

Cover Art

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 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 cursive script that reads "Neil W. Levin".

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



DARIUS MILHAUD (1892–1974), one of the 20th century's most prolific composers, with an opera comprising nearly 450 works, belongs historically to the coterie of French intellectuals and composers who, loosely bonded by their initial embrace of Jean Cocteau's antisentimental aesthetic ideas, as well as by their allegiance to composer

Erik Satie's spiritual-musical tutelage, were known as *Les Six*. That group also included Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric, Germaine Tailleferre, and Louis Durey. But Milhaud belongs as well to the significant number of European Jewish émigré composers who took refuge in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s from the Fascist-inspired anti-Jewish persecution that emanated from Germany and culminated in the Holocaust.

Milhaud was born in Marseilles but grew up in Aix-en-Provence, which he regarded as his true ancestral city. His was a long-established Jewish family of the Comtat Venaissin—a secluded region of Provence—with roots traceable there at least to the 15th century. On his father's side, Milhaud's Jewish lineage was thus neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi (i.e., stemming neither from medieval German-Rhineland nor from pre-16th-century Spanish/Iberian Jewry), but rather, specifically Provençal—dating to Jewish settlement in that part of southern France as early as the first centuries of the Common Era. His paternal great-grandfather, Joseph

Milhaud, was one of the founders of the synagogue at Aix, and he wrote exegetical works on the Torah and conducted the census of Jews who had returned to France after the Revolution.

Like its Ashkenazi and Sephardi counterparts, Provençal Jewry had a distinct musical tradition that developed over many centuries. Milhaud's mother, however, was partly Sephardi on her father's side. This may have lent an additional perspective to his internalized Jewish musical sensibilities. Both parents came from middle-class families who had been engaged successfully in respected business enterprises for generations, and both were musicians as well. Darius began violin studies at the age of seven and began composing even as a child. In 1909 he commenced studies at the Paris Conservatoire, where one of his teachers, Xavier Leroux, immediately recognized that his student had discovered a harmonic language of his own. His other teachers included Vincent d'Indy, Paul Dukas, and André Gedalge, whom Milhaud later credited as his greatest influence.

In his memoirs Milhaud wrote that when he first began to compose, he was already aware of the path of Impressionism, which he viewed as the end of an artistic current whose mawkishness he found unappealing. He became profoundly affected as a composer by literature, as well as by Satie's commitment to a concept of artistic totality, exploring and including the various art forms in complementary expression. From 1917 to 1919 Milhaud held a secretarial post at the French Consular Mission in Brazil, where he developed an interest in native folk rhythms and ethnic music

traditions. He later applied these influences to some of his pieces, and his first two ballet scores drew directly upon the Brazilian experience.

In the 1920s Milhaud began his association with Cocteau, whose seminal aesthetic attack on the contemporary direction of “serious” music and its high-flown “romantic bombast” made a significant impression on him. Encouraged by Satie and his own musical models, Milhaud—together with the other composers who formed *Les Six*—embraced aspects of this aesthetic principle, especially with regard to simplicity, directness, avoidance of excess sentimentality, sounds related to nature and everyday life, and, perhaps above all, that attribute so prized by certain French poets of a previous era: *la clarté*—clarity. For Milhaud, perhaps more so than for the others of his circle, Satie’s love of the music hall, the circus, and other unelevated forms of entertainment was in tune with his own adoption of popular material—French folksong, Latin American dance rhythms, Jewish secular and sacred melodies, and one of his most important discoveries: jazz.

Milhaud first encountered jazz in London in the early 1920s, and he visited Harlem dance halls when he made a concert tour of the United States in 1922–23. He was instantly engaged by the syncopated rhythms, the improvisatory freedom, the authentic character, and even the purity of the music, and he created a bit of a stir when he was quoted as saying that jazz was “the American music”—according to the same validity as classical repertoire. Thereafter he turned to jazz elements for his works on quite a few occasions. Later he was quoted as observing that jazz could only have sprung from the experience of an oppressed people. After the installation of the Nazi puppet Vichy regime in France and his escape to America as a Jewish refugee—as well as the German murder of

more than twenty of his cousins—that can only have had additional significance for him. It is no accident that, notwithstanding several prewar Jewish-related works, it was in his American period and afterward that he turned even more frequently to his Jewish roots for musical sources.

In 1940, Milhaud’s one-act opera *Médée* (to a text by his wife, Madeleine) had just reached the stage of the Paris Opera when the German invasion resulted quickly in France’s surrender and the creation of the Vichy government. The occupation of Paris was a clear sign to Milhaud and his wife that it was time to leave with their son while they still could. The Chicago Symphony had invited him to conduct a new work it had commissioned, and that invitation enabled him to receive exit visas from the consulate in Marseilles for himself and his family. Their friend, the French-Jewish conductor Pierre Monteux, then conducting the San Francisco Symphony, organized a teaching position for Milhaud at Mills College in nearby Oakland, California, and beginning in 1951, for twenty years, he also taught every summer at the Aspen Music School and Festival. He is known to have cautioned his students—who included such subsequently celebrated musicians as Dave Brubeck, William Bolcom, Simon Sargon, and Peter Schickele—against what he called “overdevelopment” as a pretension to the profound. “It is false,” he told students, “that the profundity of a work proceeds directly from the boredom it inspires.”

Milhaud is often perceived as the champion of polytonality. Although he neither invented that harmonic technique and language nor was the first to employ it, he found ingenious ways to make use of its potential. Perhaps because he so clearly understood its possibilities, it became the harmonic vocabulary most commonly associated with his music. In the 1920s,

however, Milhaud was considered a revolutionary and an enfant terrible of the music world. Yet his actual approach owed more to the French composer Charles Koechlin than to Satie, and it built upon a particular concept of polytonality derived from Stravinsky's early ballets. Ultimately Milhaud believed not in revolution, but in the development and extension of tradition. "Every work is not more than a link in a chain," he postulated, "and new ideas or techniques only add to a complete past, a musical culture, without which no invention has any validity."

Milhaud's personal Judaism as well as his family heritage informed a substantial number of his compositions, beginning with his *Poèmes Juifs* (1916) and followed by several prewar pieces with overt Jewish titles and content. But it was in his later Jewish works that he relied frequently and specifically on the Provençal liturgical tradition that he knew from his youth in Aix-en-Provence. His Judaically related works from the period following his immigration to America include *Cain and Abel*, for narrator, organ, and orchestra; *Candélabre à sept branches*; *David*, an opera written for the Israel Festival; *Saul* (incidental music); *Trois psaumes de David*; *Cantate de Job*; *Cantate de psaumes*; and—arguably his most significant Judaic work—*Service Sacré*, an oratorio-like full-length Sabbath morning service (with supplemental settings for Friday evening) for cantor, rabbinical speaker, large chorus, and symphony orchestra, which was commissioned in 1947 and premiered by Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco. This service was first recorded in its entirety by the Milken Archive in 2000. His final work, *Ani maamin* (subtitled *un chant perdu et retrouvé*), on a text by Elie Wiesel, received its premiere in 1975 at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Lukas Foss, with soprano Roberta Peters, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and several narrators, including Wiesel.

ÉTUDES sur des thèmes liturgiques du Comtat Venaissin pour quatuor à cordes

In the early 1970s Milhaud was approached about a commission by the Braemer Foundation of Philadelphia. That local foundation had, in conjunction with Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park (a Philadelphia suburb), previously sponsored competitions with monetary awards for what it called "Hebraic string quartets"—which it defined as works demonstrably based on established Jewish liturgical music traditions. After two composers, Nachum Amir and Yehuda Ben Cohen, had each received this award, the foundation reoriented its direction from competitions toward the commissioning of new works by well-known composers, and it turned first to Milhaud. The guidelines remained the same: the piece was to draw directly and identifiably on musical material that had been documented in one or more reliable notated musicological source. And the composer's intent must be to create a "Jewish work." However, according to Milhaud's widow in her recollections thirty years later, the foundation was even more specific in Milhaud's case, in view of his known Provençal Jewish heritage. He was asked expressly to incorporate in his quartet melodies of the Provençal rite—the liturgical tradition also known as *minhag* Carpentras—insofar as possible from his youthful memories of family celebrations and services at the synagogue in Aix-en-Provence.

Minhag Carpentras (the custom of Carpentras) so named after one of the four cities where it once flourished, was the distinct liturgical tradition of the Jews of the Comtat Venaissin—a secluded region of Provence where Jews lived, until the Revolution, within the domains and under the protection of the Church. In addition to Carpentras, the four communities of the Comtat included Cavaillon, Avignon, and L'Isle-sur la Sorgue. The Jews who were native to that region as

late as the early 20th century are believed to have been the last descendants of the Languedoc and Provençal Jews who had been expelled from the kingdom of France in the 14th and 15th centuries (the Comtat was under papal sovereignty), whose liturgical customs they inherited and preserved. Jewish life in the region has been traced to early Jewish settlements in Gaul at the time of the Roman Empire and its conquest.

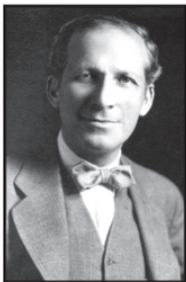
As he had done previously, especially with regard to the *Service Sacré*, Milhaud seized the opportunity to share a heritage virtually unknown to American Jewry and at the same time to explore the synagogue experience of his childhood and his own French-Jewish identity. Mme. Milhaud once recalled that whenever her husband felt inspired while immersed in a piece of music, “at a spiritual moment he would incorporate a fragment of the *minhag* Carpentras.” By the postwar decades, however, *minhag* Carpentras—which was entirely different from either the Ashkenazi or the Sephardi services Milhaud might have known from his Paris days—had become nearly extinct in practice, and relying solely on his childhood memory, with the added burden of separating those melodies from the acquired repertoire of his adult life in America as well as France, could have proved limiting. Fortunately, much of the Provençal rite is preserved in a 19th-century compendium, *Z'miroi yisrael k'minhag Carpentras: chants Hébraïques suivant le rite des Communautés Israélites de l'ancien Comtat-Venaissin* (Hebrew Chants/Melodies According to the Rite of the Jewish Communities of the Old Comtat Venaissin/*minhag* Carpentras), which was compiled, edited, notated, and published in 1885 by Messrs. Jules Salomon and Mardochée Crémieu (both from Aix) under the auspices of the Grand Rabbi of the Consistoire of Marseilles. Milhaud consulted this valuable source and used it in tandem with his own personal recollections in identifying the melodic

foundations for this quartet, which was published only posthumously (1981) under the present title and subtitle.

Études is a potpourri of tune references and fragments from the musical repertoire of *minhag* Carpentras, not an exposition of tunes in their entirety. Among the melodies from which Milhaud quotes and then develops motives and phrases are plaintive tunes from Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur liturgies (*hatzi kaddish* for the morning service, *kol atzmotay, mi khamokha av harahamim*, and *ahot k'tana, a piyyut*—liturgical poem—not found in the Ashkenazi rite); from the Three Festivals, including one seder song; for *Tisha ba'av* (the Ninth of Av, commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples); for the Sabbath (*'kha dodî*); and for life-cycle events such as weddings. All these elements are woven into a lucid, lyrical, and transparent work that typifies Milhaud's manifesto of clarity and in which the polyphonic textures are never allowed to obscure the melodic source material.

This quartet received its premiere in 1973 at Congregation Adath Jeshurun, performed by an ad hoc professional quartet that took the synagogue's name for the occasion. After that the piece fell into oblivion, where it remained even after its publication in Paris. Although it could be found in some bibliographic listings and catalogues of Milhaud's works, even Milhaud advocates and aficionados were generally unaware of its existence. Its rediscovery by the Milken Archive occurred by chance in the course of a filmed interview with Mme. Milhaud in her Paris home in the summer of 2000 as part of the Archive's oral history project. Its public revival was marked in 2003 by its New York premiere (and its only known performance to date apart from the synagogue concert in Elkins Park) at the Jewish

Theological Seminary, played by the Fountain Ensemble as part of the Seminary's and the Milken Archive's jointly sponsored international conference-festival, "Only in America."



Beginning in the late 1920s, for more than four decades, **ABRAHAM WOLF BINDER** (1895–1966) was one of the most prominent figures among the stimulating intellectual and artistic Jewish music circles in the New York area. He was also one of the few native Americans of that mostly émigré milieu of composers, musicologists, learned cantors,

other synagogue musicians, and critics who—through their sometimes overlapping academic societies and journals—promoted a renaissance of interest in serious deliberations about Judaically related music. At the same time, from a practical perspective, they sought to raise the musical standards in American synagogues.

Binder was reared in an orthodox environment (his father was a *ba'al t'filla*, or lay cantor), and he commenced his Jewish musical experiences as a boy chorister in an orthodox synagogue. At the age of fourteen in the densely concentrated eastern European immigrant neighborhood of New York's Lower East Side, he led a choir for the locally distinguished cantor Abraham Singer, and through various succeeding positions and associations and self-tutored studies, he acquired a thorough familiarity with the full range of the eastern and west-central European cantorial and

synagogue choral repertoire. It was within the American Reform movement, however, that he eventually used that knowledge and early experience to make his most important contributions and leave his most enduring mark—not only as a composer for the liturgy, but equally as a pedagogue, writer, lecturer, editor, choral director, and general savant. Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries or colleagues, he can be credited with having lifted the American Reform musical scene out of its nationwide malaise by introducing substantial amounts of authentic tradition. As a prime mover in that restoration of liturgical music tradition, he enriched and infused Reform practice with long-established melodies, biblical cantillation, and the adapted work of some of the principal European synagogue composers of the modern era. At the same time, he befriended many of the synagogue composers who immigrated to America during the 1930s and 1940s, and he encouraged them to continue expanding the aggregate repertoire with their own compositions.

Born in New York City, Binder attended the Settlement Music School there, and then Columbia University from 1917 to 1920, graduating from the New York College of Music with a bachelor of music degree. During that time, in addition to various choral conducting positions, he was appointed music director of the YMHA/YWHA (Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association, now known as the 92nd Street Y, a Jewish counterpart to the YMCA network), where, in addition to teaching music, he organized a choral society and an orchestra. He also became an instructor of liturgical music in 1921 at the Jewish Institute of Religion, which merged in 1950 with Hebrew Union College (the rabbinical school and training institute of the Reform Movement) to become the New York branch of the principal campus in Cincinnati. When the New York school established America's first academically oriented cantorial ordination and degree

program (the School of Sacred Music), in 1952, he was able to offer his knowledge to future cantors there. In 1953 Hebrew Union College conferred upon him an honorary doctor of Hebrew letters degree (D.H.L.). From 1954 until 1958 he also lectured on Jewish music and liturgy at Union Theological Seminary in New York, the premiere nondenominational liberal Protestant institution.

Meanwhile, Binder became the music director at the Stephen S. Wise Free Synagogue in New York, one of the city's leading Reform congregations, named in honor of the great American Zionist leader and Reform rabbi. (The word *free* in the synagogue's name referred partly to its rabbis' right to speak freely about Zionism, which at that time was actually prohibited—sometimes by contract—in some Reform congregations, as well as their right to speak about the labor union movement.) Binder's visits to Palestine in 1924 and 1932, and to Israel in 1952, introduced him to Israeli musical activity and to important elements of Hebrew Palestinian and Israeli song, which then informed some of his own compositions and arrangements and inspired him to promote the music of Israel in America. His two-volume publication of arrangements, *New Palestinian Folksongs* (1926; 1933), was one of the first widely available vehicles in modern format for the American public.

Binder was one of the founders and principal activists of the American Palestine Music Association—MAILAMM (the acronym for *makhon aretz [eretz] israel [yisra'el] la-mada'ey [l'mada'ey] musika*)—one of the most important and sophisticated Jewish music organizations in America, whose objectives were to assist the Palestine Institute of Musical Sciences, to promote a musical bond between Palestine and the Diaspora, and to encourage Jewish musical creativity through concert programs, academic seminars, and

educational programs in the United States. In 1934 it became affiliated with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with the aim of establishing there its Jewish music library as well as a research department. Eventually Binder broke with the group and established a second organization, the Jewish Music Forum, more specifically and more narrowly geared to local contemporary music programs, discussions, and scholarly lectures and papers, which were published in its annual bulletins. The Jewish Music Forum also functioned as a means for professional participants in various aspects of Jewish music to share ideas. (MAILAMM's de facto demise was a result of the commencement of the Second World War, which made pursuit of its aims in Palestine nearly impossible.)

Binder was the editor of the third edition (1932) of the *Union Hymnal*, which, notwithstanding his many compositions and variety of other activities, might be considered his most indelible legacy and his most profound contribution. Published by the Reform movement originally in 1897 (2nd edition, 1914) as the official adjunct to its *Union Prayerbook*, its contents consisted—before Binder's work on it—largely of second-rate hymns, mostly in English, and many adaptations from non-Jewish sources such as opera, classical lieder and oratorio, and Western folksong. It contained very little in the way of tradition. Binder carefully rethought its entire purpose and aesthetic and thoroughly revised the hymnal to include many established tunes from eastern and western European Ashkenazi traditions. He also included melodies and settings extracted from the works of some of the major European synagogue composers, such as Salomon Sulzer, Louis Lewandowski, Samuel Naumbourg, and Eliezer Gerowitz—who were introduced to the American Reform Synagogue for the first time, albeit in adapted and abbreviated versions that made them

appropriate for the American Reform worship format. Many congregational tunes that eventually predominated for decades in synagogues throughout America, orthodox and traditional as well as Reform, thus entered the American Jewish consciousness as a result of Binder's efforts on this 3rd edition. These tunes included the most ubiquitous and once nearly exclusive versions of *adon olam* and *ein keloheinu* (the mistakenly so-called Freudenthal melody, after the organist and choirmaster in Braunschweig, Germany, who first printed and perhaps adapted—but did not compose—the tune in that synagogue's hymnal in the 1840s). The *Union Hymnal* thus constituted a watershed event in the musical development of the Reform movement, giving it (or restoring) its musical roots; and it also had a ripple effect among American Jewry in general.

Binder was appointed to be the consultant on Jewish music for the United States *Armed Forces Hymnal*, which was prepared for servicemen during the Second World War. Published in 1941, it included appropriate hymns for the three principal American faiths: Protestant Christian, Roman Catholic, and Jewish.

As a composer, Binder is remembered chiefly for his numerous liturgical choral settings, which include many individual prayers as well as entire services. Some of his once-popular earlier works, such as his children's oratorio *Judas Maccabeus* (1919), are long forgotten, but many of his later prayer settings became part of the standard repertoire in Reform congregations and are sung to this day. He also wrote several classically oriented Hebrew and Yiddish art songs, which may be considered worthy components of the aggregate American Jewish lieder repertoire. And he tried his hand as well at orchestral composition, although those pieces are now obscure. For the most part, he was at his best as a miniaturist

in his succinct artistic expressions of Hebrew liturgy for Reform services.

Binder's book *Biblical Chant* (1959) was at one time widely used as a guide to cantillation, although it has been superseded by more recent studies on the subject. He also wrote monographs, entries for encyclopedias and other reference works, and journal articles. In 1971 Irene Heskes edited and published posthumously a number of his lectures and writings under the title *Studies in Jewish Music: The Collected Writings of A. W. Binder*. This volume continues to serve as a valuable resource.

TWO HASSIDIC MOODS

As a composer, Binder's most successful work and principal reputation rests on his vocal music. Yet his *Two Hassidic Moods* (1934) for string quartet, little known and still in unpublished manuscript, is probably his finest exception. As the title suggests, the piece explores moods and even altered states associated with Hassidic mysticism, although it does not quote any known or established Hassidic tunes. The melodic material here appears to be entirely original. The work does, however, rely on certain modalities typical of Hassidic song—modalities that Hassidim adopted from their surrounding host cultures in the Ukraine and Poland during the 18th and 19th centuries but which have come to be perceived as emblematic of Hassidic expression. In that sense, Binder treats his material in the context of traditionally Hassidic aesthetics and sensibilities.

The first movement, *Meditation*, has the characteristic feeling of meditative, soulful prayer among Hassidim. Just as the more complex Hassidic *niggunim* (religious melodies) typically begin slowly and increase in the intensity of mystical closeness and clinging to the Divine

essence, the tempo of this movement builds gradually as the melodic ideas are developed and repeated with variations in different string combinations. The mood then reverts to a slow yet pulsating dance feeling, reflecting an even deeper level of the desired spiritual ecstasy and climax, which segues to a concluding cadenza for the cello.

The second movement, *Dance*, also begins slowly—this time almost as if to suggest a gradual series of warm-up movements in preparation for an actual dance. The movement is built on a simple motive and its continuous development through alterations, fragmentation, and augmentation and expansion. Following another solo cadenza for the cello, the entire ensemble engages in a vigorous dance. After a brief lyric interruption, the momentum returns and increases until the movement's conclusion.

This string quartet conveys, through the standard artistic devices of Western composition, some of the quintessential fervor and entranced states of Hassidic prayer, song, and dance—which can be intertwined on several levels in Hassidic perceptions of communication with God. The piece focuses on two aspects of Hassidic life: meditative contemplation, whose goal is to reach a state of the soul's clinging to God with ecstatic love (*hitlahavut*); and joy—at that very closeness to the Divine, but also as a continual celebration of life. Although such fast-paced dance might appear on its surface to represent simple frivolity, in the Hassidic world it becomes a form of profound ecstasy in the context of religious experience, as much so as quiet contemplation. These two movements, therefore, are interrelated and might be considered two manifestations of a single spiritual encounter.



Although her parents were part of the Viennese Jewish community, **RUTH SCHONTHAL** (b. 1924) was born in Hamburg, where they were living at the time. She began her musical studies at the age of five at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin, where she had piano and theory lessons. Shortly

after the elections of 1932–33 led to the National Socialist regime, however, Jews were no longer permitted to attend such institutions, and she was expelled as a Jewess in 1935. As the persecution increased, her family emigrated and sought refuge in Stockholm, where she continued her studies at the Royal Academy of Music. There she studied piano with Olaf Wibergh and composition with Ingemar Liljefors, and in 1940 her first piano sonatina was published. But when safety for Jews in Sweden began to appear less secure, she and her family left and became refugees once again—this time in Mexico City (to which they had to travel via the Soviet Union) in 1941. She continued composition studies with Manuel Ponce, and at the age of nineteen she was the soloist in the premiere of her own piano concerto (*Concerto romantico*) at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. When the great émigré composer Paul Hindemith (also a refugee from the Third Reich) came to Mexico City on a concert tour, he had occasion to meet Schonthal and hear some of her piano works. He offered her admission and a scholarship at Yale, where he had been on the faculty since 1940—an offer she quickly accepted, graduating in 1948.

For a time in the 1950s and 1960s Schonthal's serious composing entered a phase of partial hiatus, as it became necessary for her to help with the support of her family. (By then she was married to an artist, with whom she had two sons, in addition to one with her first husband in Mexico.) She took several part-time teaching positions; played piano in bars, cocktail lounges, and supper clubs; and wrote popular songs and music for television commercials. By the early 1970s she was once again composing in earnest, and she was able to devote the major part of her artistic energies to new works and to the continued development of her stylistic approach and technical procedures.

More romanticist than modernist, yet fully conversant with 20th-century developments, Schonthal pretty much resisted the sway of both the European and American avant-garde forces. But some of those influences are still to be found within her synthesized aesthetic, which includes many elements of the aggregate European musical tradition, Mexican folk music, aleatoric aspects, and even occasional nods to more recent so-called minimalism. She sees all these factors not as artistic ends in themselves, but as tools to serve her primary concern: the conveying of emotion. By her own observation, she envisions her work "as a mirror held up to a world full of complex human emotions." And she has acknowledged to students of her work that she conceives of music as a dense tapestry of musical associations in which the individual elements are "linked to each other in multiple, symbiotic relationships."

Schonthal has been the recipient of numerous commissions for chamber music, operas, symphonic works, and piano and organ pieces. Her large-scale works include a second piano concerto (1977) and her operas *The Courtship of Camilla* (A. A. Milne), and

Jocasta (1996–97), to a libretto by Helene Cixous—a reworking of the Oedipus story (produced in New York in 1998) in which the two principal characters are each represented by an actor, a singer, and a dancer. Among her important smaller-scale piano compositions are *Gestures* (1978–79), which explores her idea of "emotional time" versus "metrical time"; *Canticles of Hieronymus* (1986), after paintings by Bosch; *Self Portrait of the Artist as an Older Woman* (1991); and *From the Life of a Pious Woman* (1999). Her chamber music, apart from the String Quartet no. 3 recorded here, includes traditional forms—such as her quartets nos. 1 (1962) and 2, *In the Viennese Manner* (1983); as well as creative combinations such as *Collagen* (1991), for soprano, flute, two clarinets, cello, piano, synthesizer, and percussion, based partly on the work of the Berlin Dada artist Hannah Hoeh, a friend of her family's in the 1930s; *A Bird Flew Over Jerusalem* (1992), for flute, piano, and electronic tape, which addresses a clash of cultures and religious traditions; *Abendruhe mit süßem Traum* (1993, rev. 1996), for cello, piano, vibraphone, and timpani; and *Bells of Sarajevo* (1997), for clarinet and prepared piano. She has written a number of guitar works, including *Fantasia in a Nostalgic Mood* (1978) and *Fantasy-Variations on a Jewish Liturgical Theme* (1994, rev. 1997), for electric guitar. Her many songs and other vocal pieces have included settings of poetry of Lorca, Rilke, Yeats, Wordsworth, and Whitman—as well as some of her own.

She has been honored with several important awards and citations, including the Internationaler Künstlerinnen Preis of the city of Heidelberg in 1994, and an exhibition at the Prinz Carl am Kornmarkt Museum was devoted to her life and work. In the United States she has received awards and grants from ASCAP (American Society of Composers and Publishers) and Meet the Composer. She has also served on the

faculty of New York University from 1979 to 2004 and at SUNY (State University of New York) at Purchase.

In 1996 Schonthal was invited to compose a piece about the Berlin Wall and its dismantling. In one section she incorporated the infamous Horst Wessel song, the official anthem of the Nazi party from 1931 on (banned by law in postwar Germany to this day), whose lyrics she still remembers hearing as a child from her family's balcony as the storm troopers marched through the streets: "Already millions are looking to the swastika full of hope.... Soon Hitler flags will fly over every street.... When Jewish blood will spurt from our knives, then things will be twice as good!" After the elections of 1932–33 resulted in Hitler's appointment as chancellor, the song, which had been adapted to a much-earlier tune by Wessel—a party organizer who was killed in a confrontation with Communist Party members and then glorified as a Nazi martyr—was commonly sung together with *Deutschland über Alles* (the national anthem) at official events. Schonthal built what she calls a "gruesome parody" around the song.

"For me," Schonthal has said, "the contrasting elements—the beautiful-ugly, tension-release, good-evil—are opposite ends of one and the same thing. They have a magnetic attraction towards each other; they are never static. I deliberately combine the good old with the good new, because of my background and because I believe that every revolution throws out the baby with the bathwater. I am not religious—on the contrary—but I believe in a spirit of devotion."

In 1999, in honor of her seventy-fifth birthday, the prestigious Academy of the Arts in Berlin (Akademie der Künste) presented a full concert of her music in the very city she was forced to leave more than sixty years earlier—where, as a nine-year-old girl, she had become unwelcome.

STRING QUARTET NO. 3 *In Memoriam Holocaust*

In composing her String Quartet no. 3 (1997), which is subtitled *In Memoriam Holocaust*, Schonthal was fully reticent about the artistic as well as ethical dangers inherent in trying to represent through music the calculated annihilation of European Jewry. "I always wanted to stay away from the Holocaust," she explained in a 1999 interview, "because I didn't want to trivialize it."

"Some composers 'use' it," she lamented, referring to the continual opportunistic efforts to exploit the event for personal career attention—a phenomenon that seems to be on the rise even at the beginning of the 21st century. "They make decorative material out of it—cheap stuff." Still, Schonthal realized that art is too powerful a medium to eliminate this subject altogether from consideration as a vehicle—not so much of depicting the Holocaust, but of ensuring its perpetual remembrance. "The challenge here is that when you want to convert something into art with an agenda like that, ultimately it still must be art—it still must be a work on its own." She feels that eventually she found a way in this work, by using the quartet as a representation of four different personal experiences and reactions, including the most significant and telling element of all: nothing and nothingness. One of the defining features of the Germans' collective murder of European Jewry—one that in many ways distinguishes it from all previous massacres, perpetrated horrors, and even attempted genocides throughout history—is that the Jews' death was essentially for no purpose, to no advantage to its enemies, and to accomplish no objective—for nothing. "Nothing—this is a moment the quartet captures," Schonthal emphasized.



In the first movement, each player takes on the role of an individual victim of the German mass murder. After the slow, relatively dissonant introduction, the four parts become independent of one another. Their individual rhythmic and melodic motifs become interspersed with collective anguish, portrayed in the music by multilayered swirls of sound and abrasive shrieks in the upper registers of each instrument. A series of parched, edgy repeated chords and single-pitch patterns in angular rhythms expresses desolation as a sort of existential nothingness. The unmitigated panic and distress at the end of the movement rings transparently in high and low ends of the registers.

The second movement, *Lament and Prayer*, is introduced by an extended rhapsodic and passionate solo cello passage, a sort of soliloquy, which the other three instruments join incrementally. Dissonances are more moderate than in the first movement, but there is an underlying disharmony. A recurring three-note motive with an augmented interval—mediant-raised supertonic to tonic—represents the scale of one of the principal Ashkenazi prayer modes in eastern European cantorial tradition: the so-called *ahava raba* mode, which, although it has come to have a distinctly “Jewish” perception and association, is derived historically from the Arabic *hijaz* mode. The movement concludes with an air of prayer, which nonetheless offers no solace in the music. If indeed it is prayer, it is prayer as an unanswerable question. “The listener is meant briefly to relive these moments,” the composer has stated. “That is the function of this musical memorial.” Its world premiere was given in 2002 (two years after its recording for the Milken Archive) in Washington, D.C.

Since the mid-1970s, composer, performer, and record and concert producer **JOHN ZORN** (b. 1953) has been one of the most illustrious and charismatic figures associated with the avant-garde world of alternative, experimental, fusion-based, and free improvisational expression known as New York’s “downtown” music scene.

Born in New York City, Zorn attended the United Nations International School and then went on to Webster College in St. Louis. There, he came into contact with the Black Artists Group (BAG) and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), which exerted profound influences on his subsequent path; and he turned to the saxophone as his principal instrument, becoming an accomplished virtuoso and a leading innovator in terms of its expanded possibilities. After a brief sojourn on the West Coast, he returned to New York and began making a name for himself in the stimulating downtown milieu—an environment in which he flourished naturally and whose devotion to spontaneous, communal participation and collective extemporization encouraged and nurtured his own propensities.

Zorn quickly caused a stir with his array of unorthodox sonic experiments, which at that early stage included blowing duck calls into bowls of water and creating strange howling sounds on a removed saxophone mouthpiece. He began to appropriate freely the sounds from what he has called the “media bombardment” of our age. More conventional musicians might lament the onslaught of industrial noises, commercial cacophonies, and electronic media-induced sounds that permeate our surroundings, but Zorn welcomes them as inspirational influences as well as extramusical parameters in his pieces. Virtually all sounds, whatever their source, have come in principle to be fair game for his musical manipulation and incorporation.

Zorn's experimental work with rock and jazz, especially in fusions with other genres and styles, has attracted a group of loyalists that has been characterized as a cult following. But in the aggregate his work draws on a much broader variety of his experience, which has included classical forms, hard-core and punk rock, eastern European Jewish band music, non-Western ethnic traditions, and film, cartoon, popular, and improvised music apart from traditional jazz. He credits a selective variety of artistic sources as having fueled his early development: American innovators within the mold of cultivated art music, such as composers Charles Ives, Elliott Carter, John Cage, and Harry Partch; the 20th-century phase of the European tradition as manifested in the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern) as well as the work of Stravinsky, Boulez, and Kagel; experimental jazz and rock; and avant-garde theater, film, visual art, and literature. Like "downtown" composers in general, his music defies conventional or academic categories. But perhaps even more than his contemporaries from that world, Zorn has pursued an irreverent and intensely idiosyncratic brand of expression that often dissolves the boundaries between and among previously established styles, while blurring the demarcation between traditionally perceived composition in the Western sense (i.e., organized and then notated musical development) and improvisation. And frequently he has eroded the distinction between recording and live performance. Some of his pieces are in fact best suited to the recording studio as an actual medium, where they can be assembled bit by bit, moment by moment, event by event, and gesture by gesture.

Particularly curious is Zorn's proudly acknowledged debt to cartoon sound tracks and their composers, whose sonic world, he maintains, is similar to his own: "That comes from all the films and TV shows I absorbed at an early age." *Keyboard* magazine once referred to his music as resembling "soundtracks for movies never made."

A significant leap to commercial success came with Zorn's release of his 1986 LP album, *The Big Gundown*, which included arrangements of music by the Italian film composer Ennio Morricone. As in a number of successive pieces, he employed self-contained blocks of sound that alternate abruptly among contrasting styles, timbres, and sound sources. He notated these parameters on index cards to introduce structure into otherwise free collective improvisation. Hence the name "file card pieces," from the cards that contain his jotted down musical ideas (which he calls "musical moments"), which are then sorted and ordered as suggested instructions to the other performers. This became one of his early trademarks. In his improvisatory "game pieces," that structure, for example, is provided by using the cards to steer the performers' interaction, without specifying the precise musical material of the individual parts.

Zorn's other significant recordings from the 1980s include *Archery*, a set of electronically colored improvisations; *Ganryu Islands*, duets between Zorn on reeds and the Japanese shamisen player Michihiro Sato; and *Spillane*, the title track of which is informed by the B-movie music from the popular Mickey Spillane detective films of the 1950s. During the 1980s Zorn was cited by no less a classically oriented critic than John Rockwell in *The New York Times* as the single most interesting, important, and influential composer to arise from Manhattan's downtown avant-garde since Steve Reich and Philip Glass. "What they [Reich and Glass] were to the 1970s," wrote Rockwell, "he [Zorn] is to the 1980s." Zorn continued to compose and record prolifically, and to celebrate his fortieth birthday, in 1993, he played a monthlong series of concerts—each with distinct music—at the Knitting Factory, which by then had become the focal point of downtown music.

Much has been made in the press of Zorn's "rediscovery" of his Jewish heritage in the early 1990s. Although

a Jew by birth, he had not previously been involved with either religious or secular Jewish culture, but now he began exploring Jewish roots in his music—in the context of his own ever-evolving aesthetics. His first composition to address Jewish subject matter was *Kristallnacht* (1992), a Holocaust-related work inspired by the memory of the orchestrated pogrom throughout the Third Reich on November 9–10, 1938, which, following five years of increasing persecution, became the prelude to Germany's eventual attempt to annihilate European Jewry altogether. A pastiche of songs and disparate sound elements that has been dubbed a "brutal sound portrait of the Holocaust"—ranging from references to traditional Jewish folk melos to chaotic, discordant, violent, screeching, and even ear-shattering noises—the recording contained a provocative warning on its jacket concerning its high-frequency extremes at the limits of human hearing and beyond: "Prolonged or repeated listening is not advisable, as it may result in temporary or permanent ear damage." *Kristallnacht* marked a watershed in Zorn's career, and following its release, he increasingly promoted himself and his self-invented persona as a "Jewish composer."

That newfound Jewish identity fitted comfortably into the downtown school's partial shift during the 1990s from an essentially cosmopolitan sensibility to the concern with ethnic roots that had already fixed its hold on popular imagination elsewhere in American society. As the downtown musicians now began to exhibit curiosity about an array of world musics outside the Western cultural orbit, Zorn's refashioned image as a "Jewish composer"—whatever that might mean—in some ways embodied that trend. For him, as with some fellow downtown musicians, that tendency toward ethnic awareness could provide an artistic anchor—a vehicle for focus and even a sense of mission.

Also in the 1990s, Zorn, together with Marc Ribot, formulated a new initiative called Radical Jewish Culture, whose stated purpose it is to extract, expose, and illuminate elements that he perceives to be Jewish components of American culture. Not all those subjective perceptions of what may constitute Jewish components, however, are necessarily shared either by mainstream (including reasonably liberal) Jewish cultural or social critics or by Judaically informed artists, many of whom would view some of those components as at most marginal if not superficial trappings. Others would go further to dismiss altogether the proposition that cartoon aesthetics, industrial noises, or pop- and rock-oriented fusions can have any legitimate role vis-à-vis Jewish artistic expression. For them, applying such features to cantorial chants or Jewish folk tunes, for example, risks diluting and even cheapening, rather than elucidating, Jewish content. To the most cynical detractors, some of what travels under that radical Jewish umbrella—and even what might motivate the undertaking in the first place—smacks of a questionable cross between contrived "hype" and a version of the post-1960s bandwagon of ethnic appropriation. How more recent, post-1990s phenomena such as vulgar sounds of human bodily functions or pornographic imagery fit into any conception, even radical, of a "Jewish composer"—presumably connoting a composer whose *music* is intended for acceptance as "Jewish"—poses yet further questions.

Still, actual Jewish themes have inspired some of Zorn's most admirable works, some of which do indeed legitimately integrate aspects of authentic Jewish melos from a variety of sources. Improvisational chamber pieces, such as *Bar Kokhba* and *Issachar*, contain echoes of prewar eastern European Jewish life and explore comparisons between jazz and instrumental Jewish folk music. His celebrated ensemble, Masada (one of his several bands), is named after the plateau fortress

above the Dead Sea in Israel, where a fanatical group of zealots staged a last holdout against Rome and—according to a legend that has been subjected in recent years to historical reexamination—committed collective suicide (which, at least in the case of the children, must be admitted as homicide) rather than surrender. He has written more than 100 “Masada tunes” for the group. Another ensemble, Bar Kokhba—a sextet named after the Jewish rebel leader who organized an ill-fated revolt against Roman authority in 132 C.E.—was formed in 1996 and continues to flourish.

Zorn’s compositional approach has been described as “kaleidoscopic” because of the way many of his pieces present rapidly changing flashes of unrelated and fleeting sound elements, gestures, and series of musical moments—all in a quick-paced flow of sonic information. The music, which can appear to leap from idea to idea and from idiom to idiom in distilled abstractions, without much in the way of development, can have a hyperkinetic air about it. By the dawn of the new millennium, when his reputation as the “bad boy” of the avant-garde was firmly established, his works had already appeared on more than sixty recordings.

Not all of Zorn’s works are completely improvisatory. His notated compositions have been commissioned and performed by such “uptown” ensembles and artists as the New York Philharmonic, the Kronos Quartet, the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, the WDR Symphonieorchester Koln (Cologne), and the Bayerischer Staatsoper. His own record label, Tzadik (a Hebrew word signifying a righteous spiritual leader, more often than not in Hassidic contexts), on which his music appears, has also included works of such academically rooted outsiders to the downtown aesthetics as Charles Wuorinen.

A part of Zorn’s Jewish self-discovery has been his mantra that Jews are inevitably and unalterably

“outsiders” drifting among host cultures—including the American environment—that will never accept them. For a composer so successfully entrenched in so patently an American world as Zorn’s, that claim of forced marginalization as a Jew can ring hollow. If anything, his Jewish phase has only brought him increased attention in the context of American awakenings to ethnic—including Jewish—musics. To what extent that charge is a function of the culture of defiance and rebellion that partly informed the rise of the downtown scene in the first place—and whether there is a tongue-in-cheek aspect to it, perhaps even to provoke legitimate discourse—is anyone’s guess. But it is difficult to ignore the publicity value of such allegations.

It is even more difficult to reconcile Zorn’s perception of a culture closed to Jewish identity with the very mission of his Radical Jewish Culture project, whose *raison d’être* seems to be founded on the assumption that Jewish components are already so embedded in American culture as to require rescue. Also, whatever the currents of anti-Semitism that might once have presented obstacles to American Jewish musicians (symphony orchestra conducting posts, for example, or factions within the composers establishment), it could now be argued astutely that Jews have become consummate insiders on the American music scene in general. The sheer number of non-Jewish American composers who have written works with consciously intended Jewish connections is telling in itself. And certainly Zorn must be considered an ultimate insider within his own chosen downtown arena.

Zorn is also noted for his vocal repudiation of assimilation. It is unclear what he means, since the very nature of his cherished fusions with quintessentially American genres, influences, and sound bespeaks a fruitful form of assimilation.

In the framework of his Radical Jewish Culture movement, he has conferred the status of “Jewish music” on pieces by composers who happen to be able to claim Jewish lineage, but where the music itself has no Jewish content, connection, or even intention—music to which the religion or ethnic ancestry of the composer is entirely irrelevant. That stance has aroused some critical rebuke, hinting as it does of the kind of racial identification once intended to exclude. For it was identity-based exclusion—policies based solely on the religion or ethnicity of artists and scientists rather than on their work—that reached its zenith in the Third Reich, and to some extent in the Soviet Union. Zorn’s thoroughly different—opposite, in fact—purpose in such “Jewish music” labeling relates of course to inclusion. But it may turn out to be a misguided inclusiveness that tends to attenuate actual Jewish substance. Writing about Zorn in a 1999 *New York Times* analysis, Adam Shatz saw it as a “prank” and deplored the result as radical kitsch. “Ultimately it [Zorn’s perception of ‘Jewish music’] rests on a racial definition of Jewish music that Jews have battled since Richard Wagner published his notorious tirade, *Judaism in Music*, in 1849,” he maintained. “The fact that this definition is now being pressed into the service of [Jewish] tribalism rather than anti-Semitism is little consolation.”

How seriously some of Zorn’s rhetoric should be taken, how coarse a grain of kosher salt should be added, or to what degree his purpose is tied to its shock value, is not always apparent. Yet for all the challenges to his theorizing about Jewish music or identity, there is no mistaking his musical talent. “He can with equal justice be called a ‘serious’ musician,” wrote Rockwell, “as serious and as important as anyone in his generation.” That was, however, in the 1980s. That Zorn has discarded, rethought, and reformulated many of the premises and procedures traditionally embraced by classical as well as other composers is an undeniable part of his originality.

But how far-out is too far in terms of some of his more recent outlandish recorded provocations, and at what point the creative becomes the bizarre for its own sake, must remain for future assessments from the more removed perspective of his entire oeuvre.

KOL NIDRE

John Zorn’s *Kol Nidre* for string quartet is atypical of the bulk of his work in its conservatively reverential exposition and in its notational precision, which calls for no improvisation. And it is neither a setting nor an arrangement of that famous Yom Kippur signature melody. Rather, it is a clever, imaginative, and perfectly respectful exploration of barely recognizable snippets (confined for the most part to as few as two pitches continually transposed, extended, and developed) of only three of the constituent motives and phrases of the traditional and exclusive *kol nidre* melody in the Ashkenazi rite. An entirely original composition that illustrates Zorn’s classical capabilities, it relies on traditional source material only as a departure point, evoking the mood of supreme awe and somber introspection that governs the holiest of days on the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement.

The *kol nidre* text is recited or sung just prior to sundown on the eve of Yom Kippur. It is an early medieval legal formula in Aramaic that absolves Jews, in advance, of all vows that may be made in the new year (“from this Yom Kippur until the next”) that do not affect the interests of others and that might be made rashly, impulsively, unwittingly, or under duress. It is a petition for release from vows between man and God, not between persons.

This *kol nidre* melody is one of the group of fixed tunes of the Ashkenazi rite known collectively as the *missinai* tunes, which date to the medieval Rhineland communities and have remained in continuous use to this day throughout the Ashkenazi world. Apart from biblical

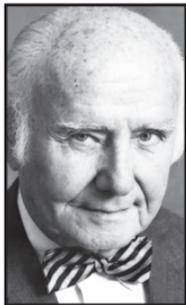
cantillation and possibly certain derived modalities, the *missinai* tune tradition forms the oldest musical layer of *minhag Ashkenaz*—the Ashkenazi custom, or rite, that is embraced by Jews whose ancestry dates to western, central, and east-central Europe.

This particular melody was probably one of the latest annexations to the *missinai* tune category (possibly as late as the 15th century, with the first documentation in the 16th century) as a fixed tune in all Ashkenazi synagogues throughout the world. It has no known discretionary alternative, apart from reasonable variation and extension that still preserves its audible identity. The melody has remained ingrained in collective Ashkenazi Jewish consciousness as a *sine qua non* of the High Holy Days—more so than any other *missinai* tune and, arguably, more deeply than any other synagogue melody for any occasion. It has even spilled over into the popular entertainment realm, divorced from its liturgical context altogether. Eventually it acquired pop versions and arrangements even for non-Jewish performers, such as Johnny Mathis, who included it in a slick but “souful” rendition on an LP recording in the 1950s.

The traditional *kol nidre missinai* melody is really a conglomerate series and assortment of loosely related, individual, and separable motifs and phrases that have acquired variants over time—and from one generation to another—rather than a precise tune in the Western sense (i.e., the Western “closed form” with a fixed beginning, middle, and conclusion, or an established order of phrases and sections). Its complexity probably reflected the structural properties of certain ornate, labyrinthine Western medieval song forms. But its free form—in which those constituent motifs can be alternated, reordered, repeated, repositioned, and even improvised in different ways, almost as a “mix-and-match” procedure—reflects the equally significant inherited Near Eastern influences that were operative even on the early formulation of Ashkenazi tradition.

Although Zorn’s piece draws exclusively on a few fragments of these motives and on bits of the original modality, some of the principal operative features of those motives—especially the identifying intervals—are not present, even in the initial statement. Yet those are the very features that would provide audible reference to the melody, while Zorn’s selected fragments are not sufficient to do so. Without prior knowledge of the title, therefore, the identity of the *kol nidre* tune is not necessarily recognizable even to those thoroughly familiar with it—especially in the absence of the rhythmic parameters of the words. If minimalism amounts to stripping down to the bare essentials, then this treatment might be considered “radical” or “minimal” minimalism, since even the basic skeleton of the signature opening phrase is reduced simply to the first two pitches: the tonic and the raised seventh (leading tone) of the scale, which could apply to any number of unrelated tunes. Still, once it is realized that the piece is inspired by *kol nidre*, the allusions to its motifs, however fragmentary, do make musical sense in their continuous permutations, alterations, and transpositions. Most of the linear movement occurs in parallel perfect fourths in the inner voices, suggesting the antiquity of liturgical chant. The outer voices provide a sustained pedal point effect.

Written in 1996, this piece shows Zorn capable of behaving himself with dignity when he so chooses and creating a piece of genuine Judaic connection and content. Among its many performances was one on September 11, 2002, by the string quartet Ethel at the site of the massacre of civilians at New York’s World Trade Center, for a ceremony marking the first anniversary of the Arab-Islamic attack on America. There are several alternate versions of the piece, including one for string orchestra and another for clarinet quartet.



Although he excelled in a number of musical genres, sacred as well as secular and classical as well as commercial, **SHOLOM SECUNDA** (1894–1974) will always be remembered primarily for his illustrious association with the American Yiddish musical theater. He established himself as one of the preeminent composers and songwriters in that arena of mass popular entertainment known as Second Avenue, which flourished among Yiddish-speaking immigrant generations from the late 19th century through the 1940s.

Born in Aleksandriya, in the Kherson region of the Ukraine, the young Secunda became a coveted boy alto soloist in major synagogue choirs, and he soon gained a reputation as a brilliant wunderkind boy *hazzan* (cantor). Following a pogrom in Nikolayev, where his family had relocated, he emigrated to America with them in 1907 and, until his voice changed, was known in the New York area too as “the prince of the young *hazzanim*.” By 1913 he was engaged as a chorister in Yiddish theater productions, for which he also began writing songs. A year later he began studies at the Institute for Musical Art (now The Juilliard School), and shortly afterward, together with Solomon Shmulevitz (1868–1943), a well-established songwriter and lyricist for Yiddish theater and vaudeville, he wrote his first full-length score—*Yoysher* (Justice). In that same time frame, the legendary prima donna Regina Prager introduced one of his songs, *Heym, zise heyim* (Home Sweet Home), which became his first real success. But after

his studies at the Institute, his interest in classical expression remained. When he became acquainted with the music of Ernest Bloch, he was struck by the high artistic level to which Jewish music could be elevated, and he took lessons with Bloch for about a year.

After working in Yiddish theaters in Philadelphia for three years, Secunda saw his first operetta with his own orchestration, *Moshka*, produced in New York (Brooklyn) in 1926. As his composing for the Yiddish theater increased, he began simultaneously turning his attention to serious Yiddish poetry with a view to writing art songs. But the lure of the theater remained paramount for him in those years, along with opportunities in Yiddish radio programming and broadcasting. Between 1935 and 1937 alone, Secunda wrote scores for at least seven shows, and he also began to experiment with more serious incidental music for Maurice Schwartz’s Yiddish Art Theater.

In the late 1930s Secunda began a rewarding artistic association with Cantor Reuben Ticker, who subsequently became the international superstar opera tenor Richard Tucker and reigned for many years at the Metropolitan Opera House. Secunda composed and arranged a considerable amount of Hebrew liturgical music for Tucker’s cantorial services, recordings, and concerts; and Tucker became the principal advocate for Secunda’s synagogue music.

All in all, Secunda wrote more than eighty operettas, melodramas, and musical shows for the Yiddish stage, in addition to numerous independent songs. Although he claimed to have concluded his Second Avenue career after *The Koshen Widow*, in 1959, he was still writing for Yiddish shows in the 1960s. His final musical—produced as late as 1973, long after the thriving days of Yiddish theater had become memory—was *Shver*

tsu zayn a yid (It's Hard to Be a Jew), a musical version of a well-known Sholom Aleichem play that was first presented in New York in 1921. But without question, his most famous song from his entire career was—and will most certainly always remain—*Bay mir bistu sheyn* (In My Eyes You're Beautiful), which he wrote for his 1932 musical comedy, *M'ken lebn nor m'lost nit* (One Could Really Live, but They Won't Let You)—officially subtitled in English as *I Would If I Could*. The song, an instant hit in the Second Avenue milieu, was shortly thereafter catapulted onto the international scene as an overnight commercial sensation, and over the years it has generated gargantuan sums in royalties and revenues. Its recording by the Andrews Sisters, with English lyrics by Sammy Cahn that bear little relation to the original Yiddish words by Secunda's collaborator, Jacob Jacobs (except for the four words of the title, retained in the original Yiddish), led to the ASCAP award for the most popular song of 1938. It was subsequently given further new treatments and arrangements in renditions by dozens of singers and orchestras—including Ella Fitzgerald, Tommy Dorsey, Guy Lombardo, the Ramsey Lewis Trio, the Barry Sisters, Judy Garland, Rudy Vallee, Kate Smith, and many others. The best-known “swing” version was introduced by Benny Goodman at Carnegie Hall, and the English version has been translated into dozens of languages. Even though it remains in many quarters only in its English or English-based version, it can still be asserted safely that *Bay mir bistu sheyn* is simply the world's best-known and longest-reigning Yiddish theater song of all time—familiar among non-Jews as well as Jews, even if they are unaware of its Second Avenue origin.

From the 1960s on, Secunda accelerated his energies toward serious concert music. In addition to the string quartet recorded here, that part of his aggregate oeuvre includes a violin concerto and an orchestral

tone poem (both recorded for the first time by the Milken Archive), as well as two major cantatas: *If Not Higher*, on a classic story by Yehuda Leib Peretz (also recorded for the Milken Archive), and *Yizkor*—both of which were sung at live performances and on television broadcasts by Richard Tucker. Secunda made no secret of his desire to be remembered principally for those classically oriented accomplishments rather than as a Yiddish theater songwriter, and following the critical success of *If Not Higher*, he is said to have remarked that he hoped that this serious work might make people forget that he was the composer of *Bay mir bistu sheyn*. That hope, however, will probably go unfulfilled.

STRING QUARTET IN C MINOR

To those for whom the name Sholom Secunda automatically evokes some of the greatest moments in popular Yiddish theatrical song from Second Avenue, any work so classically oriented and crafted as his String Quartet in C Minor will likely come as a surprise. It is, in fact, a testament to his early aspirations to become a classical composer (or “serious composer,” to invoke the label more current in his day)—an ambition that resurfaced periodically throughout his principal career in the popular as well as liturgical arenas.

On some levels, this piece is an effort in the tradition of the “ethnic nationalist” sensibilities that informed a number of late-19th-century central and east-central European as well as Russian composers—such as Dvořák, Smetana, and Borodin—and Jewish counterpart composers such as Jacob Weinberg and Joseph Achron, who were associated with the *Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volksmusik* (Society for Jewish Folk Music) in St. Petersburg, or the so-called new national school of Jewish art music. Those

composers—who discovered the artistic potential of ethnic roots—exploited and incorporated folk themes and tunes from their respective ethnic and regional traditions, not only in programmatic tone poems, but also often in the framework of standard classical forms such as symphonies, sonatas, concertos, and string quartets. Secunda's piece here offers a pastiche of interwoven but transparently recognizable Jewish melodies and motifs—mostly from Hebrew liturgy, but with some flavoring of Jewish secular sources outside the synagogue—within the context of one of the most established intimate forms of Western art music: the four-movement string quartet. In terms especially of its formal structure (less so with respect to contrapuntal technique or texture), however, Secunda's quartet looks even further back—to the 18th century and Joseph Haydn's conception of and predominance over the string quartet genre. It is almost as if Secunda were trying to imagine, in overall concept as well as in certain sections, how "Papa Haydn" might himself have handled an assignment to build a quartet around this same Jewish musical material—with some clairvoyance of late-Romantic and 20th-century clichés as well.

This is not a programmatic work in the sense of illustrating any literary or historical agenda. To the contrary, the preexisting melodies—whose sources range from High Holy Day and Three Festivals prayers to cantorial-type melismas to wedding bands—appear to have been selected arbitrarily. Their only connection to one another is their common provenance in the traditions of Ashkenazi Jewry in eastern Europe and in their transplanted stage in America. There are specific identifiable tunes with established liturgical functions, ubiquitous motifs from synagogue song in general and from biblical cantillation, and hints throughout at typical Ashkenazi patterns and modalities.

The first movement begins with a resolute yet briefly meditative prologue, with successive pronouncements by each of the four instruments. This leads to the exploration and development of the two principal themes upon which the movement is based:

- a. A well-known quasi-congregational tune for certain passages of the *ḥatzi kaddish* prayer in its rendition as an introduction to the *mussaf* services specifically on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.
- b. One of the principal chantlike motifs of the traditional Ashkenazi rendition of *kiddush* for the Three Festivals (Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot).

As an affirmation of faith, *kaddish*—whose language, apart from a Hebrew response and the concluding sentence of its full form, is Aramaic—may be perceived as a Judaic doxology. It embodies the supreme acknowledgment of God's unparalleled greatness—the ultimate expression of unqualified glorification, praise, and worship of God throughout all eternity. Among the several forms and versions of its text, each with a distinct liturgical function, the *ḥatzi kaddish* (half *kaddish*) is recited to separate the sections of the liturgy in all services where a quorum of ten (*minyan*) is present. In one of those roles, the *ḥatzi kaddish*, in effect, introduces the *mussaf*—the additional service immediately following *shaharit* (the morning service) and the biblical readings of the Torah service on Sabbaths, High Holy Days, Festivals, and the New Month, thereby separating it from the immediately preceding liturgy.

In all synagogues and services that follow the Ashkenazi rite (*minhag Ashkenaz*), there is—specifically attached to this *mussaf kaddish* on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur by requirement of canonized tradition—one of the fixed, universally accepted, and exclusive melodic patterns of the so-called *missinai* tune family. This is

essentially a group of seasonal leitmotifs associated with specific annual holidays and other seasonal events on the liturgical calendar (i.e., rather than regular weekly or daily liturgies), and many of these tunes are also assigned to specific prayer texts. Their adoption as mandatory for those occasions or texts dates for the most part to the period of *minhag Ashkenaz's* crystallization among medieval Rhineland communities.

The High Holy Day *mussaf kaddish* tune that Secunda quotes in the first movement here, however, is one of many unrelated secondary tunes that is customarily interpolated into the *missinai* pattern at the discretion of the cantor or the composer of the setting—usually for two passages beginning with the words *b'hayyeikhon uv'yomeikhon*, and *l'ella ul'ella min kol birkhata ...* Unlike the *missinai* tune (actually a series of motives rather than a continuous single melody) employed for much of the text, none of these secondary tunes is “official” or mandated as exclusive by tradition, and all of them are of much more recent origin. But the one used by Secunda here—generally attributed to Wolf Shestapol, a.k.a. Velvele Khersoner (ca. 1832–72), a learned modern-oriented cantor in the Ukraine—somehow emerged as predominant in American synagogues and is also now frequently treated as a congregational melody even when sung by the choir. As early as 1926 it was included in Israel and Samuel E. Goldfarb’s groundbreaking and influential collection, *Synagogue Melodies for the High Holy Days*, which probably contributed to its ubiquity.

Here, this melody is introduced by the cello and then joined by the other strings. It is subsequently developed by rhythmic as well as modal alterations, fragmentation, and alternating diminution and augmentation of its constituent motives. In its rhythmic transformation (from duple to triple meter) it even acquires the flavor of a quasi-Viennese waltz at one point.

The quotation from the special Festival melody for *kiddush* that constitutes the second theme in the first movement refers to the most widely established and oldest accepted version for that prayer and benediction (though also not generally considered a *missinai* tune per se), and it is derived from biblical cantillation. The melody is notable for its leap of a major 6th and its hesitation on the supertonic before cadencing on the tonic.

Kiddush (lit., sanctification) is recited or sung over wine as the symbol of joy in Jewish life (“wine cheers a man’s heart”—Psalms 104:15) before commencing the festive meal on the eve of the Sabbath, Festivals, and Rosh Hashana, with text variations applicable to each of those occasions. (A shorter version, usually recited rather than sung, also precedes the daytime meals on those occasions.) *Kiddush* is a testimony to God’s creation of the universe and an acknowledgment of His having hallowed the Jewish people through the gifts of His commandments, the Sabbath, and the appointed seasons and times of rejoicing: the Festivals. Only the Festival *kiddush*, however, has a melodic formula prescribed by tradition. (The famous melody for the Sabbath eve *kiddush*, for example, despite its familiarity now to virtually all Ashkenazi Jewry to the point of perceived oral tradition, is in fact a notated composition by the 19th-century Berlin synagogue composer Louis Lewandowski.)

In Secunda’s quartet, after the initial statement of this Festival *kiddush* melody, it is manipulated and transformed among all four string parts—in some passages reappearing as a barely recognizable echo, with the flavor of a late-Romantic-era Viennese light operetta song. It returns to its more transparent guise, however, in a recapitulation.

In some respects this movement follows a basic A-B-A structure, in which the B section is combined with

further development of elements of the A section, which function as countermelodies and counter-ideas at various points. But it could also be perceived as a continuous development of the High Holy Days *kaddish* tune interspersed with episodes derived from the Festival *kiddush* melody as well as other, extraneous melodic bits. Each such episode is introduced by some component of the High Holy Day *kaddish* tune.

Ever the theatrical composer despite his occasional protestations, Secunda frequently frames both themes from liturgical tradition in tasteful reverberations of Second Avenue, including some of its typical harmonic language and clichés, original melodic fragments with popular hints, and chromatic cascades employed as “fills.”

The second movement suggests a lyrical cantorial improvisation, built on two similar motives that could be perceived generically as reflecting either modal cadential patterns of biblical cantillation, or traditionally ubiquitous events in the complex network of Ashkenazi prayer modes and formulas known in the cantorial world as *nusah hat'filla*. In the context of a flowing, unfolding recitative, these motives are presented by the cello, then in octaves, and then developed in different registers of all four strings. But cello and first violin are featured. Emblematic ornamentation is broadened and extended to become an organic part of the melodic structure. There are no specifically identifiable tunes here, but there are recurring hints of typical modalities of eastern European brands of the prayer formulas—for example, the flattened supertonic resolving on the tonic. Accompanimental figures from the early part of the movement become the principal concluding material.

The third movement is constructed in the classical minuet form, AA-BB-A (reprise)-Trio-A-B, even though

the first theme has more the character of a waltz than a minuet. The melodic material of the A section has a typical Central European waltzlike flavor, though it does not appear to be traceable to any specific source. It proceeds to a radically different exposition, reminiscent of the melos of eastern European Jewish wedding bands of the 19th and early 20th centuries (erroneously called klezmer since the 1970s, despite that fact that the klezmerim—i.e., instrumental band musicians—played widely differing styles and types of music at different periods, from at least the Baroque on, and in disparate regions). Suggestive of uninhibited celebration-oriented dance, the mood here becomes appropriately fast and furious. The Trio section opens with material that evokes the character of classical minuets more than it does Jewish sources. But it is followed by a quotation of a familiar cadential pattern from the prayer modes of the Three Festivals, framed in turn by what appears to be original material more typical of Secunda's own songwriting aesthetic.

The fourth and final movement takes a quasi-rondo form, with recurring folk dance-like thematic material as an anchor to unrelated episodes that always return to some recognizable statement of that theme, even if altered or fragmented. The episodes contain two more melodies of the *missinai* tune group. The first is the tune that pervades the evening service for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, which, since it is generally employed as a motto applied to several prayer texts, can be called simply the High Holy Day *maariv* (evening service) tune. The second is the prescribed melody for the *aleinu* prayer text as it occurs in the *mussaf* services of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur—*aleinu l'shabe'ah la'adon hakol ...* (We adore the Lord of all)—sometimes known as the “great *aleinu*,” to distinguish it from the same text that is appended to the conclusion of all services. There is ample evidence to place the origin of both of these *missinai* tunes in the Middle Ages, and

the *aleinu* melody—with a descending triad forming its incipit, followed by an octave leap that then returns downward, initially in stepwise motion—is traceable to the 12th century.

Only the initial, signature parts of these two *missinai* tunes are provided during these episodes, unharmonized and in octaves—which gives them additional emphasis. Fragments recur, but the tunes are more suggested than developed. At the movement's climactic point, the two themes of the first movement reappear, although the High Holy Day *musaf kaddish* tune is here more prominent than the more subtle fragments of the Festival *kiddush* chant. Both elements provide the entire quartet with a cyclical veil. An accelerated coda, which is an extension of the main rondo theme, is both preceded and interrupted by recitative-like solo passages—first by the cello, then the viola, then echoed in the violins.

* * * *

Secunda's String Quartet in C Minor received its world premiere on a 1947 radio broadcast of Arturo Toscanini's weekly Sunday program. It was played by the NBC String Quartet, which was drawn from Toscanini's NBC Symphony Orchestra. After a few subsequent broadcasts, it fell into oblivion until its discovery by the Milken Archive among Secunda's papers and manuscripts.

—Neil W. Levin

About the Performers



The **JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET**, one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles for the past half century, was formed in 1946, partly at the instigation of William Schuman, then president of The Juilliard School. It has been a feature of the Juilliard landscape ever since, giving master classes and concerts every year and serving as quartet-in-residence at the conservatory, where all its members are on the Juilliard faculty. In this capacity the group has shaped and influenced generations of string players. In addition to its regular concert appearances in the major performing venues of Europe, Asia, and North and South America, the Juilliard Quartet has since 1962 been quartet-in-residence at the Library of Congress. The group has given more than sixty premieres of new American works. It was the first ensemble to play Bartók's quartets in the United States, and its performances of Schoenberg's quartets in the 1950s helped rescue those works from obscurity. It has performed the work of Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt, and David Diamond, and its recording of the Debussy, Ravel, and Dutilleux quartets was selected by *The Times* of London as one of the 100 best classical CDs ever made. The ensemble's other honors include membership in the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame, and Musicians of the Year (1996) from *Musical America*. The personnel on this recording are **JOEL SMIRNOFF** and **RONALD COPES**, violins; **SAMUEL RHODES**, viola; and **JOEL KROSNICK**, cello.



Keith Burstein's *The Year's Midnight* with the Zemel Choir at St. John's Smith Square, London, which was repeated on BBC Radio 4 in January 2001 as part of a service commemorating the Holocaust. Other recent commissions include works by Paul Patterson, George Nicholson, John Dankworth, Francis Routh, and Stephen Roberts. The ensemble's commitment to music education has led to a residency at the University College in Worcester, England, public master classes and workshops, intensive courses for postgraduate students and young professionals, and the establishment of new chamber series for introducing great works to new audiences. Performing on this CD are **MICHAEL BOCHMANN** and **MARK MESSENGER**, violins; **HELEN ROBERTS**, viola; and **PETER ADAMS**, cello.



The **BINGHAM STRING QUARTET**, formed and developed under the guidance of Sidney Griller at the Royal Academy of Music in London, has earned an international reputation as one of the finest

young British string quartets, with a strong commitment to new works. It has toured extensively in Great Britain and performed on the Continent and in Australia and the Near East. Regular appearances at the South Bank Centre, London, have included a number of Purcell Room recitals, a two-year residency, and education projects. The group has many critically acclaimed recordings and performs regularly on radio and television. The musicians are **STEPHEN BINGHAM** and **SALLY-ANN WEEKS**, violins; **BRENDA STEWART**, viola; and **JAMES HALSEY**, cello.

The string quartet that performs John Zorn's *Kol Nidre* was assembled specifically for this recording. Moscow-born **ILYA KALER** is professor of violin at the Indiana University School of Music. He is the only violinist ever to win gold medals in three of the most prestigious competitions—Paganini, Sibelius, and Tchaikovsky. San Francisco native **PERRIN YANG** is on the faculty of the Hochstein School of Music, where he teaches chamber music, and he is also a member of the Rochester Philharmonic. New York City-born **GEORGE TAYLOR**, violist, is on the Eastman School of Music faculty and is a member of the Black Music Repertory Ensemble. Cellist **STEVEN DOANE** is professor of cello at the Eastman School and an associate in cello at the Royal College of Music in London.

Darius Milhaud: *Études* (1973)

Publisher: Éditions Durand-Salabert-Eschig

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

Recording Producer: Tim Martyn

Recording Engineer: Tom Lazarus

Recording Project Manager: Paul Schwendener

Abraham Wolf Binder: *Two Hassidic Moods* (1934)

Recording: St. Silas Church, London, UK, November 1998

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin

Ruth Schonthal: *String Quartet no. 3* (1997)

Publisher: Furore Verlag

Recording: St. Silas Church, London, UK, February 1999

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin

John Zorn: *Kol Nidre* (1996)

Publisher: Carl Fischer

Recording: Kilbourn Hall/Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, NY, September 1999

Recording Producer: David Frost

Recording Engineer: David Dusman

Recording Project Manager: Richard Lee

Sholom Secunda: *String Quartet in C Minor* (1945)

Publisher: Williamson Music

Recording: St. Silas Church, London, UK, November 1998

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes

Recording Project Manager: Neil Levin

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.

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For purchasers of this CD, these liner notes are available in a large-page format. Address requests to linernotes@musicarc.org.

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