

Cover Art
Jewish Operas
Volume 1

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.

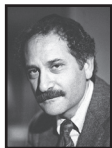
While much of this music had become a vital force in American and world culture, even more music of specifically Jewish content had been created, perhaps performed, and then lost to current and future generations. Believing that there was a unique opportunity to rediscover, preserve and transmit the 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.

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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.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Neil W. Levin". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial "N".

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.

About the Composers and Their Works



Among the major names associated with the heyday of the American Yiddish theater as songwriters, composers, orchestrators, and conductors, **ABRAHAM ELLSTEIN** (1907–63) was the only one born in America. He is generally considered one of the “big four of Second Avenue,” along with Sholom Secunda,

Joseph Rumshinsky, and Alexander Olshanetsky. Ellstein, though he may be remembered most widely for some of his theatrical “hit” songs, went further than the others in the classical realm, and he considered his theater career only part of his overall artistic contribution.

Ellstein was born on New York’s Lower East Side—one of the most concentrated eastern European Jewish immigrant areas—and as a boy chorister in local synagogues, he sang with some of the most accomplished cantors of the time. He received his early musical training at the Third Street Settlement House, sang in the Metropolitan Opera Children’s Chorus, and began composing while still a young child. He is said to have written a short opera at the age of eight. At only thirteen he conducted a boy choir in John Barrymore’s Broadway production of *Richard III*.

Ellstein was later awarded a scholarship to The Juilliard School. He studied with Frederick Jacobi, Reuben Goldmark, and Albert Stoessel, after which he made his debut as a theater composer with music for B. Epelboym’s play *Gerangl* (Struggle), performed by the

Viñner Truppe, followed by music for Beynush Steynem’s *Baym toyer* at the Artef, and Mendel Elkin’s *Bum un dreydl*. These were the first of thirty-three scores for Yiddish theater, although his subsequent scores were more directly associated with the popular—so-called Second Avenue—vein. By the 1929–30 season he was engaged as resident composer and music director at Ludwig Satz’s Folk Theater, where he wrote the scores for *Zayn vaybs lubovnik* (His Wife’s Lover), which was later made into a film, and *Az der rebbe vil* (When the Rebbe Wants), referred to as a “Hassidic operetta.” Ellstein then moved to the Public Theater as resident composer and director for the 1930–31 season, where he wrote the score for the comedy *Der berditchever khosn* (The Bridegroom from Berdichev), among others.

Ellstein wrote new music for Molly Picon’s performances of Goldfaden’s *Shmendrik*, and for the “operetta” that once played on Second Avenue, *Oy iz dos a meyd!* (O, What a Girl!). He also added new musical numbers to shows such as *Dos tzirkus meyd!* (The Circus Girl), *Hello Molly*, and *Molly Dolly*. His “Hassidic musical revue” was performed in Argentina. Ellstein also later wrote two film scores—*Mamele* and *Yidn mitn yidl!*—for Molly Picon, which became “Jewish box-office hits.” Among his many other successful theater scores was *A bisl mazi* (A Bit of Luck), which featured Menashe Skulnick singing his famous rendition of “The Scotchman from Orchard Street.”

Active for many years in Yiddish radio, Ellstein had regular programs on WEVD, where he presented a variety of Yiddish folk as well as theater music and cantorial selections. He directed a weekly broadcast of liturgical music, *The Song of the Synagogue*, and he also wrote and arranged for Broadway, general radio and television, as well as “pop” concerts and even some British and American film shorts.

He was in great demand as a pianist, arranger, and conductor for cantorial concerts and recordings for such great cantors as Yossele Rosenblatt, Leib Glantz, and Mordecai Hershman. His cantorial orchestrations in particular are considered the most stylistically classical in that genre. He conducted synagogue choirs for many years, especially for holy day services, for which he wrote a good deal of traditional cantorial-choral music, most of which remains unpublished, and two modern Sabbath services.

Ellstein always aspired to classical expression, and he seized such opportunities whenever they arose. His 1958 one-act opera, *The Thief and the Hangman*, with a libretto by Morton Wishengrad (1913–62), based on a Yemenite folktale, was televised nationally on ABC in a program sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary for the series *Directions*, and was then shown to delegates from more than 100 nations at the World Music Congress at the Salzburg Festival.

In addition to *The Golem*, among Ellstein's other important classical works are two oratorios: *Ode to the King of Kings*—televised on CBS and sung subsequently by Jan Peerce—and *Redemption*, based on the Hanukka story; the *Negev Concerto* for piano; a piano suite; and *Haftorah* for violin and piano (with a string orchestra version). Apart from his actual synagogue music, his concert cantorial settings remain popular and are frequently performed.

THE GOLEM

Libretto by Abraham Ellstein and Sylvia Regan

Based on a story by Halpern Leivick, adapted by Joseph Buloff

Abraham Ellstein's lifelong ambition to write a full-length opera on a Jewish subject materialized when the New York City Opera conductor Julius Rudel took an interest in the idea and helped secure a City Opera

commission under a Ford Foundation grant. The result, *The Golem*, was premiered at City Opera in the spring of 1962, conducted by Rudel.

Ellstein had been interested in the golem subject ever since he first visited Prague about thirty-five years earlier on a European concert tour as accompanist to the world-renowned cantor Yossele Rosenblatt. He had visited the attic of the Altneuschul, one of Prague's oldest synagogues, where the Prague version of the golem legend—and the particular story used for the opera—is placed. He was immediately inspired to create a major work. "Something in the atmosphere of that old room got to me," Ellstein recalled on the eve of the premiere, "and I've been aiming at this opera ever since."

The golem, a mysterious mythical creature, has been the subject of one of the most persistent legends in western and Central European Jewish folklore—one that has been recycled and reinvented frequently since the Middle Ages. Although anything even approaching humanly wrought magic is clearly prohibited in Judaism, the long path of Jewish history has not been without the emergence of natural human inclinations toward folk superstitions and magical beliefs. Indeed, it has often fallen to responsible rabbinic leadership to eradicate such notions.

Generically, a golem (also homunculus) is a creature, usually quasi-human—i.e., made artificially through the magic of holy names, a phenomenon common to the magic lore of various ancient cultures. The development of the golem idea in Jewish contexts derives from the magical exegesis of the mystical work *sefer y'tzira* (Book of Creation) and from mystical ideas about the creative power of speech, of words, and even of particular letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The holy name involved in most Jewish golem legends is, of course, that of God—an unpronounceable tetragram of His actual Name. The word *golem* derives from its single mention in the Bible (Psalm 139:16), which led to the Mishnaic description of it as a fool and to the talmudic use of the word as an unformed and imperfect entity—in philosophical terms, matter without form—which it acquired only in later versions. It might simply signify body without soul, but the deeper connotations in early talmudic and Midrashic legends often concern secret powers of intuition derived from primordial clay—the earth, from which a golem is artificially fashioned.

In the medieval conception, certain transformations and reorderings of certain letters could contain secret knowledge of creation on an internal level. Although in the early medieval period some saw in this a hidden guide to magic procedures, in the later Middle Ages the idea of a golem creation became more metaphorical. In the 12th and 13th centuries, there arose among the Pietist sect *ḥasidei ashkenaz* the notion of the golem creation as a mystical ritual. Yet that was also the beginning of the perception of the golem as an actual creature, even though the mystics insisted on its exclusively symbolic meaning—spiritual experience of ecstasy without practical benefits or consequence. In fact, none of the early sources contain any reference to practical benefit being derived from a golem.

In the ensuing centuries, the concept of the golem solidified as a creature whose animation depended upon the “holy letters” in physical contact with it—in a particular secret order. The golem also took on the character of a creature who could serve its creator in practical terms, but could also be vaporized by removal of the life-giving letter(s). Kabbalistic opinions on the nature of the golem—whether it could have power of speech or intellect—vary.

By the 17th century, golem legends were commonly known, and they had certain features in common: 1) Some type of life could be ignited in the creature by placing the four letters of God’s name in its mouth or on its arm, the removal of which would cause its death; and 2) The golem may serve its creator, but once created, it can develop quasi-independent powers and can wreak havoc, especially by continuing to expand in size, to the point where it must be disintegrated back into primordial dust by removing either the tetragram or one of three letters that had been placed on its forehead. (The three letters spelled *truth*, but removal of the first letter spelled the word *dead*.)

The most recent and best-known golem legend is connected to 16th-century Prague, where the fashioning of the creature is ascribed to Rabbi Judah Lowe ben B’zallel, known as the Maharal. The Prague legend has no historical basis vis-à-vis the Maharal. The story developed only after his death, and according to some estimates, its attribution was transferred from Elijah of Chelm to the Maharal possibly as late as the second half of the 18th century. Later golem legends endowed the creature with powers of protecting Jews from persecution—especially from the fallout of accusations of ritual murder. But that role is an invention of the modern era.

The Prague golem was said to have been fashioned out of clay, into which the Divine tetragram was inserted—making it obedient to the Maharal’s will. Eventually it grew to menace the entire city and turned its destructive force on the very people it was supposed to protect. The Maharal was thus forced to destroy it. The Prague legend has inspired plays, ballets, poetry, novels, abstract compositions, films—and operas.

Ellstein’s opera is based on the play of the same title (1921) by the Yiddish dramatist and writer

H. [Halpern] Leivick (1886–1962), which was produced initially in Hebrew, in Moscow, by Habima. A studio of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, Habima is regarded as the foundation for modern professional Hebrew theater, and it later became the National Theatre of Israel. Ellstein's opera was a close collaboration with his wife, playwright Sylvia Regan, who wrote the libretto to Joseph Buloff's adaptation of Leivick's play. In creating her libretto, Regan did not confine herself strictly to Leivick's play. Together with Ellstein, she scoured many other sources for variant golem legends, eventually incorporating some of those elements in a composite product.

In determining his musical approach, Ellstein realized that much of what was popularly considered "traditional Jewish music" in America—Hasidic-type tunes, klezmer band inflections, eastern European modes and motifs, Yiddish folksong, and cantorial chant—is in fact of relatively recent origin, dating to the 19th century with sometimes wishful perceptions of greater age. He became convinced that those musical elements could not appropriately express a 16th-century story with medieval roots. Therefore he chose instead to rely—albeit very conservatively—on 20th-century techniques and harmonic idioms as a more universal approach.

In the first act the Maharal creates the golem by deciphering mystical formulas in the Kabbala and deriving God's preeminent name (*shem ham'forash*), believed to be the secret of all creation, and then injecting it into the skull of the clay creature in order to animate it and enable it to protect Prague's Jews against their persecutors. Soon afterward, the Maharal is warned that a fanatic monk, Tadeus, is preparing to launch a new "blood libel" and ritual-murder accusation against the Jews by planting as evidence the corpse of a murdered Christian child. That

infamous "blood libel," which surfaced periodically in Europe from the time of the Middle Ages even into the 20th century, maintained that Jews killed Christian children to use their blood in the preparation of *matza* for Passover. The death or even disappearance of a Christian child could instantly provoke a pogrom leading to wholesale slaughter of Jewish communities. In an attempt to forestall such an event, the Maharal decides to use his newly created golem rather than to rely on the conventional paths of beseeching God through fasting and prayer.

In the single-scene second act, only the finale of which is recorded here, the golem almost evokes sympathy as a lonely and shunned creature with no consciousness of its identity. But hints and warnings of its darker side begin to emerge and will play out in the third act, when the golem develops powers too great for the Maharal to control, becomes confused and bewildered, turns on the Jews and commits murder, and must be destroyed by its creator.

The scene here takes place just outside the Prague ghetto in a desolate, ruined castle inhabited by the city's Jewish beggars—who chase and mock the golem. As this excerpt begins, the Maharal has just emerged from a vision in which Elijah the Prophet has appeared in disguise and offered to usher in the Messiah. The Messiah, however, would be able to raise the dead, but not prevent Tadeus's murder of the Christian child or the ensuing massacre of Jews. The Maharal has therefore declined Elijah's offer, rejecting dependence on messianic redemption in favor of the golem's protection, choosing strength over supplication.

The golem enters and pleads with the Maharal to help him in his existential crisis: "Why did you bring me here to be alone, always alone?" The Maharal explains that the golem's mission is to wait alone until

needed. After the Maharal ascends to the castle's tower, his orphaned granddaughter, Debora, appears in search of him. The golem asks her, too, for help in understanding his identity, and he wonders why the townspeople chase him and call him a "golem." When he resists her explanation that people simply fear strangers, she concludes that the golem, too, must be an orphan, because he neither recalls his parents nor even knows what parents are. Momentarily appeased, the golem assumes that Debora must suffer from similar loneliness. But she explains that her mood is the opposite, especially in anticipation of her impending marriage, and she invites the golem to her wedding. Since the golem has no idea what a wedding is—nor of anything else human or earthly—Debora demonstrates typical wedding joy by dancing, and the golem begins to dance with her. As he gets carried away, he pulls her into a violent embrace, and she struggles in his grasp. Hearing her screams, the Maharal and his disciples—Isaac and Debora's betrothed, Yaakov—rush to her aid. Furious that the golem has touched his bride, and foreseeing the eventual danger of its power, Yaakov warns the Maharal: "He is evil, Rabbi—put an end to him before he puts an end to us."

The Maharal, however, merely reprimands the golem for its inadvertent excess and aggression, and reveals to it the purpose of its existence. He asks God to bestow supernatural powers on the golem so that it will be able to "see all without being seen." He then hypnotizes the golem and—without telling it of Tadeus's scheme—instructs it to discover and reveal any secret plans of the Jews' enemies. With its newfound clairvoyance, the golem foresees the murder of a child, its corpse hidden in two sacks that have been planted as culpatory evidence in a tunnel under the castle. The Maharal realizes that his prayer has been granted: the golem has been endowed with the requested powers. He instructs it to retrieve

those sacks—i.e., to prevent the blood-libel accusation, or perhaps the entire incident, in advance. As the golem disappears into a cloud to do the Maharal's bidding, the Maharal rejoices in triumph over the success of his newest creation: a golem that not only has life but also obeys his commands in the service of Jewish protection: "A miracle blessed by Thy holy Name, O God!"

—Neil W. Levin

THE GOLEM

The Maharal, *Rabbi Judah Lowe ben B'zallel*:

Christopher Meerdink, tenor

Debora, *the rabbi's granddaughter*:

Lauren Allardyce, soprano

Yaakov, *the rabbi's disciple*:

Michael Gallant, tenor

The Golem:

Tyler Oliphant, baritone

1 ACT II *finale*

MAHARAL [*Comes out of trance*]: He is gone. I have driven him out, and with him the long, sweet dream of all my fathers. Now am I free at last to do what must be done. [*The Golem enters. Maharal addresses him.*]
I go to the top of the tower. Wait here for my return.

GOLEM: Do not leave me. Stay, Rabbi, stay. [*beseechingly*] Speak to me—tell me, Rabbi, who am I? What am I? Why do I feel closer to earth and worms than people? Why did you bring me here to be alone, always alone?

MAHARAL: That is as it must be, Yosef. Your entire life is but a waiting expectation for the moment when I shall need you. Only then will you understand the meaning of your aloneness. [*Maharal slowly starts to ascend stairs. The Golem sits waiting.*]
Yaakov, Yaakov. [*exits into tower*]

DEBORA [*from a distance*]: Grandfather, Grandfather, if you are within sound of my voice, answer me. [*The Golem moves from the ruins toward Debora.*] Grandfather, answer me. Oh! [*Frightened*]

by the giant figure in the semidarkness, then recognizes the Golem with relief.] It is you. Have you seen the rabbi? It is long past evening prayer, and we have not seen him since early morning.

GOLEM: The rabbi is there. *[points]*

DEBORA: At the top of the tower? Why would he be there?

GOLEM *[longingly]:* I do not know. I only know, I wait for him; always I wait for him. *[slowly, childlike]* Tell me, when you look at me, what do you see?

DEBORA *[gently]:* I see Yosef the woodchopper; I see Yosef the water carrier.

GOLEM *[pleading]:* I know I am Yosef, but who is Yosef? If I am Yosef, why do people chase me and call me Golem?

DEBORA: You are a stranger from a faraway place. It is the old, old fear in them—the fear of strangers.

GOLEM: What is stranger? Where is far away? Who was I before I came here?

DEBORA *[with pity]:* Poor, unhappy soul, do you remember nothing? Not your mother? Your father?

GOLEM: What is mother? What is father?

DEBORA: You never knew them, as I never knew mine. Now I can tell you who you are: you are what I am, an orphan.

GOLEM: Orphan?

DEBORA *[tenderly]:* We are alike, you and I.

GOLEM: You are also a poor, unhappy soul? Alone, always alone?

DEBORA *[laughing]:* Oh, no, I am not alone. I have happiness to spare, and I will share it with you when I become Yaakov's bride. You will be a guest at my wedding.

GOLEM: Wedding? What is wedding?

DEBORA: A wedding is a uniting of two souls pledged to each other in heaven long before they were born. There will be joy and celebration when we plight our troth beneath the open sky under a canopy of stars. Fiddlers will play happy music all through the night. There will be singing. There will be dancing. Do you know how to sing? Do you know how to dance? Do you know

how to receive a bridegroom in a circle of lighted candles and drink his health with wine?

GOLEM: Wine, wine, what is wine?

DEBORA *[pulls red kerchief from her neck, waving it]:* Wine is the essence of goodness, sparkling red as this kerchief, warm and sweet to the lips. As bread sustains the heart of man, wine makes his spirits rejoice.

GOLEM: Wine, wine!

DEBORA: Wine makes you sing; wine makes you dance. The fiddlers play louder.

GOLEM: Sing, dance, louder!

DEBORA: Arms spread out like wings. *[moving her arms in rhythm]* Feet fly faster. Round and round they go.

GOLEM: Like wings! Faster! Round and round they go! *[Debora circles, kerchief in hand. As she gets closer to the Golem, he grabs the other end of the kerchief and moves with her. As he gets carried away, the Golem pulls Debora into a violent embrace. Debora screams, struggling in the Golem's grasp.]*

DEBORA: Let me go! Let me go! Grandfather! *[Overhearing her cries, the Maharal, Yaakov, and Isaac have run downstairs.]*

MAHARAL: Yosef!

YAAKOV: Golem! *[He lunges at the Golem and is restrained by Isaac.]*

GOLEM *[deflated]:* I am not a Golem. I am an orphan.

YAAKOV: You are nothing human! You were sired by a prayer and mothered by a stone.

MAHARAL: Yaakov!

YAAKOV: He is evil, Rabbi. Drive him away or put an end to him before he puts me into us!

MAHARAL: Quiet! *[to Debora]* Go, child, go. Yaakov and Isaac will lead you home. *[Debora, Yaakov, Isaac exit.]* *[fiercely, with staff raised over the cowering Golem]:* The terror you have provoked still whirls about your head, and you stand rigid as a rock, not seeing me near you. Raise your eyes so I may look into them! *[The Golem raises his head.]* The odor of rotting clay is still heard from your breath and already possessed of all

human frailties. Have all my prayers to the Almighty brought forth only weak, vile flesh?

GOLEM: Rabbi, she was near, telling me of joy—wedding, wine, dancing. Under my feet the earth began to tremble. A hand seized me, flung me high out of the darkness into light. [*drops to the Maharal's feet, pleading*] Rabbi, Rabbi, do not drive me away.

MAHARAL [*looking heavenward, hand on the Golem's head*]: You have sent a servant to help us who is himself helpless. Have mercy on us and help us both. [*commandingly, hypnotically*] Listen, Yosef, and listen well. Your waiting is over. The moment of expectation is upon us as I prepare you for your first mission. You will lie down now, stretch yourself in your full length. [*The Golem stretches out on the ground.*]

GOLEM: What will you do with me, Rabbi?

MAHARAL: I will reveal to you your true face—the meaning of your existence. With tears and with pain have I implored the Almighty to give you miraculous powers that you would scent the spirits from the most distant winds—that your body will penetrate fathoms deep and would not burn in fire nor drown in water. That you would be translucent as air—see all without being seen.

GOLEM [*struggling against the hypnotic spell*]: Rabbi, Rabbi.

MAHARAL: For you, distance and depth are but a step, a leap, a glance, and thus as our enemies move against us, you will trespass their hidden paths to bring salvation to my afflicted people.

GOLEM [*in a trance*]: Salvation, salvation.

MAHARAL: Your eyes are closed; your body sleeps. You will hear all, see all—and that which is revealed to you, you will reveal to me.

GOLEM: I hear. I hear the murmur of roots under earth as footsteps hurry over them.

MAHARAL: Follow those footsteps.

GOLEM: I see. I see men like shadows moving through blackness. I see a knife.

MAHARAL: Knife!

GOLEM: I hear a cry—the last breathless cry of a child.

MAHARAL: Father in heaven, the child is dead.

GOLEM: I see a path deep under the earth, dark and narrow.

MAHARAL: A tunnel.

GOLEM: I see two sacks.

MAHARAL: Too well do I know their contents. Listen now to a word which I shall tell you. A word to make the heart tremble. The word is *blood*.

GOLEM: Blood.

MAHARAL: I command you now, using all your powers to terrify: get those sacks and bring them to me!

GOLEM: I see, I see a face. It stares at me. It is my face. Now a body hovers over me on wings. [*He extends his arms.*]

MAHARAL: As your unseen spirit spreads its sheltering wings over you—rise now and go! Do not look back. Power is yours! [*A huge cloud arises. When it clears, the Golem has disappeared. The sky above the ruins is now black with clouds. The wind blows fiercely, auguring a coming storm.*]

MAHARAL: A miracle, a miracle—blessed be Thy Holy Name, O God!



For many decades **ROBERT STRASSBURG** (1915–2003) figured prominently in the general musical life and in Jewish cultural circles in the Los Angeles area. Born in New York, he studied and worked with Igor Stravinsky, Walter Piston, and Paul Hindemith—with whom he studied at Tanglewood on a Boston Symphony scholarship. After bachelor studies at the New England Conservatory, he received his master's degree from Harvard, where he was the recipient of a fellowship in composition. Later, he earned a doctor of fine arts degree at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

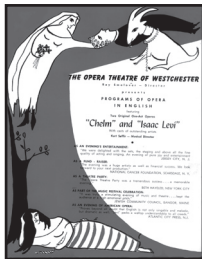
Strassburg was always dedicated to teaching. He was chairman of the composition and theory department at the Philadelphia Music Settlement School (1943–47), he lectured at Brooklyn College (1947–50), and

he was on the inaugural faculty of the Brandeis Camp, directing the music program at its branch in Hendersonville, North Carolina, in 1950. He was also an artist-in-residence and taught at the Brandeis Arts Institute, a subsidiary program of the Brandeis Camp, for five summers (1951–55) in Santa Susana, California, where the director of musical activities was the conductor and composer Max Helfman (1901–63), one of the seminal personalities in Jewish musical creativity in America. That institute brought together college-age students and well-established Jewish and Israeli composers and other artists in an effort to broaden the horizons of young American artists and to introduce them to new possibilities inherent in modern Jewish cultural consciousness and artistic developments in the young State of Israel.

In 1960 Strassburg moved to Los Angeles. He served as assistant dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Judaism until 1966, when he became a professor of music at California State University (Los Angeles). There, he also established and directed the Roy Harris Archives and published a catalogue of Harris's works. Strassburg composed in nearly all classical media, and his own substantial catalogue includes many Judaically related works, secular as well as sacred. During his tenures as music director at various synagogues—first in Florida and then in Los Angeles—he developed a particular interest in liturgical music, and he composed numerous prayer settings. Among the best known of these are two Torah services, many individual prayers for Sabbath and High Holy Days, various Psalms, and liturgically related solo songs. Liturgical as well as Jewish historical themes also informed a number of his instrumental pieces, including *Festival of Lights Symphony* for string orchestra; a *Torah Sonata* for piano (with a version for string quartet, *Tropal Suite*); *Terecentenary Suite* for viola and piano; *Patriarchs*, four biblical portraits for

string orchestra; and *A gilgul fun a nign* (Migrations of a Melody), on a text by Yehuda Leib Peretz, for baritone, narrator, and chamber orchestra.

Apart from Judaic subjects, Strassburg's lifelong passion for the poetry of Walt Whitman found its expression in many of his secular works. He was cochairman of the Walt Whitman Centennial events, held at California State University. He also composed more than forty documentary film scores and wrote incidental music for such theatrical productions as *King Lear*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Anne of a Thousand Days*, and *The House I Live In*. He was an active poet, and he published nearly twenty books of his own poetry during his lifetime.



CHELM

A Comic Folk Opera in One Act
Libretto by Cantor Raymond Smolover

In 1955 Cantor Raymond Smolover founded the Opera Theatre of Westchester, in White Plains, New York, a northern suburb of New York City. Inspired by the success of such intimate stage works in the

general operatic realm as Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *The Old Maid and the Thief*, Smolover saw analogous operatic possibilities in Jewish lore and literature, but he realized that no single opera program yet existed to champion that cause. The new Westchester County project was intended to encourage both the creation and the performance of chamber operas on Jewish themes on a regular basis. After initial performances there, the productions might go on tour to various cities on the Eastern

Seaboard and even in the Midwest. All productions were thus required to have casts of no more than five people; sets that could fit into one station wagon; and small instrumental ensembles, with alternative piano accompaniment for those situations where further instruments were unavailable.

Robert Strassburg's *Chelm*, a one-act comic folk opera, was one of the first two chamber operas commissioned by the Opera Theatre in the year it was founded. Smolover invited Strassburg, who was then living in Florida, to compose a work to a libretto in English that the cantor had already written. It was based on Yiddish folktales and had an eastern European Yiddish folkloric character. Strassburg was intrigued by the opportunity to express musically and dramatically that Yiddish lore and also to draw upon the Yiddish folk melos. *Chelm* received its New York City premiere in 1956 at the 92nd Street YMHA, paired with Frederick Pike's *Isaac Levi* (with a libretto also by Smolover), a one-act opera about the 19th-century Hassidic master and folk hero Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev. Since then, *Chelm* has been presented at least forty times on the East Coast and often elsewhere in the United States.

The very mention of the city of Chelm can evoke laughter, owing to a large body of humorous folktales connected to its mythical former Jewish inhabitants. Since at least the 19th century, generations of eastern European Jews and their émigré descendants have been entertained by those sometimes satirical, sometimes nonsense stories mocking Chelm's population of fools—known sarcastically in folklore as *khelmer khakhomim*—the “wise men of Chelm.” Although it is often erroneously assumed to be a completely fictitious town, Chelm [*khelem* in Yiddish] is actually a small city in Poland, southeast of Lublin, with a centuries-old Jewish history. Its Jewish community, virtually extinct since the German deportation and

slaughter of the Jewish population in 1942, is thought by some to be one of the oldest in Poland—possibly of medieval origin. (It numbered approximately 15,000 Jews in 1939, but only 15 of the handful left behind by the Germans survived to be liberated by the Red Army in 1944.) The earliest documented evidence of the city's existence dates to 1442. Early in the 19th century, a local Hassidic dynasty was founded there, after which the city's rabbis were Hassidim. At its peak, the Jewish community—probably about fifty percent of the total population at the time of the 1939 German invasion—boasted the typical communal and religious institutions: a yeshiva (talmudic academy), an orphanage, an old-age home, a secondary school, two Jewish weekly periodicals, and synagogues (one of which may have dated to the 13th century). All were destroyed by the occupying Germans between 1939 and 1944.

Chelm's comic notoriety stems from the perception of its residents as naïve and sometimes childlike simpletons, unable to separate theory from practice; incapable of deductive reasoning, logical understanding, or problem solving; and prone to silly conclusions and confusions. Those perceptions eventually acquired the status of folklore throughout Poland and other regions of eastern Europe—much as jokes or comically derogatory anecdotes about stereotypical daftness have characterized inhabitants of Gotham, England, or certain regions or rural parts of the United States, however unfairly.

Typical stories about the “wise men of Chelm” concern senseless solutions to dilemmas and portray a community mentally overwhelmed by ordinary as well as self-created problems and befuddled by questions requiring even a modest degree of practical wisdom. Many Chelm tales and their variants are found in published collections.

For his libretto, Smolover compiled a selection of Chelm anecdotes and vignettes and fused them into a central plot. The story revolves around David's wedding gift to his bride, Leah; the problems he confronts; and his interactions with the town "wise man" and the local seductress. There are ten scenes in all, of which four (scenes 2–5) have been excerpted for this recording. In scene 2, David has just brought his bride home. After a mutual declaration of love, he confesses to her that he has forgotten to buy her the wedding gift he has selected. Leah protests that no gift is necessary and that it would be better to conserve their funds. But David insists, and Leah agrees that perhaps he could buy her a she-goat—something practical that she has always wanted. David consults Berel, the wise man, regarding where he might find a she-goat and how he can determine both the gender and the quality of the animal. Berel advises David to visit Khaya, for she has goats to sell. In scene 3, a comical debate ensues between the two men over whether the head or the feet should be the determining factor in selecting a young goat that will grow into a healthy and productive animal. Scene 4 opens with Khaya both bemoaning her unmarried state and proclaiming its advantages at the same time. Her conversation with David is peppered with double entendres and innuendo in reference to the gender of the goat he seeks ("What would you want with a *he*? You need look no further: *I* am a *she*.") Scene 5—in which David reports to Berel on his success in finding and purchasing the goat—shows the two men engaged in a disputation over obvious explanations for natural phenomena: from how to identify gender (again, with a sexual innuendo) to why days are longer in summer than in winter. To the latter question, David proposes the "obvious, scientific" answer: that summer days are longer because heat causes expansion!

For much of the melodic material, Strassburg drew upon actual Yiddish folksongs as well as fragments of ubiquitous folk tune motifs. Scene 2 is based upon a well-known folksong, *Papir iz dokh vays* (As Sure As Paper Is White), about a young man's yearning for his beloved. However, the tune is not merely arranged or quoted. It is used as a foundation for the composer's improvisation, and it is developed through fragmentation and extension. The other scenes here contain melodic references to archetypal Yiddish folksong phrases and motives.

At some point during the 1970s or 1980s the orchestrated score and parts were lost when the composer moved. The present orchestration—for flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon, violin, cello, and harp—was reconstructed expressly for this Milken Archive recording.

—Neil W. Levin

CHELM

Berel, *the innkeeper*:

Richard Lalli, *baritone*

Khaya, *the goat keeper*:

Carla Wood, *mezzo-soprano*

David, *groom*:

Matthew Chellis, *tenor*

Leah, *bride*:

Karen Longwell, *soprano*

2 SCENE 2

LEAH: Was I heavy, my love?

DAVID: Heavy? Like the smile on your face when I first caught your sight, like the gleam in your eye when I kissed you good night. Like my soul when it leaves my body in flight.

LEAH: I mean heavy, heavy, heavy.

DAVID: Heavy, heavy, heavy.

LEAH: Like the pain in my heart when we part at the door, like my limbs when caressed by the one I adore. Like your love when it pierces my breast to the core.

LEAH, DAVID: Heavy, heavy, heavy. Like the feel of a child nestled close in my arms, like the weight of a treasure chest full of your charm. Like the sun when it burns through my skin as it warms. Heavy, heavy. My love for you is heavy, heavy.

DAVID: Leah, my love, I have a confession to make.

LEAH: A confession, my sweet? You need not confess to me. In my eyes, you can do no wrong.

DAVID: But I did, I did! In my excitement I forgot to buy you your wedding gift—a lovely lace shawl.

LEAH: My poor darling, you're so very good. Please do not feel so badly. We really should save the money for our family.

DAVID: No. I won't be happy until I bring you your wedding gift.

LEAH: My David, your love is all I need—oh, my dearest.

DAVID: No, my dearest.

LEAH: Then I shall tell you what you may do. If you must buy a gift, buy something useful for our home.

DAVID: Express our love with some dead piece of furniture! No! Never!

LEAH: It need not be dead. You can buy a live gift—an animal, a pet, even useful, like a she-goat.

DAVID: A she-goat?

LEAH: A she-goat. I always wanted a she-goat, and besides, I'll need plenty of milk for the future.

DAVID: Then I'll do as you say. But I still feel badly. My heart is heavy.

LEAH, DAVID: Heavy, heavy.

LEAH: Like my limbs when caressed by the man I adore.

LEAH, DAVID: Like the weight of a treasure chest full of your

charms, like the pain in my heart when we part at the door. Heavy, my love for you is heavy.

3 SCENE 3

DAVID: Berel, oh Berel, I need your advice.

BEREL: Speak frankly, my friend. In me you may confide.

DAVID: It's nothing like that! I need a she-goat!

BEREL: A she-goat?

DAVID: A she-goat!

BEREL: It must be a she? A he won't do?

DAVID: A she, not a he, as a gift for my bride. *Biri biri bim, biri biri bim.*

BEREL: I suggest you see Khaya, who lives near the bay. A she-goat she'll sell you, and something more, so they say.

DAVID: Berel! You forget I am a married man. It's nonsense that you speak—pure nonsense, I say. But I'll go and see Khaya who lives near the bay.

BEREL: Forgive me, David, but do you know one end of the she-goat from the other?

DAVID: Of animals, I must admit, you are the one that knows. But a goat I must have, young and pure, giving lots of milk as she grows.

BEREL: Then check her head most carefully. No nonsense, I say. But go and see Khaya who lives near the bay.

DAVID: A scholar to me you've always been, but in this—but in this I will not bow. I've paid close attention to all you've said, but of growing, this I know. One grows up from the feet not down from the head. This is the way we grow.

BEREL: You should leave the head work to me. It's nonsense that you speak—pure nonsense, I say. Go and see Khaya who lives near the bay.

DAVID: I can prove what I say. Listen to me carefully: when my trousers I put on, they were short at the feet but not at the head, don't you see? Don't you see? Which should prove from which end we grow.

BEREL: You can't convince me!

DAVID: *Biri biri bim, biri biri bam.* Look at me! Don't you see? Which should prove from which end we grow, *biri biri bim, biri biri bim*.

BEREL: It's nonsense you speak—pure nonsense, I say. Go see Khaya, who lives near the bay.

DAVID: Look at me! Don't you see from which end we grow?

BEREL: Now you listen to me. Don't you recall when we sat on the ground in the gray morning light, to watch the king's infantry pass. Ah, what a sight! Their feet were all the same. They all touched the ground. But their heads were all different; they varied in height.

DAVID: It's nonsense you speak—pure nonsense, I say, but I'll go see Khaya who lives near the bay. It's nonsense you speak—pure nonsense, you say, but I'll go see Khaya who lives near the bay.

BEREL: It's no nonsense I speak. No nonsense, I say, but go see Khaya who lives near the bay.

4 SCENE 4

KHAYA: This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai ai.* This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai ai.* The day is warm, the sky is clear, my goats are grazing, I have nothing to fear. I'm healthy and strong, though fifty I'll be, my life would be happy, if I just had a *he*. This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai ai.* This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai.*
No husband to scold me, no mean ugly looks, no clothes to be mended, no dinner to cook.
I'm quite independent, quite free. How I could enjoy it if I just had a *he*. This is the life? *Ai ai ai.* This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai ai.*

DAVID: Forgive me. I hope I'm not intruding.

KHAYA: Intruding?

DAVID: I've been told you have a *she* to sell.

KHAYA: A *she* to sell? You need a *she* already?

DAVID: Yes! A *she*!

KHAYA: Naturally, what would you want with a *he*? You need look no further. I am a *she*.

DAVID: I mean a she-goat!

KHAYA: A she-goat?

DAVID: Yes.

KHAYA: I should have known. So what can you do. Go over to yonder gate and pick yourself a she-goat. I'm quite independent, quite free. How I could enjoy it if I just had a *he*. This is the life? *Ai ai ai ai.*

5 SCENE 5

BEREL: Well, David, you got her?

DAVID: Yes, Berel. She's outside. She's quite pretty.

BEREL: You like her? Huh?

DAVID: Yes, I think that I do, though I didn't think I would.

BEREL: Well, it takes a little time to get used to Khaya, but she grows on you.

DAVID: Berel!

BEREL: All right, all right, but tell me, David, how do you know a *he-goat* from a *she-goat*? Tell me how you know.

DAVID: What do you mean? It's easy, it's simple, it's natural!

BEREL: It's not always. It's not always so simple because it's natural for instance.

DAVID: Why, it's simple, it's natural!

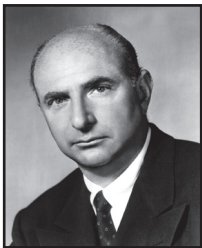
BEREL: Tell me, David, since you seem so bright, why are the days in summer so long but the days in the winter—correct me if I'm wrong—grow shorter day and night?

DAVID: Well, I—I don't know.

BEREL: For this information I turn to my science, upon which I've full reliance. We know that the cold makes the elements contract, that snow and ice freeze the land, but the days in summer grow longer, you see, because heat—yes, the summer heat—makes the days expand—yes, expand.

DAVID: A scholar to me you've always been, but please excuse me just a moment while I ...

BEREL: Why, by all means, David. I'll watch your *she* for you. It's so simple, so natural, "it's easy" he tells me, to tell a *he* from a *she*. Would his bride be surprised if her David came home to find that he had a *he* not a *she*? *Biri biri bim. Biri biri biri biri bim.*



DAVID TAMKIN (1906–75) was a highly successful and prolific Hollywood film composer, arranger, and orchestrator who also had an abiding interest in opera. He was born in Chernigov, the Ukraine, but his family emigrated to Portland, Oregon, when he was less than a year old. He began violin lessons at an early age and was eventually in a class—taught by Henry Bettman (a Yaşay pupil)—with Louis Kaufman, the future distinguished concert and sound-track violinist who became Tamkin's lifelong friend and was later instrumental in promoting and garnering support for *The Dybbuk*.

Tamkin studied composition with Francis Richter and then with a number of teachers in New York, after which he was a student at the University of Oregon. He also worked for a brief time with Ottorino Respighi, as well as with Ernest Bloch, before settling in Los Angeles. In 1949, Universal Pictures made most of its music staff redundant, and Tamkin was retained there as an arranger and an orchestrator. Between 1947 and 1960 he worked on nearly forty films, including *Swell Guy* with Ann Blyth, *The Fighting O'Flynn* with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., *You Gotta Stay Happy* with Eddie Albert, and *Singapore* with Fred MacMurray and Ava Gardner; and he orchestrated most of the film scores of Dimitri Tiomkin. In 1968 he was the orchestrator for award-winning composer Jerry Goldsmith for the film *100 Rifles*, also for Universal. In addition to *The Dybbuk*,

Tamkin's works of Jewish interest include a second opera, *The Blue Plum Tree*, based on the biblical story of Jacob and Esau; and an orchestral version of Joseph Achron's *Stempenyu Suite*.

THE DYBBUK

Libretto by Alexander Tamkin

Based on the play by S. An-Ski

David Tamkin's opera *The Dybbuk*, with a libretto by his brother, Alexander, is based closely on the immortal classic Yiddish play of the same title by the celebrated author, playwright, and folklorist S[emyon Akimovitch] An-Ski [Solomon Zainwil Rapaport] (1863–1920). Tamkin was first struck by its operatic possibilities when he saw its American production as a young man. Indeed, a learned essay following the opera's premiere observed that An-Ski's play itself was in effect a sort of "opera without music," with the inflections of language, the implied melos of Jewish and Hassidic folk life, and the rhythm and hum of its rituals providing a type of music. But it was not until 1931 that Tamkin and his brother commenced work on the opera.

An-Ski, who was born in Belarus, separated himself from his traditionally religious background and surroundings to join the Haskala (the Jewish enlightenment movement) in Russia, and he wrote mostly in Russian until about 1904, after which he returned to the Yiddish language. He became attracted to social revolutionary circles, as well as to the populist *narodniki* movement, which embraced Russian peasant roots and values. After a thirteen-year exile in western Europe (mostly in Paris), he returned to Russia in the year of the 1905 Revolution and joined the Social Revolutionary Party. His involvement in the Jewish Labor Bund was internationally echoed in his Bund anthem, *Di shvue* (The Oath). After the 1905

Revolution, An-Ski also developed an intense interest in Jewish folklore, and he headed the watershed Jewish Ethnographic Expedition in 1911–14 (later informally referred to as the An-Ski expedition) throughout significant regions of the Russian Empire—notably Podolia and Volhynia—financed by Baron Horace Guinzbourg, which collected folklore, artifacts, music, and other documentation of Jewish life in those villages and hamlets. The fruits of that expedition were brought back to St. Petersburg, where they would be available for scientific and scholarly study and artistic use. An-Ski's play *The Dybbuk* provided a new window to a world of superstitions among Jews in areas of eastern Europe that had yet to be subdued by westernization and the Haskala. An-Ski used this particular tale as a framework for depicting the mysterious world of Hassidic Jewry. He wrote the play originally in Russian, but translated it himself into Yiddish for its production in Vilna (Vilnius) in 1920 by the famous Yiddish theatrical troupe the Vilner Truppe. For its production in Berlin in the 1925–26 season by the Habima troupe from Moscow, it was translated into Hebrew by Chaim Nachman Bialik—the leading figure of the modern Hebrew cultural renaissance, avatar of modern Hebrew poetry, and Israel's poet laureate. That Berlin production marked Habima's entry into the European theater world, and it was received there as a cultural revelation. A non-Jewish critic for a Berlin newspaper was mesmerized: "Of course, I could not understand one word of it," he wrote, "but I could hear that this elegant Hebrew must have been the language in which God spoke to the ancient Israelites when He was in His best mood!"

In that interwar period, An-Ski's drama about demonic possession evoked a very real way of life that was still being played out—not so far geographically from Berlin, but light-years away culturally. It bespoke a world in which daily lives were still governed by



Hanna Rovina as "Leah" in the Habima Theatre production of *The Dybbuk* in Moscow, 1922

centuries-old folk beliefs, archaic rituals, medieval magic and mysteries, and outdated perceptions of good and evil. That immediacy appealed to Berlin critics and contributed to the play's general success—almost as if lifting a veil on an utterly foreign world, so near and yet so far. Chemjo Vinaver, the distinguished musician, critic, and scholar of Hassidic music who had come from a Hassidic environment but was living in Berlin, reacted to the play less as a conventional drama than as "a loosely woven dramatic legend based on Hassidic lore and Jewish folkways."

Incidental music for the 1922 Moscow production of *The Dybbuk* (also used for the Berlin Hebrew production) was composed by Joel [Yuli Dimitrovitch] Engel (1868–1927), one of the seminal figures of the Jewish national art music movement. Engel had also headed the music division of An-Ski's ethnographic expedition, and both he and An-Ski are said to have been inspired to artistic expression of this folk tale when they heard it together from an innkeeper's wife in 1912. Since An-Ski's construction of the play relied on a question posed as the principal motif in a Hassidic song (perhaps also learned during that expedition), *Mipnei ma?* (Why did the soul descend from the supreme height to the deep pit?), the tune of that song was used in the Vilna premiere, and Engel incorporated it into his incidental music along with other authentic folk and Hassidic melodies. In 1926 he published the score as an independent concert piece, *Dybbuk Suite* (Suite *hadibbuk*, op. 35).

In the 20th century there have been many artistic treatments of the *dibbuk* theme, and the play itself has inspired many works. An opera by the Italian composer, Lodovico Rocca, entitled *Il Dibbuk*, was premiered at La Scala, Milan, in 1934, and an orchestral prelude by Bernhard Sekles, *Der Dybuk*, was published in 1929. There is a *dibbuk* ballet score by Max Ettinger (1947), and there are several operas in addition to Tamkin's, the most recent of which is Shulamit Ran's *Between Two Worlds*, which was premiered in Chicago in 1997. A well-known Yiddish film version of the An-Ski play was made in Poland in 1937, starring Leon Liebgold and Lili Liliانا, and a Hebrew film was produced in Israel in 1968.

The story concerns an archetypal demon in Jewish folklore, the *dibbuk*, an evil spirit that enters the body of a living person and cleaves to his soul—speaking through that person's mouth as an independent and foreign personality and driving the inhabited victim to madness. A similar phenomenon is found in talmudic as well as kabbalistic literature, where the reference is simply to "evil spirit." But the term *dibbuk* is not found in literature until the 17th century, in the Yiddish of that period, and it is actually an abbreviated form of the Hebrew, *dibbuk m'ru'ah ra'a* (cleavage of an evil spirit), or *dibbuk min haḥitzonim* (*dibbuk* from the outside). Initially, a *dibbuk* was perceived as a type of devil or demon that entered an ill person. A later dimension concerned a *dibbuk* as the spirit of a dead person who had not been laid to rest properly, which thus became a demon—a belief also found in other folk cultures. In the 16th century this *dibbuk* conception became intertwined with the mystical idea of transmigration of souls (*gilgul*). In that belief, a *dibbuk* could be perceived as an exposed soul that, because of its serious sins, was not permitted to transmigrate and therefore sought refuge within the body of a living person. At the same time, however, the new

living host was considered to have committed some secret sin that invited a *dibbuk* to enter. Such notions were composites of folk beliefs from surrounding non-Jewish cultures and from kabbalistically oriented mysteries. In still other versions, the *dibbuk* could be simply the soul of one who dies unfulfilled and then wanders in search of a new vessel. From the latter half of the 16th century on, until as late as the early 20th century, there are many accounts and types of *dibbuk* incidents, and even descriptions as well as instructional literature on exorcisms.

In the opera, as in An-Ski's play, the spirit of a dead young man—his marriage to his beloved having been thwarted—enters her body as a *dibbuk*. Ḥanan [Channon], a poor but brilliant talmudic student in the town of Brainitz, and Leah, a wealthy man's daughter, were in love. But her father, Sender, arranged a "more appropriate" match for her, with a yet-to-be-identified wealthy man's son. In a desperate effort to gain the riches that would make him acceptable to Leah's father, Ḥanan turned from Talmud to the study of the Kabbala and mysticism in order to learn the dangerous secret of how to invoke the "evil spirit" in the service of his wish. That pursuit caused his death.

Following local custom, on Leah's wedding day a separate feast is given for the town's beggars, who dance with the bride. In his introduction to his libretto, Alexander Tamkin saw those dancing beggars as enacting "the suggestive role of the souls of the dead returned to dance at the wedding," and he envisioned their movements working up to a "frenzied milling which sweeps the senses clear for that horrible, mad-minded incident so soon to come—the entrance of the *dibbuk* Channon into the body of the bride."

Also following a prenuptial tradition, Leah visits her mother's grave to invite her presence under the marriage canopy. While at the cemetery, she also sees

Hanan's grave, and she mourns for him while shrinking from the thought of the loveless marriage that lies ahead. Later, as the bridegroom places the veil over her face prior to the ceremony, Hanan's spirit takes possession of her body.

In the third and final act, Sender takes his daughter to a reputed "wonder-working" rabbi, Azrael, for exorcism. Azrael summons the spirit of Hanan's long-dead father, Nissan ben Rifke, who accuses Sender of having broken the agreement that their two children would marry when they reached the appropriate age. In a climactic scene, Hanan's dead father's claim is adjudicated by a rabbinical court, which finds in his favor. Sender is required to acknowledge his betrayal and to accept the court's judgment: he must give half his fortune to the poor and for the rest of his days pray for the souls of Hanan and Nissan. Azrael proceeds to exorcise the *dibbuk* from Leah, pronouncing it "excommunicated from all Israel." That accomplished, Azrael calls for the wedding to proceed. Now emptied of Hanan's spirit, Leah is unable to sustain life. She calls to Hanan—to his soul—and his soul calls to her in response, paraphrasing the expressions of love in the biblical Song of Songs. She expires, following him into death, to be united with him eternally. As the curtain falls, the mysterious words of the old Hassidic song *Mipnei ma?*, with which the opera opens, are repeated by the same messenger: "Why, from the highest height to deepest depth below, has the soul fallen? The Fall contains the resurrection."

With a commitment for a fully staged production still not secured, Tamkin extracted certain portions of the opera and reworked them into a concert version in eight movements, for tenor and orchestra. That suite was premiered in Portland, Oregon, in 1949, sung by Jan Peerce with the Portland Symphony Orchestra conducted by Werner Janssen. The full opera in its

original version received its premiere by New York City Opera in 1951 in a fully staged production, conducted by Joseph Rosenstock.

The present recording draws upon excerpts from both versions. Track 6 contains an excerpt from the opening scene of Act I of the actual opera. A distraught elderly woman and two children rush into the synagogue and study house in Brainitz late at night, where a few remaining Hassidic and Talmud students are lingering, following their discourse about a Hassidic *rebbe* (rabbinical-type Hassidic leader) who once ruled against a rich man in favor of a poor one, and then upheld his ruling—foreshadowing the final scene of the opera. The distraught woman beseeches God to spare the children's mother, who is unconscious and on the verge of death. The beadle suggests that those in the synagogue might form a *minyán* (prayer quorum of ten) to recite Psalms, as a traditional means of solace and an expression of faith; and he asks that she offer them the usual customary token of charity in return—in the name of the children's mother. When she is able to offer only a single *koepke* for each of them, the beadle reflects on the poor lot of the pious, intoning an old ironic song: "If I sold [burial] shrouds, then no one would die ..." Annoyed by his delaying and his sarcastic dissatisfaction with her tokens, the woman summons the children to find another prayer house.

Track 7 contains an instrumental excerpt from the first movement of the concert suite, which is titled "Wedding Chorus." But the music is drawn from the later wedding festivities scene in the opera.

Track 8 is an excerpt from the second movement of the concert suite, titled "Under the Earth's Surface" in reference to a passage in Act I of the opera libretto. Hanan has entered the synagogue (*beit midrash*). In response to a fellow student, Chenoah [Hanoakh], who

has reprimanded him for neglecting Talmud study in favor of kabbalistic fantasies (“The Talmud is not in your hand”), Ḥanan extols the mystical and spiritual attributes of the Kabbala over the rational and earthly focus of the Talmud (“it [the Talmud] binds you to earth, it forbids the attempt of heights; but the Kabbala wrenches your soul and throws you to loftiest heights”).

Tracks 9 and 10 contain instrumental excerpts: the prelude to Act II, which is the fifth movement of the concert suite; and the “Dance of the Beggars,” which is its seventh movement.

The final excerpt here (track 11), “The Song of Israel,” was written specifically for the concluding movement of the concert suite; it does not appear in the opera. It only loosely corresponds to Ḥanan’s singing of the biblical love song (*Shir hashirim*) toward the end of Act III of the opera, in the sense that some scholars interpret the Song of Songs as a metaphor for God’s love for the people Israel rather than as the romantic love poetry suggested by its erotic images. But here the new lyrics, by Jack Brooks, a motion-picture lyricist associated with Universal, form an overtly Zionist expression, referring to the new Jewish state as the Jewish people’s ultimate refuge. The concert was premiered during the euphoria that followed the establishment of the State of Israel, which had occurred less than a year before, at a time when the national consciousness of Jewish war and Holocaust refugees was immediate and acute. But these lyrics appear to have been written prior to the actual date of Israel’s declaration of statehood (May 14, 1948), since the fifth line in the printed score reads “Oh, give them now their homeland.” For that 1949 performance, with Israel already an independent sovereign nation, the line was altered accordingly: “Oh, now they have their homeland.”

In his review essay following the New York City Opera premiere, Chemig Vinaver was gratified by the reception of the subject matter by a contemporary American audience:

It is consoling to think that there are still people capable of being carried away by the image of so irrational and mysterious a world as that of this play, and one wonders whether after all there may not be the possibility in this country for a Jewish culture above the borscht-and-bagels level that some of our entrepreneurs of culture seem to have decided is all we can take.

—Neil W. Levin

THE DYBBUK

Elderly Woman:

Freda Herseht, soprano

Meyer:

Raphael Frieder, baritone

Channon [Ḥanan]:

Joseph Evans, tenor

5 “LORD OF THE EARTH!”

ELDERLY WOMAN [*In the synagogue at Brainitz, rushing to the Ark with children, shrieking hysterically: Ai, Ai, Lord of the Earth! Help me! Come! Children, let us open the Ark and throw ourselves upon the Holy Scrolls and not leave them until our tears have won your mother back from the Valley of Death.*

[a general silence as she wrenches open the doors of the Ark and buries her head amongst the Scrolls, intoning a wailing chant]

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Look, God of Abraham, down upon my misery. Look, God of Isaac, down on the grief of those little ones. Take not their mother away in the years of her youth. Adonai, do you intercede for the forlorn widow? Adonai, beloved mother of Israel, beseech the Almighty. Beseech Him that He shall not uproot the lovely sapling, nor cast the dove out of its nest, nor tear the gentle lamb away from the meadow. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, look! God of Abraham, hear my lamentation. Adonai! Adonai! I’ll put down the world. I’ll tear Heaven apart—but from here I will not move—until they return the one who is the crown of my head.

MEYER: Hannah Esther, would you have a *minyán* say Psalms for you?

ELDERLY WOMAN [*withdraws from the Ark*]: Yes, a *minyán* for Psalms. Hurry, hurry. Every second is precious. For two days, God help her, without speech, struggling with death.

MEYER: They shall begin this very minute. But something for their trouble, poor things?

ELDERLY WOMAN [*searching in her pockets*]: Here are ten kopecks—but see that they say the Psalms.

MEYER: Ten kopecks ... [*with dry humor*] one kopeck each, little enough that is. Only one kopeck. Such is the lot of the pious. Only one kopeck. If I sold [burial] shrouds, no one would die. If I sold lamps, then in the sky, the sun for spite, would shine at night.

ELDERLY WOMAN: Come, my doves, let us hurry to another prayer house.

8 “UNDER THE EARTH’S SURFACE”

CHANNON [**HANAN**]: Talmud? Not in my hand, the Talmud is cold and so dry. Under the surface of this earth is a world the same as ours, with fields, forests, seas and deserts, hamlets, cities, and life. Storms rage over the deserts and the seas which sail great ships. Rolls of thunder break o’er the forests as eternal fear holds sway. Thus is the Talmud. It is deep and vast and glorious. But it binds you to earth. It forbids the attempt of heights. But the Kabbala, the Kabbala wrenches your soul and throws you to loftiest heights. The Kabbala spreads all heavens before you and leads direct to paradise. It reaches out in the infinite and raises a corner of the great curtain of life. My heart turns faint. I have no strength.

11 “SONG OF ISRAEL”

CHANNON

Shir hashirim, Song of Songs, song of Israel my homeland. Israel, land of sorrow, watching, waiting, hoping, praying to be free.

Israel shall be their home. *Shir hashirim*, Song of Songs; Song of Israel my homeland.

Israel, homeless people loving, hating, living, dying to be free. Hear them cry, they cry for Israel. Children of the Chosen Land, what will be your fate? What will be your destiny? Wait, you must wait.

Children born to Israel, born are they for tears. They live without a homeland through the endless years. Oh now they have their homeland; Banish now their fears.

Wand’ring, wand’ring, down the ages, weary heads held high, wand’ring home to Israel, to live and to die. Question not the will of heaven as the faithless do; Just remember in thy sorrow God hath chosen you.

Shir hashirim, Song of Songs, song of Israel my homeland. Israel, deathless people; standing, sadly, silent suffering to be free.

Hear them singing, sing their song of Israel. *Shir hashirim*, *Shir hashirim*, Song of Songs, song of Israel.

I’ll keep my faith and freedom, freedom will not fail, and glory will be in my song, song of Israel.

About the Performers

The **UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC**, one of the leading performing arts educational institutions in the United States, was founded in 1880. The university’s orchestra, symphony band, and chamber choir have toured the United States and abroad. The University Symphony Orchestra, conducted by its director, Kenneth Kiesler, has been a guest at the Salzburg Festival in Austria and the Lyon Festival in France. The University of Michigan Opera Theater has produced a vast array of operas. The featured soloists for *The Golem* excerpt—**LAUREN ALLARDYCE**, soprano, **MICHAEL GALLANT**, tenor, **CHRISTOPHER MEERDINK**, tenor, and **TYLER OLIPHANT**, baritone—were recorded when they were students at the School of Performing Arts.

A native of New York, **KENNETH KIESLER** studied at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, the Aspen Music School in Colorado, and the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, Italy. At twenty-three he was the youngest conductor of a full production in the history of the prestigious Indiana University Opera Theater. He was accepted into the Leonard Bernstein American Conductors Program; won the silver medal at the 1986 Stokowski Competition at Avery Fisher Hall; received the Helen M. Thompson Award (in 1988); and in 1990 was one of four American conductors selected to conduct the Ensemble Intercontemporain in sessions with Pierre Boulez during the Carnegie Hall Centenary. Kiesler was music director of the Illinois Symphony Orchestra for twenty years, becoming conductor laureate at the end of the 1999–2000 season,

and he is now music director of the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra. He has appeared as guest conductor with the National Symphony Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony, and he has conducted the Jerusalem and Haifa symphony orchestras in Israel. Since 1995 he has held the positions of professor of conducting and director of university orchestras at the University of Michigan School of Music. Klesler is also the founder and director of the Conductors Retreat at Medomak, Maine.

Tenor **MATTHEW CHELLIS** studied at the University of Michigan, the Manhattan School of Music, and the Juilliard Opera Center and apprenticed with the Santa Fe and Wolf Trap opera festivals. He has sung with the New York City Opera, the Washington Opera, the Dallas Opera, and the Atlanta Opera, in roles including Mozart's Tamino and Don Ottavio; Rossini's Count Almaviva; and Baron Lummer in Richard Strauss's *Intermezzo*.

Baritone **RICHARD LALLI** is a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory and the Yale School of Music. He has given solo recitals at London's Wigmore Hall, the Spoleto Festival U.S.A., the National Gallery in Washington, Merkin Hall in New York, and the Salle Cortot in Paris, and he has premiered works by such composers as Yehudi Wyner, Richard Wilson, and Ricky Ian Gordon. Lalli is an associate professor of music at Yale, where he has taught since 1982.

KAREN LONGWELL, soprano, has pursued a diverse career in musical theater, opera, and drama. She appeared in *Camelot* on Broadway with Robert Goulet and in the American tour of *Cats*, singing the role of Grizabella, as well as in numerous off-Broadway shows.

Mezzo-soprano **CARLA WOOD** has appeared as Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and as Meg Page in *Falstaff* at the New York City Opera. She has also sung in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Mefistofele*, and *Rigoletto*, and she sang the role of Flora in Renata Scott's Emmy-winning production of *La Traviata* telecast on *Live from Lincoln Center*.

Conductor **PAUL HOSTETTER** studied at Florida State University and The Juilliard School, with Eric Stern (Broadway), Richard Voitch (Metropolitan Opera), and Joseph Gifford (Boston University), and has participated in master classes with Leonard Slatkin. He is currently music director of the Lyric Orchestra of New York and conductor of the New Jersey Youth Symphony. He has premiered more than thirty works by composers including David Del Tredici, Tania Leon, Anne LeBaron, and Dan Rakowski. As a percussionist, Hostetter has performed with the Perspectives Ensemble, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the American Symphony and New York Philharmonic orchestras, Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival, and Music Mobile.

Originally from Mississippi, **JOSEPH EVANS** studied music at the University of North Texas. He has sung leading tenor roles at the New York City Opera, as well as in guest appearances with companies including those of Houston, Seattle, Boston, and Cleveland. In 2000 he created the role of Camp in Carlisle Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree* at the Houston Grand Opera, and he sang the role of Captain Vere in Britten's *Billy Budd* in Seattle and Tel Aviv.

RAPHAEL FRIEDER was born in Israel and studied 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. A highly respected cantor, he has appeared in cantorial festivals at Carnegie Hall and at concert halls and synagogues throughout North America.

Mezzo-soprano **FREDA HERSETH** received her musical training at the Eastman School of Music. A Fulbright fellowship later allowed her to continue her studies in Munich, and until 1995, when she was appointed assistant professor of voice at the University of Michigan, her career was centered in Germany. She sang in the world premiere of William Bolcom's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* at the Stuttgart Opera under Dennis Russell Davies in 1984, and in the world premiere of Richard Wernick's *...and a time for peace* with the orchestra of La Scala, Milan, under Riccardo Muti at the Ravenna Festival in 1995. She has appeared frequently as a soloist in Europe, Israel, and the United States.

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. The orchestra 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.

Conductor **STEPHEN GUNZENHAUSER** was born in New York. After earning degrees at the Oberlin and New England conservatories, he received three successive Fulbright grants to study at the Salzburg Mozarteum. He served as assistant to three legendary conductors—Igor Markevitch in Monte Carlo, Istvan Kertesz at the Cologne Opera, and Leopold Stokowski with the American Symphony Orchestra in New York. In 1979 he was appointed music director of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra, a position he held until 2002. Gunzenhauser has become well known internationally for his recordings, numbering over sixty, including a critically acclaimed complete cycle of the Dvořák symphonies with the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra.

SCENES FROM JEWISH OPERAS, Volume I

ABRAHAM ELLSTEIN (1907–63)***The Golem* (excerpt from Act II)**

Publisher: EMI Mills Music, Inc.

Recording: Hill Auditorium/University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, January 2001

Recording Producer: David Frost

Recording Engineer: Tom Lazarus

Assistant Recording Engineer: Michelle Nunes

Recording Product Manager: Richard Lee

University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra:

Violin: Grace Oh, *concertmistress*;* Juliana Athayde, *principal*;* Benjamin Peled;* Jeremy Black;* Joanna Bello; Madeline Cavalieri; Timothy Christie; Michelle Davis; Joel Fuller; Spring Gao; Mary Golden; Lara Hall; Sherry Hong; Adrienne Jacobs; Catherine Jang; Elizabeth Lamb; David Lamse; Lydia Lui; Kate Massagli; Bethany Menemeyer; Emilia Mettenbrink; Stephen Miahky; Martha Walvoord; Cece Weinkauff; Sarah Whitney; **Viola:** I-Chun Chiang, *principal*;* Joseph Kam;* Emily Watkins;* Youming Chen; Kyung-Hwan Lee; Devorah Matthews; Ty McDonald; Tam Tran; **Cello:** Avi Friedlander, *principal*;* Barney Culver;* Andrew Barnhart; Ann Brandon; Eileen Brownell; Jill Collier; Andrew Deogracias; Leah Hagle; Tara Hanish; Alisa Horn; Heather Truesdall; Elizabeth Weamer; **Double Bass:** Andrew Anderson, *principal*;* Li Xu;* Daniel Dault; Molly Doernberg; Rital Laurance; Maren Reck; Kevin Sylves; **Flute:** Dawn Kulak; Koren McCaffrey; Adrienne Miller; Lori Newman; Jee Hye Shim; **Oboe:** Aaron Hill; Charles Huang; Adrienne Malley; **Clarinet:** Andre Dyachenko; Reis McCullough; A. J. Stanci; Serguei Vassiliev; Michael Wayne; **Bassoon:** Jason Artz; P.J. Woolston; Nathaniel Zeisler; **Horn:** Eric Kuper; Rachel Parker; Joel Wealer; Yuri Zuvanov; **Trumpet:** Dara Chapman; Saphra Mikal; Sarah Schneider; Jesse Tubb; **Trombone:** Drew Leslie; Alexandra Zacharella; **Bass Trombone:** Garrett Mendez; **Tuba:** Kevin Wass; **Timpani:** Ako Toma-Bennett; **Percussion:** David Endahl; Larry Ferguson; Jason Markzon; **Harp:** Alison Perkins; Katryna Tan; **Keyboard:** Joseph Cullen; Matthew Mazzoni

**Concertmasters and principal string players rotate positions during the season. Wind players rotated principal positions during these recording sessions.*

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ROBERT STRASSBURG (1915–2003)***Chelm* (scenes 2–5)**

Orchestration: Tony Finno

Publisher: Robert Strassburg

Recording: American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York City, March 2001

Recording Producer: David Frost

Recording Engineer: Tom Lazarus

Recording Product Manager: Richard Lee

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DAVID TAMKIN (1906–75)***The Dybbuk* (6 excerpts)**

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes Inc.

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

Recording Producer: Elliot McKinley

Recording Product Manager: Neil Levin

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