adonai, adonai*, which mirrors the formal structure and flavor of earlier classical European settings of this text—most notably, that of Avraham Moshe Bernstein (1866–1932)—without compromise to artistic originality, is undoubtedly the best-known movement of *The Holy Ark*. It remains, along with Bernstein's composition, one of the most frequently sung musical versions of this prayer in America, and it can be considered a classic of the American Synagogue.

—Neil W. Levin



## ◆ Texts and Translations

### DI NAYE HAGODE

Text: Itzik Fefer  
Sung in Yiddish

Translation: Elyahu Mishulovin

[1] NARRATOR: This is the story of a city in desolation. A city of ghostly shadows, where once Jews lived and prayed and worked. This is the story of a fateful evening, of unspeakable days when Jews were huddled in the frightful subcellars of the ghetto to read again the Haggada, the ancient recital of the struggle for freedom. And when the brutal hordes of the enemy came into the ghetto with their tanks and their poison gases to exterminate them, the Jews left off reading the Haggada and rose and met the enemy empty-handed but head-on, writing a new Haggada in their blood. This is the story of a city. This is the story of a fateful night. This is the story of the New Haggada.





*Ma nishtano halaylo haze mikol haleloyts?* How does this night differ from all other nights in the year? Why? Why? Those ghostly columns of marching shadows—these are the shadows of those who have perished. Aimlessly they wander through the desolate streets, groping in the darkness of burned-out ruins, wailing over the fate of mothers and children. They cannot find their last resting place. They have not even spoken their last prayers yet. Thus begins the New Haggada, the New Exodus. *Ma nishtano halaylo haze mikol haleloyts?* How is this night different from all other nights in our lives?

## [2] *MA NISHTANO*

**CHORUS:** How is this night different from all other nights? Why? Why is this night different from all other nights ... of our lives? Why?

They roam through streets and alleys,  
They knock in darkness on wide-open doors,  
They mourn near ruins, they sleep on hard floors,  
They fall upon dark, cold dirt roads.  
They rise once again and wander exhausted  
Through gray abysses, over verdant peaks.  
They have not yet recited their confession;  
They cannot yet find their rest.  
Early in the morning, late at night,  
They roam, the shadows of the Warsaw Ghetto.

## [3] *GEBENTSHT* (Blessed)

**NARRATOR:** Forever blessed are they who remember the graves, the graves wherein lie our people so great and so tormented. Blessed are they.

**CHORUS:** Blessed are they who remember the graves  
Where our people lie, our great, our poor.

## [4] *RIBOYNE-SHELOYLEM* (Master of the Universe)

**NARRATOR:** O Father in Heaven, can it really be that in this city of desolation our people once lived and worked and bargained and played with their children?

**CHORUS:** Master of the Universe!  
Here men lived and worked, wept and sang.  
Here they would curse, here they would bless;  
Here merchants haggled with customers.

**NARRATOR:** O Father in Heaven, can it really be that here children were lovingly rocked in their cradles, and joyful sounds of merrymaking were heard at splendid weddings?

**CHORUS:** Here they knitted and danced and shouted,  
Here they rocked the babies in their cradles,  
Here children clung to their mothers,  
Here they reveled at large weddings.

## INTERLUDE—WEDDING SCENE

[5] **NARRATOR:** And so begins the New Haggada. It was spring. Again it was Passover, and joyous songs were heard blended with the strains of the sad *avodim hayinu*: slaves we were in the land of Egypt. Passover had come again and the mild April winds touched the young leaves.

## [6] *A LINDER APRIL* (A Mild April)

**CHORUS:** A mild April spread over the orchards,  
And the birds and grass rejoiced,  
That, just as always, the lovely spring arrives.

“We were slaves [of Pharaoh in Egypt]....”

## [7] *VET KUMEN?* (Will He Come?)

**NARRATOR:** What tragic messenger flies through the ghetto?

**CHORUS:** Will the prophet [Elijah] come? Will the savior come?  
Whence will help come to the Ghetto?  
From East? From West? From South? From North?

## [8] *VET KUMEN?* (continued)

**NARRATOR:** The terrible news has routed the seder. All eyes are aflame, all hearts filled with courage. They come, they come, the poison-filled hordes. Slayers, they come.

**CHORUS:** [Even if just one hundred remain]  
May the wrath burn for hundreds of generations,  
And whoever distances themselves from maintaining  
the wrath  
Shall be forever cursed.

[9] **NARRATOR:** But they were met. They were met with lightning and thunder by the white-robed fathers, by the queens of each house. Each room is a bastion. Each home a fortress. They shoot. They shoot in the ghetto.





**[10] UN OYB S'VET NOR A MINYEN FARBLAYBN**  
(And If Only Ten Survive)

**CHORUS:** Then this *minyen* [quorum of ten] with strength in its arms  
Shall not come to our graves bedecked in sighs.  
Let the *minyen* not visit our graves gushing hot tears.  
Even if only ten in all remain,  
Let this conscience be ablaze in them for generations;  
And the conscience of ages should spur them on  
In the vicious final struggle!  
And if into these Jewish fingernails shall fall  
Even just one butcher to be strangled and choked,  
One who will not live to see the crack of dawn,  
I will, from the grave, bless these sons of mine.

**[11] DI SHLAKHT** (The Battle)

**CHORUS:** There's shooting in the Ghetto, and the Ghetto replies,  
Hate with hate, fire with fire.  
Guns converse here.  
The Ghetto seethes with new infernos.

**[12] ZEY ZAYNEN GEKUMEN** (They Came)

**CHORUS:** They descended like hordes from the steppe  
With venom in their eyes, with satanic faces,  
Like robbers who come stealing others' possessions.  
  
They were met with thunder and lightning;  
It rained lead in the Warsaw Ghetto.  
The pale Jewish men, kings in white *kitls*,  
The slender women, the queens, rich and poor alike  
Boldly threw themselves on tanks  
Unarmed, but with an iron wrath.

Every house turned into a fortress.  
Every window sputtered forth wrath.

Now the wind is saying, "Pour out Your wrath."  
Bloody rivers streamed on;  
And the stars were like weeping eyes,  
And the Passover Haggadas were left reading themselves....

**[13] NARRATOR:** The seder is deserted. The wind now alone chants the prayers. The sobbing stars behold the orphaned Haggada.

Out of all this unspeakable destruction only the young boy is left. Tempered in fire and bursting shells, he stands on the last remaining tower. He, the symbol of the last youth of the Ghetto. Was it only yesterday when, as a child, he played in the streets?

**[14] DOS YINGL** (The Boy)

**CHORUS:** Right here, not too long ago, when evening would fall,  
He used to ride on brooms with the other boys.

They used to ride wooden horses;  
They used to fight with wooden swords.  
They dreamed about great battles  
With real guns and real spears,  
With real soldiers, towering like giants....

**[15] NARRATOR:** How quickly has his childhood ended!  
And what are the worldly possessions now left to him?  
Only two hand grenades, a gun, the torn flag of his people.  
He climbs up the broken wall of the tower. He wraps his body like a high priest in his prayer shawl, and clinging to its folds in everlasting embers, he fires two bullets and leaps into space.

**[16] DI FON** (The Banner)

**CHORUS:** The boy takes the fluttering banner  
And wraps together its broad folds  
And throws it, like a light shawl,  
Over his shoulders—the shoulders of the Warsaw boy;  
And tosses himself from high atop the flaming building.

**[17] DER TOYT** (The Death)

**CHORUS:** Death is his life. The banner—his will and testament.  
It is his heritage, his faith, his hope,  
With it his way to eternity is open!

**[18] NARRATOR:** Who will now come to console us? Will a prophet appear to deliver us? When will he come? What is his name? Still the Ghetto's shadows suffer and wonder. "If out of all our people only one hundred should remain, then let, in these hundred, the flame of generations thunder and burn."





[19] **SHFOYKH KHAMOSKHO**  
(Pour Out Your Wrath)

**CHORUS:** Pour out Your wrath upon the enemies....  
Pour out Your wrath upon all the enemies....

[20] **NARRATOR:** If not one hundred, or even fifty, but only ten shall survive, then let power strengthen the arm of this *minyeh*, this quorum, not to shed bitter tears on our graves, not to weep on our tombs, but to let the conscience of ages burn in the hearts of men for now and forever. Then, only then, from our grave we shall give them our eternal blessings.

[21] **RUM UN GEVURE** (Glory and Heroism)

**CHORUS:** And above all shines the glory and heroism, From the battle on the Volga, from Russia's bayonets, From that blessed and precipitous storm, Which comes in late summer after the harvest.

[22] **NARRATOR:** And so begins the New Haggada. *Ma nishtano halaylo haze mikol haleylots?* Why is this night different from all other nights? Because on this seder night we remember them all, those nameless shadows who have died so that we may live, who have borne their suffering so that we may live in freedom. In us and our children, their blessed memories shall live on and on.

[23] **AZA DER GEBOT IZ** (Such Is the Command)

**CHORUS:** How is this night different from all other nights? Why is this night different from all other nights ... of our lives?

They roam, the shadows of the Warsaw Ghetto.  
They roam like prophets beheaded,  
They bear their cruel fate with pride  
And their secret dream is danger.  
They wander the world like rebels,  
Who haven't surrendered their ammunition on  
the battlefield.

The Vistula knows them and so too the Nieman [River]  
And their names are exalted along the Jordan;  
And the Volga spies them through the smoke of the North,  
And the mountains have not impeded their way.

Such is the command,  
Such is fate:  
To die in order to be reborn.  
So begins the New Haggada....



**HAG HABIKKURIM**

(Festival of First Fruits)  
Sung in Hebrew

*Translation: Eliyahu Mishulovin*

[24] I. **EL HAKFAR**

Melody: Mordechai Zeira; words: Emanuel Harusi

From the city, from the town, from the comfortable homes  
*Arise halutz*, make haste and flee to the village.  
*Arise halutz*, make haste and flee to the plowed field.  
*Halutz*, arise and run to the *moshav* [cooperative settlement],  
to the kibbutz.

*Halutz*, arise and run to the village, to the plowed field,  
To your mother, the land.  
Don't ask why, don't question;  
It is known to all, it's to the land:  
Land—it is called mother,  
Land—plow ahead,  
Land—where the hands engage in labor,  
Land—it is the homeland.  
Land, land, our homeland, the land.

[25] II. **URU AHIM**

Melody and words: Emanuel Amiran

Awake, brothers, and let us ascend Mount Zion,  
And let us say, "Blessed are the people who have it so."  
(Psalms 144:15)  
Fill up the basket with *bikkurim*.  
The *bikkurim*, the *bikkurim*.

[26] III. **SALLEINU AL K'TEFEINU**

Melody: Yedidia Admon; words: Levin Kipnis

Our baskets on our shoulders,  
our heads adorned,  
we have arrived from the far corners of the land.  
We have brought *bikkurim*  
from Judah and Samaria,  
from the Emeq and from the Galilee.





Clear a path for us;  
The *bikkurim* are with us.  
Beat the drum and play the pipes.

**[27] IV. ATZEI ZEITIM OMDIM**

Melody: anonymous folk tune

Olive trees, standing upright.

**[28] V. SHIRAT HASHOMER (Holem tsa'adi)**

Melody: Mordechai Zeira; words: Yitzhak Shenhar

My footsteps reverberate in the silence of the night.  
Somewhere in a distance a fox is howling.

Hearken and listen, guardian of Israel.  
Look, just a little while and the morning star will rise.

**[29] VI. BAGALIL (Aleï giva)**

Melody: Nahum Nardi; words: Avraham Broides

On top of the hill somewhere in the Galilee  
a watchman is sitting with a *halil* in his mouth.  
He is playing a shepherd's song  
to the sheep, the goats, and the wandering foal.  
He is playing a greeting: *shalom*;  
come hither, to me to me.

Just as the songs are heard from the pipe,  
so are there legends alive here in the Galilee.

**[30] VII. HAZZOR'IM B'DIM'A**

Melody and words: Mattityahu Shelem

Behold! the rain is coming;  
Its blessings are numerous,  
sprouting grass and cornfields  
in every valley and on every mountain.

"Those who plow with tears will reap with joy."  
(Psalms 126:5)

**[31] VIII. SHIR LANAMAL**

Melody and words: Mordechai Zeira

A seagull is screeching—there's a storm.  
The wind is whipping up a wave.  
Give your blood and your brains.  
Give all your might.  
Give it to the building of the port.  
Come and give a shoulder.  
The ocean too is a source of sustenance.

Land and water,  
Move the pier step by step.  
A seagull is screeching—there's a storm  
The wind is cutting like a razor!  
A delight! A wave!  
We are building a port.

**[32] IX. EL HAKFAR (Reprise)**



**THE HOLY ARK—ARON HAKODESH**

Torah Service—excerpts

Sung in Hebrew

Translation: Rabbi Morton M. Leifman

**[33] VAY'HI BINSO'A**

As the Ark of the Covenant set out in the desert [from camp to camp], Moses would say: "Arise, O Lord, and may Your enemies be scattered; let Your foes retreat before You." For Torah will come from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

**[34] BARUKH SHENNATAN TORAH**

We praise Him who in His holiness gave Torah to His people Israel.

**[35] ADONAI, ADONAI**

(Not recited on *Shabbat*)

The Lord, the Lord, God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, trusting in loving-kindness and truth; preserving His grace for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and cleansing from sin.

**[36] VA'ANI T'FILLATI**

Relate, O Lord, to my prayers to You; may they come before You at a propitious hour. O Lord, answer me with the fullness of Your loving-kindness, with Your true deliverance.

**[37] KI LEKAH TOV / ETZ HAYYIM / HASHIVIENU**

For I have given you excellent instruction; do not abandon my Torah. It is a tree of life to those who cling to it, and those who support it are happy. Its paths are paths of pleasantness, and all of its ways lead to peace. Take us back, O Lord; let us come back. Renew our days as of old.



## About the Performers



Folksinger, actor, and spokesman for Jewish causes, **THEODORE BIKEL** was born in 1924 in Vienna and emigrated with his parents to Palestine when he was thirteen. There, in 1943, he joined the famous Habima Theater as an apprentice, and a year later he cofounded the Israeli Chamber Theatre (Cameri). In 1948 he graduated from London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and Sir Laurence Olivier

offered him a role in his production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Bikel created the role of Baron von Trapp in the original production of *The Sound of Music*, and he has played Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* more than 1,600 times since 1967. He was one of the most prominent and successful pioneers in introducing authentic world folksong on a serious artistic level to broad but sometimes previously uninitiated segments of the public from the 1950s on, through formal concert appearances as well as popular recordings; and for postwar generations to whom he sang on tours throughout North America, Europe, Israel, New Zealand, and Australia, his renditions of Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian folksongs were often their first glimpse of those repertoires. He was also a cofounder of the Newport Folk Festival.

The **LOS ANGELES ZIMRIYAH CHORALE** was founded in 1997 by Cantor Ira Bigeleisen and Rand Harris to represent America's second-largest Jewish community in Jerusalem at the eighteenth World Congress of Choirs (Zimriya) in 1998. The group has performed Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt* and has presented Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish Symphony* in U.C.L.A.'s Royce Hall and in Germany with the Nürnberg Symphony (Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra) and other choral groups. The choir is directed by Nick Strimble.

The **CHORAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**, formed in 1982, has earned praise both at home and abroad for its performances of American music and neglected masterworks. The ensemble appeared in Europe with such orchestras as the

Philharmonia of London, the Munich Philharmonic, and the Athens State Orchestra. At home, under the direction of Nick Strimble, it has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony.



Since 1955 the Young Musicians Foundation—through financial assistance, performance opportunities, and music education outreach programs—has provided encouragement to gifted young musicians from southern California. The **YMF DEBUT ORCHESTRA**, one of the premiere youth orchestras in the United States, comprises seventy-five talented musicians, ages fifteen to twenty-five, from the greater Los Angeles area. The orchestra, led by a young conductor chosen every three years by a national audition process, performs the full range of literature, from Baroque to contemporary, including works for both chamber and full orchestra. Former conductors include André Previn, Michael Tilson Thomas, Myung-Whun Chung, and Jung-Ho Pak.



**NICK STRIMBLE** was born in Amarillo, Texas, in 1946 and studied at Baylor University and the University of Southern California. A performer-scholar of Czech music, in 1985 he conducted the first 20th-century performances in America of Dvořák's oratorio *Saint Ludmila*, and he has also directed premieres of works by

such 20th-century Czech composers as Pavel Haas and Gideon Klein, Jan Hanuš, Petr Eben, and Arnošt Pársch. In June 1997 he organized and conducted two concerts in conjunction with the *Terezin Then and Now* exhibition at the Pauline Hirsch Gallery of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, and in 2001–02 he served on the California State Legislature Working Group for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education. He has been a visiting professor at U.C.L.A. and the University of Southern California.

In addition to his academic involvements and accomplishments as a Jewish music historian and scholar, and as a professor of Jewish music at the Jewish Theological Seminary since 1982, **NEIL LEVIN** has achieved significant recognition as a choral conductor. Following formal music studies at Columbia University, at The Juilliard School, and in Robert Page's choral conducting classes at the Aspen Summer Music School, he conducted a Chicago-based chorus on a monthlong concert tour of Israel. He made his London conducting debut in 1988, followed by return engagements there at the Royal Festival Hall and at the Barbican Centre; and he made his Lincoln Center conducting debut in 1997. He has also conducted choral ensembles for numerous recordings.

Neil Levin founded **CORO HEBRAEICO** in 2000 as a mixed-voice expansion of Schola Hebraeica, the highly acclaimed New York-based professional male voice chorus he has directed since 1987, which has recorded extensively and appeared at major concert venues throughout the United States, Canada, and England. Coro Hebraeico's first performances were in London in connection with a concert tour, and it made its New York debut at Lincoln Center in 2003. Only the women of Coro Hebraeico are featured on this recording of Helfman's treble-voice arrangements.



Israeli-born **CANTOR RAPHAEL FRIEDER** studied voice and choral conducting at the Rubin Academy of Music in Tel Aviv. He has performed with the New Israeli Opera as well as with all of Israel's major orchestras, under such prominent conductors as Zubin Mehta, Gary Bertini, and Roger Norrington. Leonard Bernstein invited him to sing in the world premiere of his *Arias and Barcarolles* (version for two voices and piano) in

1989 in Tel Aviv, and Cantor Frieder has made numerous recordings for Israel National Radio. He serves on the voice faculty of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York. In 1992 he became cantor of Temple Israel of Great Neck, New York, prior to which he served the pulpit of the Norrice Lea Synagogue in Hampstead Garden Suburb, London.

The **SLOVAK CHAMBER CHOIR** is one of the leading professional choirs in Central Europe and is also part of the Slovak State Folk Ensemble. Established in Bratislava in 1949, the choir at first specialized in folk music and contemporary music by Slovak composers. After five decades, its repertoire covers the gamut of styles, performing both a cappella and with European orchestras. The group is affiliated with Slovak Radio and Television in Bratislava.

Based in the historic capital Bratislava, the **SLOVAK RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA** was founded in 1929 as the first professional music ensemble in Slovakia, initially under the leadership of the renowned composer and conductor Oskar Nedbal. As its early conductors emphasized contemporary Slovak music in their programs, the orchestra has been closely associated with the works of such composers as Alexander Moyzes, Eugen Suchoň, and Ján Cikker. It has toured extensively abroad and made more than 150 recordings covering a wide range of musical repertoire. In 2001 the Canadian conductor Charles Olivieri-Munroe became the orchestra's music director.

**SAMUEL ADLER** (b. 1928) is one of the few composers in the forefront of the Judaic mainstream who has devoted his gifts equally to Judaically related and to general musical expression. He enjoys equal acclaim as a conductor, and he has appeared regularly with leading American and international orchestras. He was born in Mannheim, Germany, and within a year after *Reichskristallnacht*, in 1938, the family emigrated to America. His father, the highly respected Cantor Chaim [Hugo Ch.] Adler, obtained a position in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the young Samuel became his father's choir director when he was only thirteen. During that early period he began composing liturgical settings. Adler holds degrees from Boston University (B.M.) and Harvard (M.A.). He studied composition with Aaron Copland, Paul Hindemith, Walter Piston, Hugo Norden, and Randall Thompson, and conducting with Serge Koussevitzky. He served as music director of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas from 1953 until 1966, after which he became a professor of composition (later chairman of the department) at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. His catalogue includes more than four hundred works in nearly all media. Adler has served on the faculty of The Juilliard School since 1977.



## Credits

---

### **MAX HELFMAN (1901–1963)**

#### ***Di Naye Hagode (1948)***

Publisher: MS

Recording: Royce Hall/UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, June 2000

Recording Producer: David Frost

Recording Engineer: Tom Lazarus

Recording Assistant Engineer: Scott Sedillo

Recording Project Managers: Gina Genova,  
Paul Schwendener, Neil Levin, Richard Lee

#### ***Hag Habikkurim (1947)***

Publisher: Transcontinental

Recording: St. Paul's School, Hammersmith, London, UK, July 2001

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes, Morgan Roberts

Recording Assistant Engineer: Andreas Hamza

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin

#### ***The Holy Ark (1950)***

Publisher: Transcontinental

Recording: Slovak Radio Hall, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, June 1998

Recording Producer: Elliot McKinley

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin





## Credits

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).

### MILKEN ARCHIVE

Lowell Milken, *Founder*

Neil W. Levin, *Artistic Director; Editor in Chief*

Richard V. Sandler, *Executive Director*

Paul W. Schwendener, *C.O.O., A&R Advisor, and Director of Marketing*

Lawrence Lesser, *Production Director*

Rebecca Rona, *Administrative Director*

Gina Genova, *Associate Director of Research; Associate Editor*

Bonnie Somers, *Communications Director*

Jules Lesner, *Archive Committee*

Eliyahu Mishulovin, *Research Associate*

Editorial Consultants:

Maxine Bartow, Richard Evidon

### MILKEN ARCHIVE EDITORIAL BOARD

Neil W. Levin

Paul W. Schwendener

Samuel Adler

Ofer Ben-Amots

Martin Bookspan

Cantor Charles Davidson

Henry Fogel

Lukas Foss

Rabbi Morton M. Leifman

Gerard Schwarz

Edwin Seroussi

The Milken Archive of American Jewish Music would not be possible without the contributions of hundreds of gifted and talented individuals. With a project of this scope and size it is difficult to adequately recognize the valued contribution of each individual and organization. Omissions in the following list are inadvertent. Particular gratitude is expressed to: Gayl Abbey, Donald Barnum, Paul Bliese, Johnny Cho, Cammie Cohen, Jacob Garchik, Ben Gerstein, Jeff Gust, Scott Horton, Jeffrey Ignarro, Brenda Koplin, Richard Lee, Joshua Lesser, Gustavo Luna, Malena Luongo, Tom Magallanes, Todd Mitsuda, Gary Panas, Nikki Parker, Jill Riseborough, Maria Rossi, Matthew Stork, Brad Sytten, Carnegie Hall Archives (Rob Hudson). Special thanks to Hannah Kuhn, Brandeis-Bardin Institute.

**PHOTO CREDITS:** Page 4, Lotte Jacobi, courtesy of the Helfman Estate. Page 7, courtesy of the Helfman Estate. Page 11, courtesy of Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal, Israel. Page 12 (left), courtesy of Beth Hatefutsot Photo Archive, Tel Aviv; (right), courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Page 15, courtesy of the Jewish Public Library Archives, Montreal. Pages 18 and 34 (top), Gene Lester, courtesy of Herbert Kummel. Page 30 (left), Mitchell Rose; (bottom right), Glenn Campbell. Page 35, photo by Arthur Gould, courtesy of the Helfman Estate.

For purchasers of this CD, these liner notes are available in a large page format. Address requests to [linenotes@musicarc.org](mailto:linenotes@musicarc.org)





Helfman with students  
at the Brandeis Camp



Arts Institute students and faculty.

*Top row from left:* Larry Erlich,  
George Weinflash, Eric Zeisl, unknown,  
Helfman (glasses), Julius Chajes,  
Charles Feldman, Jack Gottlieb.

*2nd row crouching:* Yehudi Wyner,  
Julian White. *Far right:* Sheldon Merel.

*3rd row left:* Nancy Braverman.

*5th from left:* Joyce Raisman.

*Far right:* Gordon Grosh

*Front row right:* Diana Bregman



"Max was a Pied Piper; a Svengali—a shaper of men." —Jack Gottlieb

# Back Cover

## Helfman