

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.

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

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


Lowell Milken

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



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

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

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

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read '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, director of the International Centre and Archives for Jewish Music in New York, music director of Schola Hebraica, and author of various articles, books, and monographs on Jewish music.

▩ About American Yiddish Theatrical Songs

The selections here all derive from the genre of popular Yiddish theatrical song that flourished as mass-oriented entertainment among large segments of eastern European immigrant generations in America, beginning before the turn of the 19th century until the early 1950s. This aggregate genre includes the following:

- The American Yiddish musical theater, now commonly known as “Second Avenue,” named after the lower Manhattan district where it made its American debut and gained its first audiences, and where the most important and prestigious Yiddish theaters stood. Songs in this category are from full-length theatrical productions based on plays, which were variously called operettas, musical comedies, romantic musical comedies, melodramas, or musical shows. These are to be distinguished from two more sophisticated and literary Yiddish theatrical forms in America: 1) the Yiddish Art Theater, introduced by the famous actor Maurice Schwarz, for which incidental music was often written by such composers as Lazar Weiner and Joseph Achron, who were otherwise associated with serious classical forms; and 2) the Arbeter Teater Farband, better known as ARTEF—a Yiddish labor-oriented art theater that operated during the Depression years.
- Yiddish vaudeville, which played in music halls and variety houses, and which preceded Yiddish theater—apart from a few European imports as early as the 1880s. Vaudeville ranged from single songs and acts to revues to skits and even one-act sketches, but not full-length theatrical productions. Yiddish vaudeville was on its decline by the 1930s.
- Yiddish popular musical films, which extended the live theatrical stage to the screen.
- Yiddish radio, which generated a large repertoire of new songs in the so-called Second Avenue style, but not necessarily written for larger productions or related to plays or plots. Many of these songs were written by the same songwriters and lyricists who simultaneously dominated the Yiddish theater.

The American Yiddish musical theater was a powerful product of the immigrant experience, and it became a highly successful export to Europe, England, South Africa, and South America. During its peak years, many of its

leading stage personalities were virtual folk heroes among certain segments of American Jewish society.

In some respects the musical style of Second Avenue grew out of Viennese light operetta and built upon the European Yiddish musical theater as founded by Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908) in Romania. But it was also informed by perceived eastern European Jewish, Gypsy, and other folk motifs and tune styles—as well as by liturgical modes and influences, especially where those elements related to specific characters or plots. And its songwriters and orchestrators were often quick to reflect and incorporate idioms or contemporaneously fashionable dance rhythms and melodic styles current in American popular and theatrical music.

ABOUT THE ORCHESTRATIONS

Complete or authoritative orchestrations for Yiddish theater or vaudeville songs have not survived, and in most cases full orchestrations were never made in the first place. Conductors worked from sketches or charts, a not uncommon practice. Many were created after the fact for live radio broadcasts or makeshift 78-rpm recordings, both with limited orchestral forces, and usually, if not always, for far smaller ensembles than the actual full pit orchestras in theaters. Those sketches also often relied on a significant measure of improvisation. Therefore, after meticulous research concerning orchestra size, typical instrumentation, and orchestral styles and idioms consistent with the original productions, the Milken Archive commissioned new, historically considered orchestrations expressly for this project. To approximate the flavor and ambience of the Yiddish theater at its optimum in its heyday, the Archive turned to leading reconstruction orchestrators Frank Bennett, Ira Hearshen, Paul Henning, Jon Kull, Patrick Russ, and Jonathan Sacks.

PRONUNCIATION

The pronunciation and diction in these recordings expressly avoids consistency with the standard literary (YIVO) Yiddish, and follows the more authentic mixture of Yoldynian and Galician-southern Polish dialects prevalent in the Second Avenue theater milieu. The absence of standardization in that circle, however, and the variety of backgrounds of those performers also resulted in occasional appearances of northern Polish and Ukrainian pronunciations—even without consistency in the same song. This, too, is deliberately reflected here.

—N.W.L

About the Composers

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. As a boy chorister in local synagogues, he was exposed early on to the intricacies of *hazzanut*. He received his early musical training at the Third Street Settlement House and sang in the Metropolitan Opera Children’s Chorus. 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, and he made his debut as a theater composer with music for B. Epelboym’s play *Gerang!* (Struggle), performed by a theater troupe from Vilna. This was the first of thirty-three scores for Yiddish theater. By the 1929–30 season he was engaged as resident composer and music director at Ludwig Satz’s Folk Theater. After touring Europe as pianist for actor-singers Dave Lubritsky and Dina Goldberg, Ellstein moved to the Public Theatre as resident composer and director for the 1930–31 season.

While on tour with Molly Picon in Europe and South America, as her arranger, accompanist, and conductor, Ellstein wrote new music especially for her performances of Goldfaden’s *Shmendrik*, and for the “operetta” that once played on Second Avenue, *Oy iz dos a meyl!* (O, What a Girl!). Ellstein also later wrote two film scores—*Mamele* and *Yidl mitn fidl!*—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 “The Scotchman from Orchard Street.”

Active for many years in Yiddish radio, Ellstein had regular programs on WEVD, where he produced and presented a variety of Yiddish folk as well as theater music and cantorial selections. Several of his best-known Yiddish theatrical-type songs were written specifically for these

radio broadcasts. He directed a weekly broadcast devoted to liturgical music, *The Song of the Synagogue*, which featured many of the most beloved cantors with his choral ensemble. Ellstein 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 and conductor for cantorial concerts and recordings, and was Yosele Rosenblatt’s pianist for his European and American tours. Ellstein’s cantorial orchestrations in particular are considered the most stylistically classical in that genre. He conducted synagogue choirs for many years, especially for High Holy Day services, for which he wrote a good deal of traditional cantorial-choral music, most of which remains unpublished. He also wrote two modern Sabbath services, commissioned by the Metropolitan Synagogue in New York.

On a visit to Prague, Ellstein became fascinated with the Golem legend, and while there, he wrote a short piece based on it that he later used as the basis for his opera *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 and premiered posthumously at a Cantors Assembly Convention with a subsequent CBS telecast. Apart from his actual synagogue music, his concert cantorial settings remain popular and are frequently performed.

In addition to Abraham Ellstein and the others of the “major four of Second Avenue,” there were many important, successful, and ever-present—if less widely remembered—songwriters for the American popular Yiddish stage. Among such names are Herman Yablokoff, Herman Wohl, Solomon Shmulevitch, David Meyerowitz, Arnold Perlmutter—and **ILIA TRILLING**.

Trilling (1895–1947) was born in Elberfeld (now Wuppertal), Germany, to parents who were Yiddish actors with various touring groups. In 1910, when his parents settled for a while in Warsaw, he began formal musical studies, and during the First World War years he became the director of a Yiddish theater in Kiev. He emigrated to America in 1929, became a dance instructor for a theater company in New York, and then took a position as choirmaster of the major Yiddish theater in the Lawndale district of Chicago, the heart of that city’s eastern European immigrant Jewish population. A few years later he was engaged as the composer-in-residence of the Hopkinson Theater in Brooklyn, and he began writing songs for full-length Yiddish

theatrical productions. Among his many popular songs in addition to the two included here are *Bessarabia*, from the musical *Gib mir tsurik mayn harts* (Give Me Back My Heart), and *Ver darf a mame* (Who Needs a Mother?) from the musical *Kinder on a heym* (Children Without a Home).

ABE (ABRAHAM) SCHWARTZ (1881–1963) was one of the best known and most recorded Jewish bandmasters—as well as a popular dance-band violinist—in the New York area for many decades. His national and even international fame as what might be called today a klezmer-band leader came from the manifold records of his bands under various names. He emigrated to the United States with his parents in 1899, at the age of eighteen, having spent his youth in Romania, near Bucharest, where he apparently acquired most of his musical skills on his own. After establishing a reputation as a dance-band leader in New York Jewish circles, his initial entrée into the frenetic recording industry occurred when he was engaged to supervise instrumental recording sessions for the Columbia label.

Schwartz's own recording career was launched around the same time (ca. 1917) with his release of two so-called Russian dance melodies: a *sher* and a *bulgar*, played by his Oriental Orchestra. Neither song was Russian, but that exotic perception of “mysterious Russia,” especially of her idealized (and usually undifferentiated) Gypsies, sold in those days—as did anything perceived as “oriental.” Sheet-music publishers and record companies of that era frequently turned to immigrant Jewish musicians to front as authentic carriers of the “new” sounds. Such composers and arrangers—supposedly “fresh from Russia,” though most came from the Ukraine, Belorussia, Galicia, Poland, Romania, or Bessarabia—had the desired cachet as cultural transmitters. Yet many of those Jews had played together with Gypsy, Romanian, and Russian musicians in Europe and had absorbed some of their styles. Still, many of the tunes or styles were simply those played by klezmerim in various parts of eastern Europe—regardless of their possible earlier derivation from host traditions. Schwartz, immediately following his first record, led bands on six other records in 1917.

DAVID MEYEROWITZ (1867–1943) represents the early phases of the American Yiddish musical stage that preceded the zenith of the so-called Golden Age of Second Avenue during the 1930s and 1940s. His songs and even his one-act presentations were often oriented more toward vaudeville, variety show, and revue formats.

Meyerowitz was born in Dinaburg, Latvia (then part of the czarist empire). He had no formal education, and his life as a songster and later a songwriter started as he entertained

fellow workers in a match factory. When his father emigrated to America, temporarily leaving his family behind until he could earn enough money to pay for their passage, David began earning extra income by singing songs from Goldfaden operettas, and ballads by the famous bard Eliakum Zunsler, which he had learned from his mother.

In 1890, Meyerowitz came to America, but he continued at menial shop labor while he composed simple Yiddish parodies and patriotic sentiments. Representative of the latter is his early miniature, *Kolombus, ikh hob tzu dir gornit* (Columbus, I've Got Nothing Against You!), a typical humorous expression of enthusiasm for the new country (“And I have nothing against you either, America! You're very good to us, and life here is happy; you're 'okay!'”). He began singing such songs at various gatherings and then for small remuneration at cafés and music halls, and soon became known as “the wandering poet.”

Among his early original songs that gained popularity were several he created for the famous Yiddish actor and producer Jacob P. Adler (1856–1926), and in 1921 Meyerowitz's song *Aheym* (Go Home) was introduced by Adler at the Kessler Theater in the play *The Power of Nature*. Meyerowitz, who was vocal about his Zionist sympathies, dedicated that song to the World Zionist Organization. When the most famous and powerful personality in the entire Yiddish theater world—impresario, actor, singer, and songwriter Boris Thomashevsky, often called the Father of Second Avenue Yiddish Theater—wanted a Zionist-oriented song to sing in his play *Tate mame tzoers* (Heartbreak, Papa and Mama), he turned to Meyerowitz, who then wrote *Kum, srul, kum aheym* (Come, Little Srul, Come Home).

Meyerowitz's one-act operettas, in which he sometimes played and sang while also producing and directing, grew in popularity throughout New York music halls and vaudeville houses, playing at no fewer than all fourteen that once existed simultaneously.

The best-known song of **REUBEN DOCTOR** (ca. 1880–1940) remains the comical *Ikh bin a “boarder” bay mayn vayb* (I'm a Boarder at my Wife's), yet even in that song it is difficult to know the extent of his role in creating the music. Doctor was otherwise chiefly known as a lyricist for many Yiddish theatrical and popular songs during the heyday of Yiddish musical theater, vaudeville, radio, and commercial recording.

He was born in Yedintsy, Bessarabia (now Moldova), and at fourteen he went to live with an uncle in England. There he sang in synagogue choirs and on the Yiddish stage of London's East End. He came to America in 1908, where he played with various vaudeville troupes and began compos-

ing popular Yiddish lyrics. More than eighty of them were published, of which he recorded more than fifty.

Yiddish songwriter, lyricist, actor, playwright, director, and producer **HERMAN YABLOKOFF** [Hayim Yablönik] (1903-81) was born in Grodno, Russian Poland (now Belarus), where he sang as a boy chorister in the choir of Cantor (Reb) Yoshe Slonimer at the age of ten. He began playing children's roles in local Yiddish theater when he was twelve, and at seventeen he left home to tour Lithuania and Poland with an acting troupe. In 1924, after four years with the Kovner Fareynikte Trup (United Troupe of Kovno) and travels through Germany and Holland, he emigrated to America and began playing on stages in Toronto, Montreal, and Los Angeles before settling in New York.

Yablokoff became one of the most pervasive personalities of the Second Avenue theater world during the heyday of American Yiddish theater in the 1930s and 1940s. One of the many major musical shows he wrote, directed, and produced was *Der payatz* (The Clown), which catapulted him to even wider fame under that sobriquet. He further popularized that role on his weekly Yiddish radio program of the same name.

Papirosn (Cigarettes), from his play with the same title, is probably his most enduring song. Most likely an adaptation of a European folk melody to his own melodramatic lyrics, it is still sung today. The tune of his song *Shvayg mayn harts* (Be Still, My Heart) became popular in English as *Nature Boy* when it was allegedly appropriated by a Hindu mystic in California who dabbled in songwriting. According to Yablokoff's own account, the plagiarist had claimed to have "heard the tune in the mist of the California mountains," but legal proceedings resulted in a substantial monetary settlement.

Yablokoff went on tour to Israel, Scandinavia, Europe, Cuba, and South America, and he frequently played opposite his wife, the equally well known Yiddish actress and singer Bella Meisel. But his most important trip was his seven-month tour of displaced persons (DP) camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy following the end of the Second World War, where he gave more than 100 performances for 180,000 homeless Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. He received the United States Army Certificate of Merit for that endeavor. In one of those camps he discovered his niece, who turned out to be the only survivor among all his European family.

Yablokoff was first accepted into the Hebrew Actors Union in 1931 and went on to serve as its president for a number of terms after 1945. He was also president of the Yiddish Theatrical Alliance as well as chairman of the

Yiddish National Theater in New York. Later in his life, reflecting upon his career, Yablokoff remarked that the Yiddish theater had constituted "a religious experience, a movement of the soul."

—Neil W. Levin

Program Notes

Der nayer sher (The New *Sher* [i.e., new dance tune]) was written in 1940 expressly for recording, and according to one recollection, it was composed in an automobile between rehearsals or concerts (or perhaps broadcasts) for a session with Seymour Rechtzeit for the RCA Victor label. It was an immediate commercial success and was sung by many radio and stage singers, including Molly Picon, the Bagelman (Barry) Sifers, and the famous clarinetist Dave Tarras. Ellstein subsequently published it (1948) in two orchestral versions—with and without voice—and labeled them as a "special rumba," with some rhythmic modification. It was also performed in an English version by Edmundo Ross, as *The Wedding Samba*.

The *sher* is one of the most popular celebratory dance forms among Jews of eastern European background—a type of "scissor dance" (*sher* translates literally into scissors, or shears), possibly related to its to-and-fro movements. The movements also bear some resemblance to the American square dance. Among eastern European Jewish immigrants and their succeeding generations, the *sher* has generally been considered mandatory at traditional and even quasi-traditional weddings, and it was adopted into general ethnic folk dance circles in the 1930s and 1940s.

The wider reference of this song seems to go beyond just another tune for a *sher*, to a new dance and a new dance tune—perhaps a "modern *sher*." ("Hey, klezmer, pick up your fiddle ... and we'll dance the new *sher* ... for when we dance, life becomes so sweet ... hope that by tomorrow we'll all dance the new *sher* together.")

Ellstein's romantic song *Oygn* (Eyes), with lyrics by Molly Picon, is from his and Anshel Schorr's 1934 musical comedy *Eyns un a rekhts*, or *One in a Million*. The show opened at New York's Second Avenue Theater and starred Molly Picon (who introduced the song) as well as an all-star cast that included Muni Serebrow, who later went on to a brilliant acting career as Paul Muni.

The story takes place in New York and concerns a wealthy banker, Joseph Hershberg, who has run into such a severe financial crisis that he has had to summon his youngest

daughter, Lillie, home from boarding school. Lillie (played by Molly Picon), who is unaware of her father's difficulties, has fallen in love with Henry Orenstein (played by Muni), a younger generation financier with a reputation as a ladies' man, from whom Hershberg seeks financial assistance.

Lillie met Orenstein while she was away at school, when he came to visit his own daughter there. He has invited her to his flat on a wager, and she has decided to accept that challenge, somehow intuiting that she could trust him. Meanwhile, her father has swallowed his pride in deciding to request Orenstein's assistance, because he has always had contempt for the man as a onetime waiter who was now an upstart in the banking world. Lillie proceeds to Orenstein's home and begins drinking to calm her fears and restore her courage. In her intoxicated state, all reticence evaporated, she sings tenderly to him—in *Oygn*—of her heartfelt love and the magical effect his dark eyes have on her.

By then inebriated, Lillie ends up spending the night at Orenstein's place, but presumably "innocently," and is brought home late the next morning. After a farcical set of misunderstandings among the various characters, Orenstein decides to assist Hershberg because he is truly in love with Lillie. As the plot synopsis in the program booklet states, "all ends happily."

The New York Times review called the production one of Molly Picon's "most charming evenings." It was Ellstein's twentieth operetta for the Yiddish as well as English stages.

Ellstein's *Ikh vil es hern nokh a mol* (I Want to Hear It Again), with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs and Isidore Lillian, was sung in William Siegel's 1946 romantic musical comedy *Ikh bin farlibt* (I'm in Love). The production starred the sensational comic actor and singer Menashe Skulnik at the Second Avenue Theater in New York, and the song was introduced by cast members Lilly Lilliana and Leon Liebgold.

Neither the script of the play nor press reviews have been located, but some indication of the show's public success might be gleaned from the fact that it toured a year later to St. Louis, with the same actors and actresses, and perhaps to other cities as well.

Abi gezunt, Mazi; and *Ikh zing*—three of the songs featured on this collection—were written for the popular 1939 Yiddish film *Mamele* (Little Mama, also subtitled in English, "Kid Mother"). Made in Poland, as were a number of American-produced Yiddish films during the 1930s (this one less than a year before the German invasion), it

starred the inimitable Molly Picon (1898–1992), probably Second Avenue's longest-reigning queen and the best-known Yiddish actress/singer later on Broadway. The first American-born Yiddish performer to rise to the highest levels of Second Avenue fame and box-office attraction, Picon starred in countless plays, operettas, revues, and musicals over several decades, enchanting audiences with her unique, direct, almost childlike voice and her idiomatic humor and emblematic stage mannerisms. She also appeared in memorable films and wrote plays and lyrics. All three of the songs here are her words with Ellstein's music.

Mamele costarred Edmund Zayenda, with a full cast under the artistic direction of Molly Picon's actor-singer husband, Jacob (Yankel) Kalich. Eight years earlier there was a staged operetta on the same story, with music by Joseph Rumshinsky. In the film, Picon played the heroine, Khavshe—the youngest of three sisters in a family of six siblings in a prewar Polish town—whose mother has died. To her falls the role of substitute "little mother"—one for which, despite her young age, she seems naturally suited, taking care of the entire household and all her siblings. When she feels she must avert her older sister Berta's path toward marriage with an undesirable man, Khavshe is willing to sacrifice her own happiness by trying to convince her sweetheart, a musician named Mr. Schlessinger, to pursue Berta instead and thus win the girl away from her current involvement. Initially, Schlessinger had been interested in Berta, but she had rebuffed him. Now, suddenly jealous that her younger sister is closer to marriage than she is, Berta is not only amenable but asks Khavshe to persuade Schlessinger to give her a second chance. But when the sacrifice plan backfires and the family quarrels with Khavshe for interfering in Berta's romantic affairs, Khavshe decides to leave the family to its own devices and exit the home. She revises her appearance to the attractive young maiden she really is and goes to Schlessinger—for herself. She finds him singing a love song, which becomes a love song for her. They become engaged. Meanwhile, her family pleads for her return. She does so, now with her fiancé. They marry, and she accepts a dual role as wife and, once again, as "little mother" to the siblings.

Khavshe sings *Abi gezunt* (So Long As You're Healthy) in the midst of preparations for the Sabbath eve meal, while reminding her sister of the quintessential Jewish sentiment that good health is all that is really needed for happiness. This became one of Picon's two most recognizable theme songs (along with *Yankele*). So quickly did it become a hit that Cab Calloway took the title for an otherwise unrelated new swing-band tune, *A Bee Gezint*.

Khavsh sings *Mazl* (Good Fortune) in a scene prior to her own courtship by Schlessinger, where she reflects on her lot and her lonely condition, while everyone else seems to find some bit of happiness. A fleeting moment of imagined happiness inspires a brief upbeat, fanciful mood, mirrored in the orchestra, but then she returns to her lament: "The dream I have dreamt for myself is gone with the wind once again."

In the film there was an additional superimposed element, when Schlessinger, soon to become her suitor and eventually her husband, sits at his window across the street, fiddle in hand, and reflects her sentiments vis-à-vis his own loneliness. It becomes a quasi-duet, although the song itself stands on its own as a solo number.

When Khavsh goes back to Schlessinger to try to salvage the chance for happiness, she finds him at his piano, singing *Ikh zing* (I Sing)—a love song recalling King Solomon's love song to Shulamit in the biblical Song of Songs.

Zog es mir nokh a mol, with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, is a song from Ellstein and Israel Rosenberg's operetta *Der berditchever khosn* (The Bridegroom from Berditchev), which starred Ludwig Satz and Zina Goldstein and opened the 1930–31 season at the Public Theatre in New York.

The plot is set in the Ukrainian city of Berditchev prior to the First World War. It was the custom throughout eastern Europe for well-to-do merchant-class households to provide meals for out-of-town students at local yeshivas, with specific nights assigned to each of them on a weekly basis. In this play, a yeshiva student named Avreleme is assigned his weekly *esn teg* (eating day) at the home of such a wealthy Jew, Isaac Varshavsky, who has pursued worldly cultured enlightenment—having sent his children to Paris for secular education—while still fully observant of traditional Jewish life and law and a member of the religious community. Avreleme falls in love with Varshavsky's daughter, Reizele, but he conceals this from her father, as well as his secret ambition to become a painter. A more socially and economically suitable student from her own circle, Boris, is also in love with her, but she is ambivalent about Boris's marriage proposal.

During a party for Reizele at her home, her parents and other adults step out, leaving the young people celebrating on their own. Meanwhile, Avreleme shows up for his *esn teg* meal. Reizele's friends, knowing of his feelings for her, tease him by staging a mock wedding ceremony, with her complicity, simply as a party joke. Her father returns home just as the mock ritual has been completed. Astounded, he informs Reizele that the joke or not, she is now legally married according to the provisions of Jewish law

(since the prescribed words have been said in the presence of legally acceptable witnesses), and she must get a *get* (a bill of divorce) from Avreleme. Avreleme refuses, even when offered various enticements. In Jewish law, a married woman cannot be divorced if she cannot obtain a bill of divorce directly from a husband known or presumed to be alive—in which case she is known as an *aguna*. As a man who refused to give his wife a *get*, Avreleme would become a pariah in the community, subject to ostracism, and perhaps even harm. So he runs away to Italy to study painting. Isaac manages through unspecified means to secure a rabbinical annulment of the marriage, but after two years Avreleme returns as a famous painter to find that Reizele is about to be married to Boris. Avreleme gives her a picture he has painted of her in Italy, demonstrating that he has never forgotten her. Reizele asks his forgiveness—telling him that in the end, he is the most charming of all suitors. In the song *Zog es mir nokh a mol* (Tell Me Again), Avreleme pleads with her to marry him (properly, this time). He sings that he will do anything to gain favor in her father's eyes: become a Zionist (presumably like Isaac), or return to religious orthodoxy. Most important in the song is Avreleme's plea to Reizele to repeat what she has just told him, having longed for more than two years to hear it: "Tell me again, oh, tell me again, I'd like to hear those beautiful words from you. Tell it to me again." Following the song, Reizele goes off to the marriage canopy with Avreleme instead of Boris.

The review in the *Forverts*, the largest Yiddish daily newspaper, criticized the play as tired and uninventive, but the music was praised as the redeeming element: "The operetta is full of beautiful melodies composed by the young Abe Ellstein."

Di grine kuzine (The Greenhorn Cousin, 1921) is one of the best known in the category of "disillusionment" songs of the immigrant era. Some are inherently theatrical (such as this), while others became folksongs. Some are light-hearted and humorous despite searing denunciations, while others bespeak unalloyed dejection. The archetypal theme of these songs was a dampened enthusiasm on the part of working-class Jewish immigrants for the new country, in the face of unexpected economic hardships and sweatshop conditions—for the transatlantic rumors about "streets paved with gold" had almost seemed believable from Europe. Yet it must be acknowledged that Yiddish patriotic anthems and love songs for America also permeated those decades—on stages, in sheet music, and on records—especially from the First World War on.

Abe Schwartz was the first to copyright this tune and its lyrics (though the music copyright is only for his arrange-

ment), but one Yankele Brisker, pseudonym for Jacob Leiserowitz, also claimed copyright for the lyrics, listing the tune as a “folk melody.” Yet a third claimant to the song was Hyman Prizant. Eventually it was republished and re-copyrighted, crediting Prizant with only the lyrics and Schwartz with the music—although again, in a particular arrangement. Meanwhile, Leiserowitz initiated a lawsuit, but did not prevail. Still, the truth about the authorship is impossible to know.

Di grine kuzine was a hit far beyond the confines of music halls. It helped catapult its publishers to a new level of prominence in the business, and it was a major boost to Schwartz’s career, gaining him and his songs access to some of New York’s major Yiddish theaters. At the same time, *Di grine kuzine* either spawned or accelerated a fashion of songs about “greenhorns”—a common tag for newly arrived, un-Americanized, and unadapted immigrants.

Vos geven iz geven un nito (What Was, Was, and Is No More) is one of the most beautiful nostalgia songs in the Yiddish theatrical repertoire. It was first published in 1926, with an English subtitle, “Memories of Days Gone By.” Not part of any play or larger theater piece, it was made famous initially by Nellie Casman, one of the leading stars of the Yiddish stage, and was subsequently sung by such luminaries as Sophie Tucker, Lillian Shaw, Aaron Lebedeff, and Seymour Rechtse. Ironically, Meyerowitz wrote it originally for a vaudeville star, Sam Klinetsky, who rejected it as too sentimental.

Oy, mame, bin ikh farlibt is one of several Ellstein songs from what has been called the most successful Yiddish film of all time. Joseph Green’s 1936 romantic musical comedy *Yidl mitn fidl* (Yidl with His Fiddle) was shot on location in Poland, and it became one of Molly Picon’s signature roles for many years thereafter. The film tells the story of a young woman posing as a male in an itinerant band.

Facing poverty in his hometown, Ari, a bass player (presumably a widower), takes his violinist daughter on the road to play with him as a traveling duo. Out of fear for her safety in strange territory, she takes on the disguise of a young man—clothing, mannerisms, and a male name, Yidl (little Jew). As they embark, Yidl sings the title song, *Yidl mitn fidl, ari mitn bass*, which Ellstein based on a European folksong and which asserts that life is just a song.

Ari and Yidl meet a similar duo, Isaac and Froim, also a fiddler, and they decide to join forces as a traveling quartet. Yidl becomes increasingly attracted to Froim and falls completely in love with him. When Froim pats her cheek condescendingly as he would a little boy, she is in agony both at the tantalizing vibration and at her predicament.

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Left alone, she launches into the song *Oy, mame, bin ikh farlibt* (Oh, Mama, Am I in Love!). Yidl sings the song to herself in frustration, pouring out her heart. She even imagines him speaking to her as a girl.

The quartet takes on yet another performer: Tauba—a runaway from an imminent arranged marriage with an elderly rich man. To Yidl’s dismay, Tauba and Froim begin a love affair. When the quintet decides to settle in Warsaw, Tauba’s singing talents are recognized by a theater director, and she is invited to sing in the theater—with Froim playing violin in the orchestra. Unable to keep up the ruse any longer, Yidl tells the truth of her plight to Isaac, who agrees to help her by locating Yosl, who was Tauba’s true love (before her arranged match), certain that she would not hesitate to leave Froim for him. Yosl shows up backstage at the theater, he and Tauba are instantly reunited, and the two run off together after Tauba has left a goodbye note in her dressing room. Yidl, in the theater to see if the plot will work, comes into the dressing room, sees the note, and goes out onto the stage to announce the cancellation of the show in light of Tauba’s escape. The action then becomes a bit of a “play within a play,” as the director pleads with the now undisguised Yidl to sing in Tauba’s place. When Yidl asks from the stage what she should sing, Froim, in the pit, begins playing the melody of *Yidl mitn fidl*. Yidl picks up the cue and begins singing that song, but she also tells the audience her story: how she had been a fiddler disguised as a boy, and how she had fallen in love with a fellow musician in their group who ignored her. As she begins to cry, she repeats her love song, *Oy, mame, bin ikh farlibt*, and the audience, assuming it is part of a prearranged performance sketch, roars with laughter. After the show, Froim comes back to the dressing room, where Yidl confesses her love for him as real. From her success singing in the theater, Yidl is offered performances in America, but Froim cannot be released from his orchestral obligation. Aboard the ship to America, Yidl, agonizing over the separation, suddenly hears *Yidl mitn fidl* being played on a violin. To no one’s surprise, it is Froim, who has secretly run away from the orchestra, and the two are finally united.

Zog, zog, zog es mir (Tell Me, Say It to Me Already), with lyrics by Chaim Tauber, is from Herman Yablokoff and Yitzhak Freidman’s 1941–42 production of their own musical *Goldele dem bekens* (Goldele, the Baker’s Daughter), which starred Menashe Skulnik, Herman Yablokoff, and his wife, Bella Meisel, at the Second Avenue Theater in New York.

The action takes place in 1940. Some of the names are deliberately Americanized to conform to second-generation immigrant situations, and English words and lines are

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interspersed throughout. Pauline, the owner of a commercial New York bakery, has been on holiday in Honolulu desperately seeking a husband. She became attracted to a less Americanized Jewish immigrant, Itzik Goodman (presumably a widower), living there with his ailing seven-year-old daughter, Goldele, who cannot walk on her own. As a ruse to get him to New York, Pauline has offered him employment in her bakery and promised that she will find medical attention for Goldele there. Apparently oblivious to her scheme, he has agreed. Meanwhile, he meets Margaret, the bakery foreman's daughter, who has also come to Honolulu, and they immediately fall in love. He remarks that her name reminds him of a famous Yiddish folksong, *Margaritkehik* (Daisies), and he begins to sing the beginning of it, the words of which parallel their own meeting and mutual enchantment. That leads into Ilia Trilling's own song, in which Margaret, becoming impatient, starts by mimicking Itzik's singing of those folksong lyrics to a slightly varied but still recognizable tune, and then she launches into her plea: "Tell me, say those words already—why should you be afraid to tell me that you love me?"

The play was not memorable, but it contained at least fifteen songs, a few of which saved the production and even outlasted it. *Zog, zog, zog es mir* has endured to this day in the Yiddish theater song repertoire.

Yabloukoff wrote *Der dishvasher* (The Dishwasher) as an independent song before it was subsequently included in his full-length production of a "musical romance" of the same name at the Second Avenue Theater in New York in 1936. Because the song was so successful on its own, he later decided to write a play around it. In the original production, in Yiddish, a young Walter Matthau played the role of a cellist. Long afterward, when Matthau was an established Hollywood cinema star, he observed in a *New Yorker* interview that he could never have learned in any drama school what he had learned in the Yiddish theater.

Yabloukoff considered *Der dishvasher* his finest play. He played and sang the role of Abrashe the dishwasher in the staged production, which also featured such celebrities as Bella Meisel (his wife), Leo Fuchs, Annie Thomashevsky, Esther Saltzman, and Dave Lubritsky. Most or all of the score, apart from Yabloukoff's song, was written by Ilia Trilling.

Der dishvasher is the lament of an elderly man, abandoned by his children, so that he is forced to wash dishes in a restaurant for bare subsistence. It was a familiar theme, especially resonant among elderly audiences, even though it was largely (and typically) exaggerated in this song for the usual dramatic effect. Although *Der dishvasher* was probably intended to portray the seriousness and genuine

pain of the dishwasher's plight, the overall mantra of parental complaints about their children's neglect became a recurring theme in American Jewish humor—as late as Mel Brooks's original 2,000-year-old man routine, where he has thousands and thousands of children, "not one of whom ever calls or comes to visit!"

Ilia Trilling's *Du shaynst vi di zun* (You Shine Like the Sun), with lyrics by Isidore Lillian, does not appear to be from any staged production. Its folio publication in 1941 mentioned none, although it is possible that such songs were later inserted into particular musical shows without reference in their scripts. The song was made popular nonetheless through radio broadcasts, simply as a tender love duet.

Although one 1970s anthology cited Ellstein's beloved song *Vos iz gevorn fun mayn shtetele?* (What Has Become of My Little Hometown?) as having been featured in "an operetta" (suspiciously unidentified) starring Menashe Skulnik at Brooklyn's Hopkinson's Theater, no play has been located that would verify this. More likely, this is one of Ellstein's various single songs, whose fame was advanced by its many renditions on a variety of stages and especially on the radio by such artists as Moyshe Oysher, Freidele Oysher, Moshe Ganchoff, Seymour Rechtzeit, and a host of others.

This is the quintessential Yiddish "longing for home" song of that era, not meant to be taken literally in its romanticized imagination of the *shtetl* or, for that matter, of anything to do with Europe. In that sense it is highly fictional and therefore theatrical, joining an entire category of songs titled after particular towns or even larger eastern European cities. Such songs reflect little actual sentiment among Jewish immigrants, many of whom certainly missed relatives, but precious few of whom missed the Europe they had so eagerly left. Even among the most disillusioned laborers in sweatshop conditions, there was never any organized expression of a desire to return, although a very small number of orthodox Jews did occasionally go back, for religious reasons. Yet these songs of an idealized past, whether as components of plays or as singles, made for good theater and emotionally satisfying entertainment.

lkh bin a "boarder" bay mayn vayb (I'm a Boarder at My Wife's), first published in 1922, became one of the most famous, comical—and slightly risqué—songs of Yiddish vaudeville, later gaining its widest popularity through a recording by Aaron Lebedeff. It endured long past the vaudeville era. Its lyrics parrot a stereotypical theme of American immigrant-era humor—the complaining, protesting but subservient (so he says), and actually slightly afraid husband—but this song offered a somewhat different twist. Here, the fellow has found a better "arrangement"

altogether, divorcing his wife and paying rent to her as a boarder. Now he is free from her perceived control: "When I come home, she doesn't ask any questions."

Not all strophes are included in this recording. In the full published version, the "boarder" further praises the wisdom of his arrangement: "[Now] I don't have to keep an eye on my wife, and worry about mistakenly walking in on her when the butcher is delivering the meat ... and I don't have to work and give her the money."

The tune is more or less a stock pattern; this song is about the words.

It is not altogether clear whether *Der alter tzigayner* was part of a theatrical production or whether it was one of Ellstein's independent songs. One latter-day (1970s) but not always reliable source attributed it to Ellstein's 1938 operetta *Bublitski* (Little Bagels), starring Molly Picon and Aaron Lebedeff. The script or stage version of the play, however, has not been found, and the synopsis contained in the program booklet makes no mention of any of the show's songs—as is frequently the case. As an operetta, the play obviously centered around songs, although this one was not copyrighted until its folio publication five years after the production. On the other hand, a newspaper review of the show refers to "an old fiddler" as a "high point of the evening's entertainment." Further complicating the uncertainty is the possibility of multiple but unrelated shows with the same title. In any case, *Der alter tzigayner* certainly stands on its own as a song, celebrating the typically romanticized perception of Gypsy violinists.

—Neil W. Levin

Translations

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(Note: Transliterations of the Yiddish for the following texts can be viewed at the Milken Archive Web site: www.milkenarchive.org)

DER NAYER SHER (*The New Sher*) **Abraham Ellstein** (*words and music*)

Hey you, klezmer, pick up your fiddle,
play your music,
and we'll dance the new *sher*.¹

We'll spin around in a *karahod*,²
and our hearts will rejoice,
whenever the new *sher* is danced.

Higher, higher, Grandpa Elya leaps
straight up to the ceiling.
He wants to enjoy life fully.

And Grandma Sosye beams with joy.
Our enemies can go to hell,
for we're going to dance the new *sher*.

Nu, see, just see how everyone is happy,
how they spin,
and how they tap their feet.

The heart is breaking
but still begs to dance,
for when we dance, life becomes so sweet.

Now we are all happy.
We will no longer be sad.
Because soon the bride will be seated,
and then we will dance the new *sher*.

What good will all the worrying do for you,
when your heart is heavy?
Better hope, brother, that by tomorrow
we will all dance the new *sher* together!

¹ A lively party or celebration dance.

² A type of circle dance.

OYGN (*Eyes*)
Abraham Ellstein
Lyrics: Molly Picon
from *Eyns un a rekhts*, or *One in a Million*

It's a dark night, and I sit and think that
my life is worthless.

It's empty and hollow, my aspiration for naught.
There's no luck in my cards....

But suddenly a ray of light, a bright source:
I caught sight of two eyes.
I soon felt that my heart was lost,
but I was happy.

Eyes ...
for your dark eyes ...
before them the bright sun
bows down.

Eyes ...
for your dark eyes ...
they pulled my heart to you, and I
became enslaved for life,
captured and amazed....
And I will aspire
to fulfill all their desires.

Eyes ...
for your dark eyes ...
the world will no longer have any worth
without your dark eyes.

IKH VIL ES HERN NOKH A MOL
(I Want to Hear It Again)

Abraham Ellstein

Lyrics: Isidore Lillian and Jacob Jacobs
from *Ikh bin Faribit* (I'm in Love)

Victor:

The world has many
books and novels,
in which we read of great romances.
My love, you may be sure
that none of these books can describe
how strongly I feel about you.

Luba:

Do you mean what you say?
Or are you just saying it?
I want be sure about it,
for I am a woman,
sworn to you forever.

Victor:

And once again you ask me
to tell you
that I love you.

Both:

I want to hear it again from you.
Say again that you are in love with me.

It rings in my ears
like the Song of Songs.
I will never tire of hearing it.
My heart dances in me
from joy and happiness
when I hear
the sweet words from you.
When you say those four words,³
it fills me with joy.
Yes, I want to hear it again from you!

³ *ikh hob dixh lib* (I love you).

IKH ZING (For You I Sing)

Abraham Ellstein

Lyrics: Molly Picon
from the film *Mamele*

King Solomon sang to his Shulamit
a love song.
And just like Solomon then, my love,
I bring my song now to you.

I sing my Song of Songs for you.
With love I adorn it,
only for you, soul of mine, do
I sing my dreams—

My love for you is like a dream—
Only for you, my comfort,
when I'm about to die from longing
for you, my beloved.

And when I still think
that you will once again be mine,
I sing my song from the heart,
my Song of Songs again.
Beloved, for you I sing.

ABI GEZUNT (So Long As You're Healthy)

Abraham Ellstein

Lyrics: Molly Picon
from the film *Mamele*

A bit of sun, a bit of rain,
a peaceful place to lay your head ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.

A shoe, a sock, an outfit without patches,
three or four measly coins in your pocket ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.

The air is free, equal for all;
the sun shines for everyone,
whether rich or poor.

A little rejoicing, a little laughter,

some schnapps with a friend once in a while ...
so long as you're healthy, you can be happy.

Some look for riches,
some look for power,
to conquer the whole world.
Some think that all happiness
depends only on money.

Let them all search,
let them all scrounge.
But I think to myself that
I have no use for such things,
since happiness is waiting at my doorstep.

ZOG ES MIR NOKH A MOL (Tell Me Again)

Abraham Ellstein

Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

from *Der berditshover khosn* (The Bridegroom
from Berditchev)

If I would only be fit
to find favor in your eyes,
the whole world would already be mine.
I would sing "Hatikvah" [Become a Zionist]⁴
and would even go to the *mikvah*⁵ [be religious],
just so you will be together with me.

I would cut a deal
to become a slave to your father,
like Jacob was to Laban.
I would suffer all kinds of terror
and would even milk the cows,
so long as I would always be able to see you.

Tell me again,
oh, tell me again,
for I'd like to hear
those beautiful words from you.
Tell it to me again,
oh, tell it to me again,
for your words bring me joy
and give me constant encouragement.

My heart is overflowing
with such great joy
of having lived to hear
such words from you.
Tell it to me again,
oh, tell me again.
Oh, my heart, my dear,
Tell it to me again.

⁴ *The anthem of the Zionist movement (and now of
the State of Israel).*

⁵ *A ritual bath of purification.*

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DI GRINE KUZINE (The Greenhorn Cousin)

Abe Schwartz

Lyrics: Jacob Leiserowitz/Hyman Prizant?⁷

My cousin from the old country came over here.
She was beautiful as gold, the "greenhorn."⁶
Her cheeks were rosy like blood oranges;
her feet were just begging to dance.

She skipped instead of walking;
she sang instead of speaking.
Happy and merry was her demeanor.
Such was my cousin.

I went to the lady next door,
who has a little millinery store.
I got my greenhorn cousin a job there—
so long live the Golden Land!⁷

Many years have since past.
My cousin has turned into a wreck.
She slaved away for many years⁸
until nothing was left of her.

Under her blue, beautiful eyes
black bags have appeared.
The cheeks, those ruddy oranges,
have aged and lost their greenhorn glow.

Nowadays, when I meet my cousin
and I ask her, "How are you, greenhorn?"
She answers me with a crooked expression:
"Columbus's land can go to hell!"

⁶ *Greenhorn—a common denotation for a new,
un-Americanized immigrant.*

⁷ *The Golden Land—a common affectionate
reference to America as a land of opportunity.*

⁸ *Literally, "She collected paydays for many years."*

VOS GEVEN IZ GEVEN UN NITO

(What Was, Was, and Is No More)

David Meyerowitz (*words and music*)

Permit me
to unburden my heart.
Whether I talk sense
or whether I speak from pain,
I suffer from a disease,
which is not called an illness.
They call it old age.
It gnaws and it yearns.

For what was, was, and is no more.
That year, that hour has already passed.
How quickly youthful joy flies away
and cannot be recaptured.

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For what was, was, and is no more....
The faculties become weak,
the hair turns gray....
One can mend himself, hide under nice clothing,
make himself up;
but he fools no one but himself,
for what was, was, and is no more....

When I chance to pass by a school,
I weep tears,
and I think of yesteryear:
How the young little mind
Doesn't understand its happiness,
and when one comes to his senses,
it is already too late.

OY, MAME, BIN IKH FARLIBT (Oh, Mama, I'm in Love)
Abraham Ellstein (*words and music*)
from the film *Yidl mitn fidl*

When he plays a beautiful and heartfelt
Jewish melody on his fiddle,
oh, Mama, everything feels so good.

Then, with his gorgeous dark eyes,
he seduced me.
Oh, Mama, I'm so happy.

And when he says, "Hey there, girl,
you are so lovely and delicate,"
and when his playing creeps into my heart,
I want to dance,
I want to sing.
Oh dear, I am starting to prance.
I can no longer live without him.

Oh, Mama, I'm in love....
Oh, Mama, I'm in love....
A young klezmer, my devoted mama,
is the only thing on my mind.
I cry and laugh and don't know, Mama,
what's going on with me.

Oh, Mama, I'm in love....
Oh, Mama, I'm in love....
I want to hug the whole world
and squeeze it close to me.
Oh, Mama, I'm in love....

ZOG, ZOG, ZOG ES MIR (Tell Me, Say It to Me)
Ilia Trilling
Lyrics: **Chaim Tauber**
from *Goldele dem bekers* (Goldele,
the Baker's Daughter)

In the glade, by the stream, a young man walked.

He spied a maiden there.
She enchanted him and immediately captured
his heart.
She was as beautiful as an angel.

She saw him there between the branches.
Her heart began to beat rapidly.
They were both shy, and just silently stared
at one another—
until he beseeched her:

"Tell me, tell me, say it to me,
I want to hear from you already,⁹
those four beautiful little words;⁹
and answer me now.

"Tell me, say it to me right now,
oh, say it and revive me.
Please, why should it bother you.
Tell me already, 'I love you.'
With you it's a brilliant paradise;
without you, my life is dark.
And should we, heaven forbid, be parted,
it would tear my heart out.

"Oh, tell me, tell me, say it to me,
I want to hear from you now
those four beautiful little words;
say it already, say, 'I love you.'"

⁹ *ikh hob dixh lib (I love you).*

DER DISHVASHER (The Dishwasher)
Herman Yablokoff (*words and music*)

In a restaurant I saw
an old man standing in the kitchen;
there's commotion swirling around him; he says not
a word.
He stands and washes the dishes there,
and with much feeling
he sings softly to himself:

"I wash with my weak hands.
I wash and wash, for a few pennies,
from early till late for a stale piece of bread.
I wash and wish for my own death.

"Once I was somebody.
I had a home, I was rich.
My father was good to me.
Now I am old; no one has any use for me.
And in the tumult
I stand and wash.

"I have four children, all well educated.
My sons- and daughters-in-law toss me out.

My daughter argues with me that I should go to my son.
He just screams: 'There's nothing I can do.'
And in the tumult
I stand and wash...."

DU SHAYNST VI DI ZUN (You Shine Like the Sun)
Ilia Trilling
Lyrics: Isidore Lillian

Day and night I think of you,
and I am happy when I hear from you.
Why is there a fire burning in my heart?
Why are you so dear to me?

I love to hear your sweet words,
for what you say brings me happiness.
From the day I first caught sight of you,
I fell in love with you.

Darling dear, tell me, am I this precious to you?
Do you feel that your destiny is only with me?
I gave my heart to you
when you sang to me:

"You shine like the sun
and you glow like the moon.
Your eyes are like the stars
that shine from heaven."

Without you,
my life is in peril.
At the first sight of you,
my heart jumps for joy.

When you are here, it's day;
when you are gone, it's night.
You have brought me
heaven on earth.

You shine like the sun
and you glow like the moon.
I truly love you.
This I swear to you by them [the sun and the moon].

VOS IZ GEVORN FUN MAYN SHTELE?
(Whatever Became of My *Shtetl*?)
Abraham Ellstein
Lyrics: Isidore Lillian

When I reminisce about
how it was when I was a child,
at home in the *shtetl*,¹⁰ once upon a time,
I recall how
in those beautiful winter nights
we used to stroll around
and dream countless dreams.

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Oh, how things were
so heartfelt, so beautiful then,
when we used to pass by the synagogue,
and the cantor's sonorous voice
resounded so piously,
so emotively, by the lectern:

"As when a shepherd takes account of his flock,
causing his sheep to pass under his staff one
by one."¹¹

Such a longing for bygone days
has remained in my heart.

Whatever became of my *shtetl*?
Whatever became of my old home?
Oh, what a longing I have for my *shtetl*.
That is where I spent my youth.
The alleyway, the little synagogue,
how heartfelt and how beautiful ...
The tree, the little dairy—
Will I ever see them again?
Oh, whatever became of my *shtetl*?
Oh, whatever became of the old home?

¹⁰ A small market town of 5,000–10,000 people.

¹¹ From one of the central prayers of the High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), concerning God's judgment of humanity.

MAZL (Good Fortune)
Abraham Ellstein
Lyrics: Molly Picon
from the film *Mamele*

Good fortune, sooner or later you shine
on everyone—
On everyone, but not on me.
Good fortune, you bring happiness to everyone.
Why do you bypass my door?
O, how I long for you every hour.
Life passes by
and there still is no hope.
O, good fortune, sooner or later you shine
on everyone—
On everyone, but not on me.

When the night arrives,
I remain awake, sitting and thinking:
Another day has already past,
and the dream that I have dreamt for myself
is gone with the wind once again.

IKH BIN A "BOARDER" BAY MAYN VAYB

(I'm a Boarder at My Wife's)

Reuben Doctor (*words and music*)

I'm a boarder at my wife's.

Guys, it's a sweet deal.

She attends to my every need.

When I come home, she doesn't ask any questions.

I am a boarder at my wife's.

I'm single once again,

single like a young boy.

I've divorced my wife.

I thought about moving out,

I looked for a room to lodge,

but my wife persuaded me:

"Why do you need to look for bargains

And be cramped in strange rooms,

And be alone and talk to the walls.

Stay here just like before.

Be a boarder now with me."

So like a boarder, I pay her rent.

I'm a boarder at my wife's.

It's so nice, so good.

Guys, it's a sweet deal.

She attends to my every need.

When I come home, she doesn't ask any questions.

I am a boarder at my wife's.

It's a pleasure;

I can get it all

as a stranger boarding at my wife's.

I'm no greenhorn,

and every day, after dinner,

I lie down, just to pass the time.

Oh, earlier she used to curse me

and make a big hullabaloo,

Even when there was a stranger boarding

in my house.

But ever since I became a boarder at her place,

she is so good to me.

It costs me little, and she loves me.

DER ALTER TSGAYNER (The Old Gypsy)

Abraham Ellstein

Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

from *Bublitshki* (Little Bagels)

Yonder, on a hill, under the free, open skies—

far from the noise of the city's tumult,

stands a little hut all by itself.

An old Gypsy lives in it.

Yonder sounds such sweet tones,

that sob in minor,

when the old Gypsy takes up his fiddle,

with all his fire and ardor,

as only a Gypsy can.

A Gypsy melody is so beautiful.

Once you hear it, you never forget it,

for it is warm, heartfelt, full of charm.

A strange power, it fills you with love as well as with

suffering.

You hear it but once

and it gives you no rest.

The melody enchants you.

When you first hear it,

it sounds simply naive,

and you have no idea of

how deeply it moves the soul.

From every side it infuses you

with passion and joy.

You want to hold on forever to these—

to these sounds of the melody.

When the Gypsy plays his fiddle,

it burns the heart.

The sound of his fiddle

awakens your soul's desire.

Your passions are aroused

when his bow strikes the fiddle's strings.

It's like floating to heaven,

all you want is life,

And life becomes so sweet....

That is the old Gypsy's song.

About the Performers

Born in Brooklyn, baritone **ROBERT PAUL ABELSON** has long been a noted cantor and cantorial teacher within the Reform movement. For many seasons a member of the New York City Opera, he has also sung with the Seattle and St. Paul Opera companies, the Goldovsky Opera Theatre, and the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center. An active performer in film, television, and theater, especially in Yiddish productions, Abelson has always shown a special devotion to Yiddish song, both art and theatrical. He starred in New York in the Jewish musical review *On Second Avenue* and in the 1990 Broadway musical *Those Were the Days*. He also sang a lead role in *Gimpel the Fool*, the acclaimed Yiddish opera by David Schiff.

BRUCE ADLER was born in New York City and began performing at the age of three, following a family tradition started by his maternal grandparents and continued by his parents, Henrietta Jacobson and Julius Adler. He has starred in shows celebrating Yiddish theater and culture, such as *Those Were the Days* (1991), for which he earned a Drama Desk award and Tony nomination, as well as *The Golden Land*, *On Second Avenue*, *Bagels and Yox*, *Raisins and Almonds*, and *Greetings ... Sholom Aleichem Lives!* with Theodore Bikel and Judy Kaye. He was also nominated for the 1992 Tony and Drama Desk awards for his role in the Gershwin musical *Crazy for You*.

The son of the prominent American cantor and Yiddish radio and recording singer Hazzan Charles Bennet Bloch, tenor **ROBERT BLOCH** was born in New York. His formal music education included studies at The Juilliard School and the American Opera Center, and cantorial studies at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College. He has performed leading roles with the Israel National Opera and was one of the featured soloists of the Reform cantorate at its celebration concerts in Israel. He has served the pulpits of several congregations and has appeared as guest cantor at synagogues throughout the United States.

JOANNE BORTS was born in Syosset, New York. Her parents and grandparents were all active members of the Workmen's Circle, the national fraternal organization dedicated to the perpetuation of the Yiddish language and culture and to Jewish social issues. At twelve she studied at the Workmen's Circle Mitzl-Shul. She has collaborated with Zalmen Mlotek on numerous Yiddish projects, including the annual children's holiday show *Kids & Yiddish*. Borts made her off-Broadway debut in 1985 in the musical *The Golden Land* and her Broadway debut in *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1991. Her concert appearances include Carnegie Hall (debut 1992), Lincoln Center, Merkin Hall, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Soprano **AMY GOLDSTEIN** was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, where her Brooklyn-born father, Cantor Jacob Goldstein, served one of the city's largest synagogues. After performing with the Goldstein Family Singers from early childhood, Goldstein discovered her "opera" voice at thirteen, and in 1980 she entered the Juilliard Preparatory Division. She attended the North Carolina School of the Arts, and studied at the Manhattan School of Music with soprano Adele Addison. In addition to her many opera roles, Goldstein is also known for her dedication to new works and to Jewish music. An increasing part of her work is devoted to recitals of Yiddish song.

BENZION MILLER is one of a few virtuoso Orthodox cantors dedicated to perpetuating the great cantorial tradition of the 19th and early 20th centuries. He is a direct descendant of the Bobover Hassidim—the followers of Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam of the town of Bobov, Galicia, founder of the "dynasty" in the mid-19th century. Miller's father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather were all cantors at the courts of the Bobover *rebbe*s (Hassidic rabbinical leaders). Benzion Miller was born in Germany shortly after the end of the Second World War, in a displaced persons camp near Munich. He studied at Bobover *yeshivot* (Talmudic academies), first in Brooklyn and then in Israel, where he came under the tutelage of the well-known cantor Shmuel Taube. Since 1981 he has been cantor of Temple Beth El of Boro Park in Brooklyn (now known as the Young Israel Beth-El of Boro Park). Miller's concert schedule includes numerous annual international performances including much Yiddish repertoire.

The daughter of a mother with roots in Latvian Jewry and a Baghdad-born father of Babylonian Jewish tradition who emigrated to America, mezzo-soprano **ELIZABETH SHAMMASH** earned a bachelor's degree in Italian studies from Brown University, an artist diploma from Boston University, and a master's degree in music and voice performance from the Manhattan School of Music. She attended the University of Bologna in Italy and Middlebury College's Scuola Italiana. Her concert appearances have included an all-Bernstein program with the National Symphony Orchestra, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Seattle Symphony under Gerard Schwarz. She has served for a number of years as cantor during the High Holy Days at Falmouth Jewish Congregation on Cape Cod.

A graduate of the Mannes College of Music, soprano **NELL SNAIDAS** began her professional career at sixteen as a soloist in a statewide tour of the New Jersey Opera Theater. She then sang leading roles with Repertorio Español, New York's renowned zarzuela company, and she also starred in the Thalia Spanish Theater's production of Francisco Alonso's *Las Leandras* at the International Zarzuela Festival at the Chamizal in El Paso. She has sung with early-music ensembles including ARTEK, the New York Ensemble for Early Music, and Ex Umbris. In 2001 she was featured in an evening of Yiddish divas at Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, and in 2002 at New York's Folksbiene she sang in an evening of Yiddish operetta by Abraham Goldfaden.

SIMON SPIRO was born in London to refugees from German-occupied Europe. His father became a noted actor-singer in the Yiddish theater of London's East End, and his mother was an accomplished singer. Spiro's path to his own calling emerged also from his family's cantorial tradition. He has become a leading interpreter of cantorial art, with a repertoire ranging from classical renditions of traditional European *hazzanut* to popular Yiddish song, and from contemporary Jewish musical styles to popular entertainment. Spiro received his cantorial training at Jews College, London, and he has subsequently held positions at major synagogues in England, Canada, and the United States. He is also an accomplished composer and arranger and has sung in many musical theater productions, including the lead role in *Phantom of the Opera* in the Far East.

The **VIENNA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA** (Wiener Kammerorchester) was founded in 1946. Philippe Entremont was its chief conductor between 1976 and 1991, and as lifetime honorary conductor, he continues to lead the orchestra on tours and in its subscription concerts at the Vienna Konzerthaus. His appearances as both conductor and soloist have started a tradition, as the orchestra has frequently invited such artists as Yehudi Menuhin, Heinz Holliger, and Heinrich Schiff to collaborate in a dual role. The tradition was maintained by Ernst Kovacic, who succeeded Entremont as chief conductor from 1996 to 1998. In October 1999 the orchestra gave nine concerts throughout the United States, and it toured there again in 2002. In 1999 Christoph Eberle assumed the position of chief conductor.

Clarinetist **DAVID KRAKAUER**, who grew up in New York City, is a graduate of The Juilliard School and the Paris Conservatoire. He is a leading exponent of the eastern European "klezmer" idiom, as well as a major interpreter of the classical repertoire. He has been heard around the world with his Klezmer Madness! ensemble, and his compositions for the group, while firmly rooted in traditional klezmer-type folk tunes, also pay homage to jazz, rock, experimental classical, and funk. In October 2000 the European arts television channel Arte aired a fifty-four-minute feature film about Krakauer's life and work. He is a member of the clarinet and chamber music faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and Mannes College.

The **BARCELONA SYMPHONY/NATIONAL ORCHESTRA OF CATALONIA** (Orquestra Simfónica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya) was founded in 1944 as the Municipal Orchestra of Barcelona, and under the leadership of the Catalan composer-conductor Eduard Toldrà it became an integral part of the city's cultural life. Since that time, the orchestra, which aspires to promote classical music—and the works of Spanish and Catalan composers in particular—has presented an annual cycle of concerts and performed with many internationally renowned soloists.

ELLI JAFFE was born in Jerusalem and graduated with distinction from the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem, later studying at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He has conducted all of Israel's major orchestras, and he holds the title of honorary guest conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra. He is artistic director of the music department of Dvir Yeshiva High School for Art and of the Jerusalem School for Cantorial Art and music director of the Jerusalem Great Synagogue Choir, with which he has made numerous world tours. Jaffe has published an encyclopedic instructional set for the entire annual cycle of Hebrew liturgy. Also an accomplished composer, his First Symphony was performed by the Israel Philharmonic, and his Wind Quintet was premiered by that orchestra's wind ensemble.

Credits

- 1. Der Nayer Sher (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Paul Henning
- 2. Oygn (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Jon Kull
- 3. Ikh Vil Es Hern Nokh A Mol (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Patrick Russ
- 4. Ikh Zing (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration: Patrick Russ & Warren Sherk
Arrangement: Patrick Russ & Warren Sherk/
Zalmen Mlotek
- 5. Abi Gezunt (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration: Paul Henning
Arrangement: Zalmen Mlotek/Paul Henning
- 6. Zog Es Mir Nokh A Mol (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration: Patrick Russ
Arrangement: Patrick Russ/Zalmen Mlotek
- 7. Di Grine Kuzine (Schwartz)**
Orchestration: Paul Henning
Arrangement: Zalmen Mlotek/Paul Henning
- 8. Vos Geven Iz Geven Un Nito (Meyerowitz)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Jonathan Sacks
- 9. Oy Mame, Bin Ikh Farlibt (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Jonathan Sacks
- 10. Zog, Zog, Zog Es Mir (Trilling)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Frank Bennett
- 11. Der Dishvasher (Yablokoff)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Ira Hearshen
- 12. Du Shaynst Vi Di Zun (Trilling)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Frank Bennett
- 13. Vos Iz Gevorn Fun Mayn Shtetele? (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration: Ira Hearshen
Arrangement: Ira Hearshen/Zalmen Mlotek
- 14. Mazl (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration/Arrangement: Ira Hearshen
- 15. Ikh Bin A "Boarder" Bay Mayn Vayb (Doctor)**
Orchestration: Ira Hearshen
Arrangement: Ira Hearshen/Zalmen Mlotek
- 16. Der Alter Tsigayner (Ellstein)**
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.
Orchestration: Frank Bennett
Arrangement: Frank Bennett/Zalmen Mlotek

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Recording Engineer: Campbell Hughes
Assistant Recording Engineers: Andreas Hamza, Bertram Kornacher (tracks 6, 15)
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Recording Project Manager: Paul Schwendener

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