

Cover Art

Yiddish Theatre V3

A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE FOUNDER



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

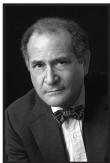
While much of this music had become a vital force in American and world culture, even more music of specifically Jewish content had been created, perhaps performed, and then lost to current and future generations. Believing that there was a unique opportunity to rediscover, preserve and transmit the collective memory contained within this music, I founded the Milken Archive of American Jewish Music in 1990.

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

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Lowell Milken

A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



The quality, quantity, and amazing diversity of sacred as well as secular music written for or inspired by Jewish life in America is one of the least acknowledged achievements of modern Western culture. The time is ripe for a wider awareness and appreciation of these various repertoires—which may be designated appropriately as an aggregate “American Jewish music.” The Milken Archive is a musical voyage of discovery encompassing more than 600 original pieces by some 200 composers—symphonies, operas, cantorial masterpieces, complete synagogue services, concertos, Yiddish theater, and folk and popular music. The music in the Archive—all born of the American Jewish experience or fashioned for uniquely American institutions—has been created by native American or immigrant composers. The repertoire is chosen by a panel of leading musical and Judaic authorities who have selected works based on or inspired by traditional Jewish melodies or modes, liturgical and life-cycle functions and celebrations, sacred texts, and Jewish history and secular literature—with

intrinsic artistic value always of paramount consideration for each genre. These CDs will be supplemented later by rare historic reference recordings.

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

A handwritten signature in 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 American Yiddish Theatrical Songs

The selections here derive from the medium of popular Yiddish theatrical song that, beginning in the 1880s, flourished for more than six decades as mass-oriented entertainment among large segments of eastern European Yiddish-speaking immigrant generations and their immediate American-born offspring. Although this aggregate medium came to embrace Yiddish film and radio as well as Jewish recordings, all of which generated on their own a large repertoire of popular Yiddish songs originally independent of live stage productions, nearly all the songs considered here have their genesis in live formats of two principal types, notwithstanding the popularity of subsequent recordings and broadcasts.

One medium considered here is the **American Yiddish Musical Theater**, now more commonly known generically as **Second Avenue**, so named after the lower Manhattan district (today geographically identifiable as the East Village) where it made its debut and gained its first audiences, and where its most important and prestigious theaters stood at the zenith of that cultural phenomenon. Satellite theaters and companies—eventually often no less important—radiated and flourished as well during that era in other boroughs of New York City and across North America in cities with significant Yiddish-speaking populations, such as Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Montreal. New York-based troupes toured as well, bringing Yiddish theater to many additional communities.

Songs in this category are from full-length theatrical productions based on plays or dramatic scenarios that were variously called operettas, musical comedies, romantic musicals, melodramas, musical shows, or simply musicals. These are to be distinguished from several other more literary Yiddish theatrical forms with less sustained and less widely appreciated, but nonetheless culturally significant life in America: serious Yiddish drama, Yiddish art theater, and Yiddish political theater (ARTEF).

The other live format was **Yiddish Vaudeville**, played in music halls and variety houses, whose introduction preceded indigenous full-scale Yiddish theater in America. Vaudeville ranged from individual songs, dance routines, and comic monologues to skits, revues, and even one-act sketches and playlets.

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The American Yiddish musical theater was a powerful product of the immigrant experience, and it became a highly successful import 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.

The musical forms, conventions, and styles of Second Avenue, especially as it advanced toward its mature stage, grew out of and relied heavily on Viennese and other Central European light operetta traditions. But its composite musical parameter was also built on the foundations of modern European Yiddish musical theater as initiated formally in Romania in 1876 by Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908), a multitalented, learned Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment in eastern Europe) beneficiary and adherent. Goldfaden's plays—especially his operettas, which drew upon a variety of secular folk, operatic, and Jewish liturgical musical sources as well as his own originality—were performed by his own troupes and others not only in Romania but in cities throughout the Czarist and Hapsburg empires. Sometimes they were staged in cleverly camouflaged defiance of the 1883 ban on Yiddish theater in the Czarist Empire, which continued sporadically thereafter. And an imported production in New York of one of his operettas in 1882 is generally accepted as the first full-length Yiddish musical staging in America, which spawned and set the tone for the future of Second Avenue.

In its early years the music of Second Avenue came on its own to be informed by some of the extrinsic gloss of perceived Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian, Gypsy, Romanian, and other folk motifs and tune styles that resonated well in popular imagination—as well as by references to traditional cantorial modes and synagogue influences, especially where those elements related to specific

characters, plots, or situations. But commercially driven songwriters rarely attempted to mine the bedrock of authentic European Jewish folksong (nor would they have known how), turning at most to bits of its topsoil. They were, however, quick to reflect and incorporate idioms, contemporaneously fashionable dance rhythms, and current melodic styles of the day from uptown American popular and theatrical music. Yet the modal adaptation of those in-vogue features, together with familiar residual strains of the imagined Old World, often combined to yield an emblematic type of fusion whose ultimate product was no less than a worthy legacy of wonderful songs.

About the Orchestration

Few complete or authoritative orchestrations of songs or the shows from which they were extracted have survived; and in many cases full orchestrations, with an actual *partitura*, were never made in the first place. Many were created after the fact for live radio broadcasts or makeshift 78-rpm recordings, both with limited orchestral forces and usually, by the second decade of the 20th century, for far smaller ensembles than the actual full pit orchestras in the theaters. By about 1920 at the latest, a minimum of twenty-four musicians was the accepted orchestral standard for properly financed productions. Still, conductors often worked from sketches or charts, a not uncommon practice in the theater world, and those sketches also relied on a significant measure of improvisation. After meticulous research concerning orchestra size, typical instrumentation, and orchestral styles and idioms consistent with the original productions, the Milken Archive turned to leading reconstruction orchestrators, commissioning new, historically considered orchestrations expressly for this project. The polished professional renditions here reflect the known desiderata of the best Second Avenue composers and producers, even if their intentions were not always fulfilled completely. It is a mistaken presumption to link the authenticity of orchestral quality or sound to the more crude accompaniments on contemporaneous but inferior recordings, which were made hastily, with minimal financial investment, and for a different purpose. Most

of the major shows, especially after about 1918, were orchestrated not by unskilled scribblers, but by the composers themselves—who often had solid classical training and experience—or by accomplished professional orchestrators. Nor by the 1920s were the orchestra pits populated by unschooled street or folk musicians, but often by some of the best players in the business—including conservatory-trained musicians who played in uptown theaters and concert halls on other nights.

Vaudeville houses could feature not only popular voice types and crooning deliveries, but also salty and, where appropriate, even boisterous timbres. In the early decades of theater, too, productions had frequently to rely on untrained singers. But apart from the specifically comic and other character roles that generated signature vocal personalities of their own, the Yiddish theater, with its pretensions to operetta, eventually came to require and present legitimate and even classically trained voices as singer-actors (much as did Broadway for a long time, until at the least the 1970s). There were no microphones, and the theaters were not tiny. Even as popular entertainment, the vocal models were not the club or pop singers of the day, but the voices that would have been heard on either side of the Atlantic in Franz Lehár, Emmerich Kálmán, Victor Herbert, or Sigmund Romberg—or, for that matter, in good Gilbert and Sullivan.

Dramatic Aspects

The Milken Archive sails in uncharted seas in its effort to reconstruct the dramatic contexts of these songs. Undated scripts—some of them obviously early drafts—have been located for only some of the shows. Like discovered ancient shipwrecks, they seem frozen in time, echoing an entirely lost world of nearly a century ago. Typed in Hebrew characters or even handwritten, they contain undecipherable margin notes and cryptic instructions that allude to unexplained changes; and some are missing whole sections. Rarely are specific locations within the action indicated for particular songs. And it is impossible to know how much was changed—songs, characters, and plot elements—by the time the curtain rose on opening night or even thereafter. Songs were frequently moved from one spot to another during the staging process,

and others were added after a show was composed. Fortunately, press reviews, advance notices, information contained on published song-sheet covers, and a few located souvenir programs are helpful in detangling some of the muddle. To further confuse things for the historian, the actors were also permitted considerable freedom to improvise and ad-lib from one performance to another of the same production.

Many of these dated ephemeral plays are crudely constructed, primitive in their predictability, and saturated with deliberately exaggerated but “required” stereotyped characters whose development onstage is generally absent. Yet, patterned on the “song and dance” mold, they furnished their audiences the simple diversionary entertainment they demanded—especially as backdrops to the music, which was always paramount. The plays overflow with warmed-over trite situations, stock plot twists, convoluted subplots, and shopworn coincidences. Looping throughout these plots are recycled clichéd recipes of family objections to marriages; schemes for alternative matches with ulterior motives; zero-hour revelations of concealed identities such as highborn birth or Jewish parentage; convenient discoveries of “long-lost” relatives just in time to save the day; and orphaned or lost Jewish children who grow up to become army officers, famous personalities, or even Christian aristocrats or clergymen. There is nearly always a luckless *shlimazl*, a comic victim of circumstances, as well as a villain—perhaps a stingy uncle, some meddler intent on thwarting a marriage, or an ill-intentioned rival—who always received resounding boos from the audience during his curtain calls. Favorite predigested routines and formulas concern eleventh-hour revelations at, or just before, weddings, when a pair is unknowingly about to enter into a forbidden—sometimes even incestuous—union, unaware of some concealed adoption, improper conversion, divorce, or other previously hidden information that would nullify the marriage. The new crisis is usually resolved by yet another revelation or some last remaining piece of the puzzle, a dramatic device not confined to the Yiddish theatrical realm, and one finds its non-Jewish counterparts recurrent in Western literature—from Shakespeare to Victorian novels and plays, as well as Gilbert and Sullivan. But the Second Avenue repertoire,

where those versions seem less plausible, can appear disproportionately riddled with this cliché.

Among the many stock song patterns was the “couplet song,” to which newly invented or improvised couplets dealing with topical situations or personalities would be appended to the original song at any particular performance—often on the spot, since the conductor had only to be signaled.

Pronunciation and Diction

Pronunciation in these recordings expressly avoids consistency with standard literary (YIVO) Yiddish and follows the mixture of Volhynian, Galician, and southern Polish dialects prevalent on Second Avenue stages. The variety of performers’ backgrounds and geographical origins in the heyday of Second Avenue, however, also yielded occasional words sung in northern Polish and Ukrainian dialects—without consistency even in the same song. This too is deliberately reflected here.

—Neil W. Levin

About the Composers

Among the significant composers and conductors associated with Second Avenue Yiddish musical theater at its zenith—a list that includes a great many once-prominent names that are now no longer so widely remembered—JOSEPH RUMSHINSKY (1881 [1879?–1956], along with Sholom Secunda, Alexander Olshanetsky, and Abraham Ellstein, is always considered one of the “big four” in aggregate achievement as well as undiminished fame. The beginning of his Second Avenue career, however, preceded the entrance of the other three in that group. He arrived in America as a young adult and an experienced musician before Ellstein was born, more than a decade before Olshanetsky immigrated from Europe, and only a few years before Secunda’s bar mitzvah. (By the time Secunda first attempted to break into the Second Avenue arena, for example, Rumshinsky was already a major force within the entrenched establishment, whose hegemony posed an obstacle to the young newcomer

that he could overcome only gradually and patiently—a situation Rumshinsky himself had faced upon his own arrival on the scene years earlier.) In terms of his formative role in the progress of the Yiddish musical, Rumshinsky's generic impact as a would-be reformer—independent of qualitative artistic or literary judgments of his ultimate products—was probably greater than that of the others who followed him. For it was he who first tried to edge Yiddish musical entertainments away from their earlier theatrical crudeness and lift them toward his theoretical ideal of a new American genre of Yiddish light operetta (or, as one critic later characterized Rumshinsky's admittedly unfulfilled aim, operetta in Yiddish). He succeeded, to a degree, in terms of form and structure, as well as with certain lasting innovations both in the pit and on the stage. But content remained little affected in the wake of his commercially driven recidivism. In many respects it may be said of Rumshinsky that his American career mirrored the chronological course of Second Avenue's development from the first decade of the 20th century until the 1950s.

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He was born in a town near Vilna (Vilnius; now, and historically, Lithuania, but then part of Russian Poland), where his father was a hatter by trade and his mother was an amateur voice teacher to local avocational singers and *badkhnim* (wedding entertainers). He later recalled that his father's shop reverberated with labor-oriented and other Yiddish songs, which were also brought home to the family.

The young Joseph exhibited musical talent at an early age, taking piano lessons at a local private school, and he soon became known affectionately by the sobriquet *Yoshke der notn-freser* (little Joseph the devourer of music [notes]). He also had some formal Russian secular schooling, which he claimed to have requested on his own, but his further musical exposure and training came with his immersion in the typical eastern European cantorial-choral apprenticeship—or *m'shorer* (cantor's choral "assistant")—system. For a time he sang in the choir of the learned and esteemed cantor Abraham Moshe Bernstein (1866–1932) at the Taharat Hakodesh Synagogue in Vilna.

This was a typical *khos shul* (lit., choral synagogue)—one of the westernized, culturally progressive, and musically sophisticated synagogues, albeit still within a basically orthodox framework, that had been established in many cosmopolitan eastern European cities as a response to modernity. Between 1890 and 1894 the young Rumshinsky toured as a student chorister with several other cantors to various cities throughout the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire, where he was exposed to a wider variety of cantorial styles. It was on one of those tours, in Grodno (Russian Poland), that he first encountered not only Russian theater but, fortuitously for his future career, Yiddish theater as well—through the professional touring productions of the famous Kaminski [Kaminska] theatrical company.

Rumshinsky appears to have been instantly attracted to the Yiddish musical stage when he heard his first Goldfaden operetta, *Shulamis*. First as a chorister and later as a conductor, he toured with the Kaminskis and other troupes, becoming familiar with many of Goldfaden's operettas and enamored of the entire genre, which he would eventually seek to implant and to emulate in New York as the basis for a new American brand of Yiddish musical theater. He was only seventeen years old when he conducted a full-scale production of Goldfaden's *Bar Kokhba*.

In 1899, in Łódź, he became the first conductor of the newly formed culturally Zionist and Haskala-oriented Hazomir Choral Society, but in 1902 he emigrated to London to avoid conscription in the czarist army. He soon became persuaded that his future lay in America. He arrived as an immigrant in New York in 1904 only to find no ready welcome from the Yiddish theater establishment or its union for a young newcomer and potential competitor.

In the overall scene he encountered, which continued to prevail for some time, American-born purported Yiddish musical theater, which Rumshinsky often dismissed as "elevated vaudeville," had yet to undergo development into a more cohesive, yet still manifestly popular, form that could be said even to approach a type of operetta in which music, plot, and dialogue were at least interrelated. That was a process in which Rumshinsky was later instrumental.

Pure drama and Goldfaden imports and imitations aside, the pandering level of homegrown Yiddish musical theater during the decade or so of Rumshinsky's immigration can be gleaned partly from a glance at the titles of some of the commercially successful productions of the day. These ranged from such Americana-infused curiosities as *Der yidishe Yankee Doodle* (1905) and a melodramatic Yiddish version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to a reimagined "Jewish Hamlet" as *Der yeshiva bokher* (the Talmud student), replete with cantorial renditions and a cemetery service for the "Jewish Ophelia," to the 1907–08 supposedly *farbeserd* ("improved" or "updated"!) offering of Goldfaden's last work, *Ben Ami*—a serious drama with music that seems to have drawn loosely on George Eliot's novel *Daniel Deronda*, but which was nonetheless made to appeal to astutely predicted popular tastes by the insertion of comic songs and couplets.

According to his not undisputed memoirs, the soon to become legendary Boris Thomashefsky (1868–1939)—as a young immigrant cigar roller and synagogue chorister on New York's Lower East Side—had persuaded a benefactor to bring an acting troupe from London for a performance of Goldfaden's recently created *Di kishefmakhern* (The Witch, or The Sorceress). The production, in which the young Thomashefsky also sang and acted, took place in 1882 at Turn Verein Hall and more or less gave birth to popular Yiddish theater in America. Exhilarated and emboldened by the experience, Thomashefsky—by dint of his larger-than-life personality, his natural theatrical proclivities, and his remarkable market instincts about the type of entertainment the growing Yiddish-speaking immigrant community would demand—went on in effect to found Second Avenue as a stage genre, an emotional outlet, a creative vehicle, and a virtual way of life for its insider professional contributors and its *patriotn* (fans, or groupies) alike. By 1912 he had his own venue, the Downtown National Theater, and he became a force that could not be ignored. Eventually a new breed of more musically sophisticated and schooled composers such as Rumshinsky and his emerging circle managed to build on that standard, but Thomashefsky's initial generic imprint was almost always discernible, especially with regard to the principle of commercial audience appeal.

As the immigrant population swelled, it was less interested in the biblical, historical, literary, or morally and ethically didactic and even homiletical subject matter of much of Goldfaden's work, and it preferred topical themes, artificial nostalgia, romanticized Old World folk motifs, sheer diversion, and, especially, New World immigrant situations and characterizations with which it could identify directly—through tears as well as laughter, including, healthfully, at themselves. Rumshinsky quickly understood that distinction, and in order to overcome the barriers to his participation, he let it be known that he was prepared to reset his sights—at least for a while—and write for the *oylem* (the "people") and its demonstrated appetites, if only given the opportunity. Still, he continued to imagine the artistic possibilities of an altogether new, higher form of American Yiddish operetta, perhaps even opera.

Rumshinsky had to contend with the fact that from the 1890s through the turn of the century, a number of well-received composers, songwriters, and lyricists had emerged, eager to follow Thomashefsky's proven recipe for popularity. The books and scenarios for many of their productions could be characterized within the extended context of what came to be known, not always with opprobrium, as *shund*—an almost institutionalized popular industry of "literary trash" that encompassed a world of cheap pulp fiction, common periodicals, and other coarse diversions.

Rumshinsky spent a year at Boston's main Yiddish venue, the Hope Theater. By the 1908–09 season, his career began to fall into place in New York when the "matinee idol" Jacob P. Adler (1856–1926), one of the giants among serious dramatic actors, brought him to conduct and compose at the Windsor Theater, in which Adler was a partner and co-manager. An ardent advocate for a higher artistic and literary plane of theatrical experience even for the popular realm, a sort of "*kunst* for the people"—though his was ultimately a losing battle—and a voice of opposition to the *shund* approach, Adler naturally appreciated Rumshinsky's long-range goals as well as his superior musical endowments and dramatic sense.

It was at the Windsor that season that Rumshinsky wrote what he considered to be his first full operetta-type score: *A yidish kind*, a revision by Bernard Wilensky of an earlier operetta by Shomer [Nohum Meir Shaykevitch; 1846, 1847, 1849?–1905]. He also wrote the songs that season for another Wilensky operetta, *Nosn hakhokhem* (Nathan the Wise), based on the German (non-Jewish) dramatist and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's famous but perplexing play, in which the relative merits of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are argued. That operetta included Rumshinsky's song *V'yiten l'kha*, with lyrics by Solomon Smulewitz, which, when issued independently in 1909, became his first American publication of an original song. It later acquired the erroneous status of an anonymous folksong.

Rumshinsky teamed up with Anshel Schorr to write the show he later described as the first “modern” Yiddish musical comedy: *Dos meydl fun der vest* (The Girl from the West). It was followed by his operetta *Shir hashirim* (Song of Songs), which Rumshinsky—a bit boldly—characterized as nothing less than “the first romantic Yiddish opera.” After residencies in several other major Second Avenue venues, Rumshinsky hooked up with Thomashefsky in 1916 in an official affiliation as composer and conductor at the latter's National Theater. During the next three seasons there, he wrote full scores for comedies as well as melodramas with Thomashefsky and other librettists and lyricists. His *Tsubrokhene fidl* (Broken Fiddle) at the National was a watershed event on two counts. First, Rumshinsky persuaded Thomashefsky to introduce for the first time a full professional dance corps (reports refer to it as “ballet,” which is debatable), to expand the elements within a single production along the lines of European opera and operetta, and to avoid reliance upon “chorus line” or vaudeville-level dance movements. But his more far-reaching innovation in that show was his insistence on a full pit orchestra with a minimum of twenty-four professional musicians, upgrading the entire orchestral parameter for the future of Second Avenue beyond the small dance-band or modestly expanded wedding-band formats that had sufficed for most earlier productions and to which audiences were accustomed.

Indeed, it is in the size, quality, and instrumentation of the pit orchestra for full-scale Yiddish theatrical productions that Rumshinsky made one of his most enduring contributions. When he first added harp, oboe, and bassoon to his orchestrations, word had it that some actors in those productions referred to him as “crazy Wagner!” Yet some of those innovations, such as harp, caught on and became rooted in Second Avenue orchestrations, while others—double reeds in particular—did not. If Rumshinsky was unable fully to achieve his symphonic ideal, he at least advanced toward it on the order of Lehár, Kalman, Romberg, and Herbert—and 1940s–1950s Broadway. Also stemming from his years at the National Theater, Rumshinsky insisted on fully trained singers with legitimate light operatic voices—on the models of Central European operetta. That, too, became the desiderata and the standard thereafter.

By 1919 he felt that his professional association with Thomashefsky had reached its limits, in view of their divergent views concerning dramatic aspects, especially plots and librettos, and he moved over to the Kessler Second Avenue Theater beginning with the 1919–20 season. He and Thomashefsky, however, remained friends and maintained collegial contact for many years.

Dem rebns nign (The Rabbi's Melody) was Rumshinsky's first production at the Second Avenue Theater, and it was a hit that ran for more than six months. In the succeeding thirty-five years, he wrote, produced or coproduced, and conducted an unprecedented—and since unequalled—number of shows, both there and at other principal theaters, which must be acknowledged to vary in quality. But his position as the de facto musical dean of Second Avenue by the mid-1920s is indisputable. Beginning in the 1930s, he was also active in radio programming and broadcasting for various stations, and he became music director of the only Yiddish program broadcast on a nationwide network, *The Jewish Hour*, sponsored by the Yiddish daily newspaper *Der Tog*. At the other end of the artistic spectrum, he spent three seasons (1946–49) at Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theater, where he composed music for such literary plays as *Hereshle ostropoler*, Yehuda Leib Peretz's *Dray matones*, and Shalom Aleichem's *Blondzhende shtern*.

No consideration of Rumshinsky's career can bypass his mutually fruitful association for more than thirty years with the adored American-born comedic actress, singer, comedienne, film star, and writer of many of her own songs for the Yiddish stage, Molly Picon [Margaret Pyckoon] (1898–1992), for whom he wrote many scores. Ironically, Rumshinsky first encountered her in 1921 on a trip to Europe, where her “discoverer,” manager, and newly wed husband, Yiddish actor and producer Jacob [Yankl] Kalich, had taken her for the ostensible purpose of honing and naturalizing her Yiddish diction and fluency.

Kalich had created a musical play for his new wife, called *Yankele*, which Rumshinsky happened to see in Łódź and which would become one of Picon's signature vehicles for decades. Rumshinsky claimed, without being perturbed, that the production was partly a patchwork of versions of his own songs, which he had written “over the years” and by that time had transcended their authorship. He was mightily impressed with the young newcomer to the Yiddish stage, but he also discovered the soubrette Mathilda St. Claire, whom he brought back to New York to star in Yiddish operettas. By the time Molly Picon and Kalich returned to the United States in 1923, however, Rumshinsky had determined to make her his protégée and to champion her career as well, since he realized that her refreshing youthfulness, her impish stage presence, her warm immediacy, and her spirited voice would make her ideal for lead roles in the lighter fare he was planning and producing. He introduced her to Second Avenue in a reworked production of *Yankele*, which inaugurated her long-running career in Yiddish theaters throughout America and abroad, later including Broadway and Hollywood as well. It was not long before the three—Picon, Rumshinsky, and Kalich—were a recognized team, to which a 1931 *New York Times* article referred as “the Three Musketiers of the East Side.”

Like the other three composers of the Second Avenue “big four,” Rumshinsky never abandoned entirely his sacred music roots and his youthful cantorial exposure, and he composed a number of enduring liturgical pieces once he was firmly established in the theater. In 1926 he conducted the more than 100-voice chorus of the Jewish Ministers Cantors Association—the Hazzanim Farband Chor—in a

premiere of his biblically based cantata, *Oz yashir*, at their concert at New York's Mecca Temple (now City Center), along with an orchestral fantasy on liturgical melodies. And the Farband's 1931 concert featured three of his major synagogue settings: *Al tira*, *Min hametzar*, and his best-known cantorial-choral work, *Shma koleinu*, which remains in the standard traditional Yom Kippur repertoire.


In 1931, the Yiddish theater world celebrated Rumshinsky's fiftieth birthday with a gala concert and banquet and with the publication of a *festschrift* titled *Rumshinsky bukh*—an honor accorded to no other composer in that milieu before or since. The *Rumshinsky bukh* contained numerous testimonial articles and messages by colleagues as well as by critics. Maurice Schwartz, the advocate of art theater, nonetheless congratulated Rumshinsky on not being “ashamed to write for ‘the people,’ ” and conductor Edwin Franko Goldman dubbed him “the second Victor Herbert”—a “sort of Victor Herbert with a yarmulke,” as Isaac Goldberg added. And Abe Cahan, editor of the *Forverts*, the largest circulating Yiddish daily newspaper, placed Rumshinsky squarely in the pantheon of such theatrical pillars as Goldfaden, Adler, Kessler, and Jacob Gordin.

There were also critical assessments that lamented the commercial practicalities of public demand that had prevented Rumshinsky from rising above mass entertainment and further realizing his artistic aims for Yiddish musical theater. For despite his advancements in terms of musical continuity, in the end most of the books, plays, and librettos for his successful scores were not of much higher quality than those of his contemporaries, and they continued to contain some of the same clichés, vaudeville residues, and other weaknesses that he had criticized from the beginning. However, Jacob Shatzky, an intellectual with no predisposition to forgive diluted standards, praised him for his vision, his initial quest for worthy librettos, and his cosmopolitanism “even when depicting [musically] a *kleyen shtetl* (small town) story” with *kleyen shtetl*—folk-oriented—sensibilities.

In the 1940s Rumshinsky completed an opera, *Ruth*, based on the biblical story and written entirely in Hebrew. Some of those closest to him maintained after his death that

he had considered it his most important work. That it was never performed (and has not been performed or recorded to this day), despite a planned production in Israel and another in Los Angeles—neither of which materialized—was a source of personal disappointment for him.


Rumshinsky's final show was *Wedding March*, which was in the midst of its run at the time of his death. He had also been in discussion about an English musical comedy in collaboration with Julie Berns.



Songwriter, lyricist, bard, actor, *badkhn* (wedding jester and entertainer), balladeer, and early recording singer **SOLOMON SMULEWITZ** [a.k.a. Small] (1868–1943) was born in Minsk, Belarus, and immigrated to the United States in 1889. He was one of the most prolific and talented of the early Yiddish composers who fashioned a type of Yiddish counterpart to American popular song around the turn of the 19th–20th century and in the immediately ensuing years. He wrote a profusion of songs (words and music) and many lyrics for other songwriters. His subject matter ranged from immigrant families, labor conditions, biblical vignettes, Judaic observances, Jewish historical incidents, nostalgia, immigration obstacles, and current political subjects to wedding celebration songs. In the last decade of his life—when, to eke out a basic subsistence, he toured the United States and traveled across Canada from Halifax to Calgary and Winnipeg, entertaining local Jewish audiences with his own and similar songs—he mused on man's course through life in his song *Man shpilt teater* (Mankind Plays in a Theater): “We act as if we were all on the stage, each one acting out his little life to a script written and directed by Almighty God.”

Throughout the first two decades of the 20th century Smulewitz recorded his songs in many of the earliest recording studios on a regular basis. Thereafter he continued to turn out melodies and lyrics for others to sing. His legacy comprises about 150 known or traceable songs and song lyrics—of which *A brivele der mamen* is now unquestionably his most famous—although in a

letter to the press he once referred to twice that number with his own tunes, in addition to 200 sets of words to melodies by others.



DAVID MEYEROWITZ (1867–1943) 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 began as he entertained fellow workers in a match factory.

In 1890, he came to America, but he continued at menial shop labor while he composed simple Yiddish parodies and patriotic sentiments. He began singing such songs at various gatherings and then for small remuneration at cafés and music halls, and he soon became known as “the wandering poet.” 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.



Program Notes

1. Rumshinsky's love duet **MAYN GOLDELE**, with lyrics by Louis Gilrod, was one of his twenty songs and other musical numbers from his three-act operetta *Di goldene kale* (The Golden Bride), to a book and libretto by Louis Freiman [Leyzer Genoyk]. First produced in 1923 at the Kessler Second Avenue Theater—staged by Michal Michalesco (who also acted and sang the lead male role), with a cast that included Annie Thomashefsky (sister of Boris), and choreographed by Hyman (“Hymie”) Jacobson, who appeared onstage as Jerome—it was the first of Rumshinsky's many fruitful collaborations with Freiman.

The story of *Di goldene kale* revolves around Goldele, whose mother abandoned her as a child of four at an inn in an unnamed town in the Czarist Pale (her father having left her mother and gone off to America). The child was taken in by the innkeeper and his wife and

reared together with their own children, Misha and Khanele. Goldele is a young lady when the Act I curtain rises. Her uncle Benjamin has just made a surprise visit from America with his son Jerome to inform Goldele that she has inherited her father's American fortune. The town is immediately abuzz, and she is suddenly besieged with suitors. Not to miss a chance to earn what he knows would be a handsome commission, Kalman Kliamke, the *shames* (beadle) of the town synagogue, quickly gets into the act as a *shadkhn* (matchmaker) and sets about frantically trying to organize potential *shidukhim* (matches) for Goldele. One can only imagine the comic opportunity this situation provided for the composer, librettist, and director as Goldele is approached by such *shtetl* (market town) stereotypes as Yankl the shoemaker, Berel the tailor, and Motl the cantor's choir singer, each of whom swears on the spot his undying love.

Uncle Benjamin, however, harbors the hope that Goldele will marry Jerome. As it happens, Goldele has long been in love with Misha, who has been away studying medicine—although the sudden parade of suitors does confuse her temporarily. When Misha returns home for a visit during a school intercession, her confusion evaporates, and she tells him—after he dispels her concerns about a transatlantic separation by offering to come with her—that he is indeed hers (“my Misha”), which leads into the duet *Mayn goldele*. In the duet he refers to her as his *kale* (bride), in the sense of a potential bride.

Meanwhile, Goldele tells Misha that she can marry no one until her mother is found, since she is convinced that she is alive somewhere. Mildly suggestive of mythical or fairy-tale prenuptial contests devised by sought-after women, Goldele announces her own variant of those competitions. Rather than any test of physical strength or even mental prowess, as in the non-Jewish versions of this motif, Goldele long ago made a vow that she will marry the one man who can find and bring her mother to her. And now that she is a woman of means, she will spare no expense. The finale of the first act begins with the traditional Sabbath eve meal, at which Misha chants the *Kiddush* (sanctification) over wine, followed by everyone wishing Goldele well in her new life in America.

Acts II and III are set in New York a year later in Goldele's lavish home. She has brought with her some of her adopted family as well as many of her former townspeople. When she receives a letter from Misha telling her that he is about to board ship for America but has been unsuccessful in finding her mother—and therefore knows that he has lost Goldele forever—she weeps and reiterates her love for him, but adheres to her vow.

In a scene worthy of Italian opera at its grandest, Goldele organizes a masked ball, and each eligible male guest is challenged to bring her mother, if she can be found. In a farcical parade, each of her many suitors (including the various characters from her European *shtetl*) brings a woman either claiming to be Goldele's mother—assuming that the passage of years would cloud physical recognition—or truly hoping to find a long-lost daughter.

Disguised in a mask, Misha arrives to bring “regards from Misha,” and he sings a song of hope couched in a Zionist reference: “Palestine, our land . . . may the *sh'khina* (God's feminine manifestation, or presence) rest on her; Land of Israel, one day I will see it again.” He and Goldele chat, and she asks if he can tell her anything that might relieve her pain. Telling her that Misha has sent along a song, he begins echoing *Mayn goldele*, and she soon joins him as in the original duet. In a climactic moment worthy of Verdi, Goldele's mother appears, heavily disguised and masked as an elegant grande dame. She reveals her identity and—you guessed it!—she points at the disguised Misha, acknowledging that it is he who has found and brought her. Before the curtain falls, Misha triumphantly unmask himself.

In the brief final act, Goldele, in her wedding dress, listens as her mother, Sheyndele, explains her abandonment and disappearance. It turns out that, with no one else to look after her child, she had left her at the inn for a short while so that she could visit her childhood love and first *khosn* (intended husband) in a sanitarium, where he had been confined with tuberculosis “and a broken heart.” Sheyndele had been pressured and all but forced by her parents into a marriage with a man she did not love (who

abandoned her for America). But her beloved, taken ill just when she got married, died in that sanitarium; and she fell ill for two years. When she returned to the inn, she found that the innkeepers—with their children and Goldele—had relocated to another town, and as much as she tried, she was never able to find them. Naturally, Goldele forgives her mother, overjoyed at being reunited, and she proceeds to the wedding canopy.

From a musical perspective, *Mayn goldele* typifies the adoption of Jewish persona and musical identity for a song that is more Viennese than anything else in character, style, and melodic contour. It draws neither on any traditional Jewish material nor on any continuum of melody type associated historically with Jewish experience, sacred or secular. *Mayn goldele* is indeed a demonstration of the power of language, in terms of its purely aural parameters, and of context to create the perception of a truly—and subsequently nostalgia-laden—“Jewish” song, regardless of actual musical content.

2. Rumshinsky and Louis Gilrod's lighthearted satire on socialist fantasies and big-city corruption, *FIFTY-FIFTY*, was sung in the 1917 four-act musical comedy *Op-to'un un da'-un-to'-un* (Uptown-Downtown). The libretto to Zishe Kornblith's book was adapted by Boris Thomashefsky, in whose downtown National Theater the production was staged, who also starred in the show as Khayim Yosi Plotkin, a frequently unemployed and struggling cabinetmaker who becomes wealthy overnight in New York.

Plotkin invents some sort of “combination bed,” for which he gains a patent. His daughters Stella and Tillie believe in his expectation that the patent will make him rich, but his wife, Keyle Bela, dismisses his optimism as daydreaming. Tillie, the older daughter, is being courted by Bernard, a medical student, which pleases Plotkin. Khayim's brother Abie [Avrohom], however, is a fruit peddler with no prospects of betterment.

By the second act, the Plotkin family is exceedingly wealthy, and Khayim Yosi Plotkin is now Gustav Plato, a banker and businessman. Tillie and Bernard are married, and the “Platos” have moved uptown to a mansion, where their pretentious household now includes a full-time maidservant, Mary, and Yukit, a supposedly

Japanese male servant who functions as a butler—or “houseboy.” “Butlers” were English—so very very English! The “Oriental houseboy” cliché in fact was a borrowed image that continued for decades in both literary plays and Hollywood, as well as on television. Yukit's character portrayal made for some moments of hilarious but, at the time, perfectly acceptable exaggerated ethnic mimicry and affectation. None of the stylized mimicry and manufactured stereotyping seemed to offend anyone in those days. Everybody made fun of everybody—including themselves—in skits, routines, sketches, and revues.

Meanwhile, Stella is engaged to marry a putative Baron Geoffrey West of London, who claims that his grandmother and Queen Victoria once looked through a *mahzor* (prayerbook) together. When Abie, who is still a peddler, comes to visit, the family is uneasy at being reminded of its former downtown circumstances. He and his brother Khayim Yosi (a.k.a. Gustav) debate the ease with which any poor Jew can, through his wits and work alone, prosper in America. From Khayim Yosi the audience hears the familiar but tired and newly acquired arrogance of the “if I can make it on my own, so can you” mantra. But it turns out that Abie has come to think of himself as a bit of a Socialist, having been seduced by the rhetoric and labor-orientated aspirations in the air of that day, which he only half-seriously expresses in the rollicking couplet song *Fifty-Fifty*. The song is a spoof on contemporaneous Socialist musings, even on Yiddish songs current among workers' movements—some of which had also surrounded the 1905 revolution in Russia (“There'll be no more bosses ... an end to rich and poor”). It mocks some of the attendant naïveté of Socialist propaganda, without dismissing the injustices, conditions, and plights of struggling immigrants, with which many in Second Avenue audiences could still—and did—empathize.

Pleased with the prospect of an aristocratic son-in-law, Khayim Yosi is about to lend the “Baron” a substantial sum when Yukit recognizes him as an imposter—a poor Jewish waiter with whom he once had an encounter. Then comes an equally startling “revelation”: Yukit is not Yukit, but a disguised Jew, and a *litvak* (Lithuanian Jew) at that, which itself represented an internal stereotyping for comic purposes.

That night, in his anguish, Khayim Yosi has a nightmare, dreaming that one of his companies is threatened by labor unrest and an imminent strike. He awakens a transformed and enlightened man, vowing to move back downtown and become a philanthropist for the benefit of Jews in his former milieu. He will establish and fund a *landsmen* synagogue (for Jews from his hometown in Europe), and Yukit will be the *shames* (beadle).

In yet a further twist in the plot, Khayim Yosi learns that his dream was not totally fictitious: his brother Abie is in fact the leader of an actual labor strike at his business concern. True to his new attitude, Khayim Yosi gives in to the strikers' demands, on condition that the Jewish workers commit themselves to joining and praying at the new synagogue he intends to found. He even accepts the fraudulent "Baron" as a son-in-law. It develops that Stella knew "Geoffrey's" true identity all along but felt it necessary to impress her "uptown" family. In the end, the entire family realizes that it is more comfortable living "as themselves" without pretensions, in their old neighborhood.

As a comedy, *Uptown-Downtown* suggests a Jewish version of Horatio Alger in its familiar Second Avenue mold of a poor Lower East Side immigrant becoming rich in the "land of opportunity" and then aspiring to a life in high society. But the boilerplate this time actually bears a social message, consistent with historical Jewish values. For the ultimate happiness of this "happy ending" resides in finding one's purpose in helping others, apart from the usual material jackpots and felicitous outcomes of romantic pursuits. Whether, as a review in the *Morgn Journal* questioned, that subject was beyond the reach of "all who had a hand in the piece," is another matter.

Fifty-Fifty lived on far past the life of the stage production. It became a frequently performed number by female as well as male entertainers in the context of vaudeville routines, music hall revues, and the like. It is in that guise that the song achieved its greatest popularity, and in which it has therefore been recorded for the Milken Archive.

3. Rumshinsky's love duet *IN A KLEYN SHTIBELE* (in *A Small Cottage*), with lyrics by Isidore Lillian, was featured in his extravagant three-act operetta *Der rebe hot*

geheysn freylekh zayn (The *Rebbe* Has Bidden Us to Be Merry), produced at the Kessler Second Avenue Theater during the 1921–22 season. It was written to a book also by Lillian, whose libretto was reworked by Samuel Rosenstein, the production's director, who also played and sang the role of Benish. The operetta was advertised in the Yiddish press as the "largest and richest operetta [yet]," with "large double chorus, joyous dances, and twenty musical numbers."

As of this writing, the script has not been located. But the story draws on Hassidic lore and folkways and is set in a Hassidic environment in Europe that includes the *rebbe's* court, which intersects with the Gypsy world. It is likely that the character Reb Elimelekh, head of that court, was based loosely on the historical Elimelekh of Lizhensk (1717–87), a popular *tzaddik* (righteous master) of the third generation of the Hassidic movement in Galicia, who on one plane was known for his asceticism. Unlike some other rabbinical personalities who advocated or were inclined toward asceticism, however, Reb Elimelekh also acknowledged that asceticism was not the exclusive path to the mystical Hassidic goal of *tikkun olam*—"restitution and repair of the world"—and he is quoted as having said that one *tzaddik* might reach *tikkun* through eating and drinking, while another might do so through an ascetic life.

In the operetta, Reb Elimelekh's son Benish is in love with a young Gypsy woman, Diana, and the two sing of their commitment and future togetherness in *In a kleyn sh'tibele*. One needs neither the script nor even a synopsis to know that by the end of the story, Diana will turn out not to be a Gypsy, but—by whatever twist of fate or convoluted hidden or switched identities—a bona fide Jewess.

The cast for *Der rebe hot geheysn freylekh zayn* was unusually large, filled with many of the greatest Second Avenue celebrities of the day and including Kalman Juvelier, Annie Thomashefsky, Regina Prager, Lazar Fried, Sam Kasten, Muni Weisenfreund (who went on to become the famous actor Paul Muni), and Mathilda St. Claire—in her American debut following her arrival in New York at Rumshinsky's invitation.

4. *OY IZ DOS A MEYDL*, with lyrics by Molly Picon, was written for Rumshinsky's 1927 two-act musical comedy *Dzhenke—Oy iz dos a meyd!* (Oh, Is This a Girl!), subtitled *Some Girl!*, to a book by Harry Kalmanovitch and a reworked libretto by its producer, Yankl Kalich. All the action takes place in America. Nathan Pomerantz has two daughters living at home. The elder is Beatrice, a recent college graduate—thus the favored one of both parents—whose signature is her pretentious display of pseudosophisticated English vocabulary. The younger daughter is eighteen-year-old streetwise Dzhenke [Jenke], played by Molly Picon, who has no interest in college and prefers a life of gaiety. She stays out night after night until two in the morning with Meni (Manny), a taxi driver who lives next door. It is no passionate love affair for her yet, although she confesses at one point (out of his hearing) that she does love him, for he is *keyn ayne hore*, a *shitik man*—"a bit of a man, 'may no evil befall him!'" Nathan's parental reactions to her late-night escapades (which he does not realize involve Manny) are ferocious and violent, and—primarily to free herself from her father—she marries Meni privately and capriciously. Yet so little does she know him that when she introduces him to her parents as her new husband, she does not know his full name. When Nathan discovers that Meni's father is his old friend Simkhe Shroyer—a retired truck driver who was also unaware of the relationship between their two children until they announced their marriage while he was dining as a guest at the Pomerantz home—all the parents give their blessing.

Meanwhile, Beatrice and Meni develop a friendship, which Dzhenke naïvely encourages. Boosted by Beatrice's envy of her sister's happiness, the friendship becomes a secret love affair. By the time Dzhenke learns, through an overheard conversation, that Meni is about to disclose the truth and ask her to accept a divorce—on the pretense that "she doesn't understand him"—she is already the mother of a three-month-old baby. She consults her old friend Nensl (Nancy, who happens, for the audience's benefit, to live on the Lower East Side's main artery, Delancey Street, so they can be treated to the song *Nancy from East Delancey*, or *Ikh bin nensy fun dilensy*). Nensl, who claims to know the secrets of how to handle and

outwit men, advises Dzhenke to "play dumb" and launch a preemptive strike by approaching Meni first and asking *him* for a divorce, pretending that she has a secret lover without whom she cannot live. Nensl also urges Dzhenke to appear not to care too much for him, since that is what "today's men want" in a woman. Men's natural jealousy, combined with her feigned aloofness, will reverse Meni's plans, Nensl assures Dzhenke. And of course, the scheme works. Not only does he renounce Beatrice, but he makes a concerted effort to win back Dzhenke's love while she plays "hard to get" for just the right amount of time. He not only succeeds in mending the marriage, but he falls truly back in love with her, which leads to his song *Oy iz dos a meyd!*, sung in the production by Irving Grossman.

Abe Cahan, the editor of the *Forverts*, allowed that this was one of Molly Picon's best performances and, as usual, that Rumshinsky carried the day, everything "galloping with the music."

5. Rumshinsky's *ES TSIT, ES BRIT* (It Tugs, It Burns), with lyrics by Isidore Lillian, was hailed by critics as the most memorable number in the 1929 production of *Dos radio meyd!* (The Radio Girl)—a musical comedy in two acts with a prologue, to a book by Louis Freiman. The entire elaborate production was conceived as a vehicle for its star, Molly Picon (who wrote lyrics to some of its songs), and the show was first staged and directed by her husband, Yankl Kalich, at the Kessler Second Avenue Theater.

The story concerns Sadie, a sympathetic young waif of the New York streets who never knew her father. She is the only joy in the life of her suffering mother, and she models for an exclusive Fifth Avenue dress shop. But during her previous employment at a similar establishment owned by a wealthy banker, Oppenheim, she became infatuated with his son, Walter. As a confirmed bachelor, however, Walter never took notice of her.

Meanwhile, Walter, in defiance of the rules of his insular Bachelors Club, has become enamored of a radio entertainer, Viola, to the point of obsession—solely through her voice, without ever having seen her. When he shares this secret with fellow club members, the club's president—despite the others' denunciation of Walter for

jeopardizing his bachelor status—offers to help, and he organizes a meeting between Viola and Walter.

It happens that Viola is Sadie's cousin. Completely unaware of Sadie's secret three-year passion for Walter, Viola tells her cousin with great relish of her impending introduction to the wealthy Walter Oppenheim, whom she already imagines as her "Prince Charming." But on her way to meet Walter, Viola is injured in an automobile accident and is taken to hospital without Walter's ever having seen her. That same evening, when Sadie conveniently learns of the derailment of her cousin's rendezvous, she seizes the opportunity and presents herself at the appointed meeting place as Viola. Overcoming a slew of complications, she dupes Walter into believing that she is indeed the "radio girl" with whom he is already in love, and he marries her. Only then does he discover that she is actually the daughter of his friend, the former president of the Bachelors Club, and the reunion of father and daughter makes for a doubly "happy ending."

It is unclear from available documents precisely where the song *Es tsit, es brit* occurs in the play. In terms of the lyrics, it could have been sung logically at any number of points—and perhaps more than once.

6. By itself, the term or word *hamavdil* (lit., [one or He] who distinguishes, or makes a distinction) would normally indicate a particular hymn of which it is the first word. This hymn is recited or sung in most Jewish rites as part of the *havdala* ceremony—the service that signals and formalizes the conclusion of the Sabbath by proclaiming and emphasizing the distinction between the holy (Sabbath) and the profane (the weekday about to commence).

Rumshinsky's famous quasi-cantorial and partially folklorized song *HAMAVDIL*, however, is a secular Yiddish theatrical and concert number that only briefly quotes from that Hebrew hymn and is otherwise based liberally on the Yiddish *havdala* service text *Got fun avrohom* (God of Abraham)—a devotional and inspirational prayer with numerous text variants. At one time this prayer was customarily recited in traditional Ashkenazi circles primarily by women. Although women are not required under *halakha* (rabbinic law) to pray, they must

nonetheless conclude the Sabbath with the *hamavdil* passage, which is incorporated in *Got fun avrohom*. Its message is a poetic extension in the vernacular of the *havdala* theme with regard to concluding and bidding farewell to the Sabbath and reinforcing its uniqueness.

Rumshinsky's text, which hardly conforms to any of the standard ones found in printed prayerbooks, seems to be a pastiche of fragments of lesser-known variants to which he added his own words. Also incorporated in his song is the greeting customarily exchanged immediately after *havdala* (and for the rest of Saturday night, or *motza'ei shabbat*): "a gute vokh" (May you have a good week).

Indeed, it is Rumshinsky's internal tune for that post-Sabbath greeting that gives the song its immortality. For it is to this now-ubiquitous tune that nearly every Ashkenazi congregation, Reform as well as traditional, has sung these words following *havdala* services for many decades—often to the Hebrew equivalent, *shavu'a tov*. It is thus assumed to be an anonymous folk tune, but there is no reason to believe that it is not Rumshinsky's own, or that he borrowed it from folk repertoire.

It will no doubt come as a surprise to nearly everyone familiar with this tune that it was born on the Yiddish stage. And to those who have long known Rumshinsky's *Hamavdil* as a concert number, it may be even a greater revelation to learn that it was introduced to the public as part of a Second Avenue theatrical production—one of twenty musical numbers in Rumshinsky's 1922 operetta *Der rebetsn's tokhter* (The Rabbi's Wife's Daughter), to a book by Shomer, a popular Hebrew and Yiddish novelist and dramatist who was perceived by his critics and detractors (among them, Shalom Aleichem) as having created a literature and style in Europe tantamount to a Yiddish version of pulp fiction. *Der rebetsn's tokhter* was Rumshinsky's updated revision and reworking of his 1909 operetta, *A yidish kind*, which he always considered his "first truly Jewish operetta."

The story takes place in 17th-century Poland, approximately during the time of King John [Sobieski] III (reigned from 1674). Count Zaminsky, an impoverished Polish nobleman whose situation has continued to deteriorate, seeks to restore his fortunes by laying a new

tax on the Jews and by organizing a marriage between his son Vladislav and the daughter of the wealthy and secure Count Orlov. It happens, however, that Vladislav is somehow in love with Henele, the only daughter of a *rebetsn*—which meant that the audience (with the possible exception of anyone who had never been to a Second Avenue production) already knew by the first act that Count Zaminsky's son was not really Count Zaminsky's son! The audience, which has already been given reason to suspect the circumstances, had only to wait for the final act to learn that he had been switched as an infant for an aristocratic Polish baby who died. It turns out of course that Vladislav is a Jew whose name now becomes Avrohom ben Yisro'el. Not only is he a Jew, says the messenger who delivers the good news, but a Jew with a true "Jewish heart of silver and gold."

Hamavdil was sung in the operetta by the *rebetsn*, portrayed by one of the great Second Avenue prima donnas, Mme. Regina Prager. Since the song is listed as the seventh number, followed by *Kum aheym tsurik* (Come Back Home!)—also sung by Henele's mother—it probably occurred in the first act, but in any case before the final act. There could have been a synagogue *havdala* scene, since it is listed as being sung with the accompaniment of a choir (the advertisement for the operetta boasted a "double choir"). Among its early recordings are those by William ("Wee Willie") Robyn and Shloimele Rothstein, both tenors. No manuscript copy of a score containing the choral parts has been located. No choir was used on those recordings (which used an orchestra), and the published folio is for voice and piano.

Although the song was a female vocal vehicle in the stage production, it quickly became a favorite concert number for cantors and other male performers—and it remained known in that form. The Milken Archive recording follows that tradition.

7. Solomon Smulewitz's **A BRIVELE DER MAMEN** (A Little Letter to Mama) is one of the longest-running and schmaltziest tissue-soaking tearjerkers in the aggregate repertoire of sentimental American Yiddish popular song. It was written and first published in 1907,

at a time when its lyrics resonated with considerable boom in the hearts of many immigrants who had left parents behind in Europe, knowing that they would probably never see them again and that letters would be their only form of communication. First recorded by its composer-lyricist, the ballad's popularity was instantaneous, telling the story of a mother whose only request to her departing son is that he remember to write "a little letter" from America to ease her bitter pain of separation. He never does, despite "a hundred letters" from her. And by the final strophe—which renders this a "lesson song" but has become obscure (only the first strophe is generally known)—it is too late. The son, now an exceedingly prosperous New Yorker with a lavish lifestyle and a beautiful family, receives word that she has died while waiting for his letter. But she had one last wish: that at least he remember her in death by "reciting *kaddish*" for her—referring to the obligation of Jewish children to recite that doxology in memory of parents during the eleven-month mourning period, as well as annually on the *yortsayt*, the anniversary of death. "Your mother will gladly hear her *kaddish* from her grave; you will heal her pain and delight her soul."

A brivele der mamen reverberated for decades from music halls, variety shows, and subsequent recordings in many arrangements. It touched off a virtual category of mother-related and letter-based songs, as well as some thinly veiled imitations. The melody became popular on its own, even in Europe, beginning with Smulewitz's publication (1908) of a version without text, for violin or mandolin. And although the song was not composed in connection with any operetta or other theatrical piece, it spawned subsequent full-length productions of the same title that built around or incorporated it, such as S. H. Kohn's four-act comedy-drama (subtitled *The Golden Dream*). *A brivele der mamen* was also the title of a 1938–39 Yiddish film with a score by Abraham Ellstein, yet Smulewitz's song recurs throughout the film, and strains from its melody are used as a quasi-leitmotif. The story line, however, departs from the story related in the final strophe of the original song. The film, subtitled *The Eternal Song*, centers around an immigration tale connected to the First World War.

Smulewitz reputedly sold his rights to the song for twenty-five dollars—before it achieved its immense popularity and long before its use on the stage or in a film. When the film was released with his song in the title, without so much as mention of him as composer, his anger was understandably heightened, and he vented his moral protest in the press—to no avail. Unfortunately, he had no legal recourse. To add posthumous mendacious insult, a Hebrew song, *Mikhtav me'imā* (A Letter from Mother), circulated in Israel. It was included on the 1973 recording *Songs of the Yom Kippur War*, where it was credited exclusively to N. Alterman and S. Fershko with the claim of having been “written during World War II [World War I?] for the soldiers of the Jewish Brigade.” The text is a parody variant of *A brivele der mamen*, but the melody is completely Smulewitz’s.

8. Rumshinsky wrote the song *WATCH* [vatsch] *YOUR STEP*, with lyrics by Sam Lowenworth, for his 1922 musical comedy *Berele Tremp* (Berele, the Vagabond Street Boy), based on Israel Rosenberg’s play of the same name. Act I takes place in Odessa, in the Russian-style teahouse of Khayke Zets, the wife of Leybe, a former taxi driver. Young Berele Fradkin, whose wealthy father has gone to America and left him and his mother, Gitel, behind, is in love with their daughter Sonia. (The role of Berele was assigned in the production to a female, Bessie Thomasfeský.) But he and his mother have been forced into street peddling as a result of Meir’s abandonment, and Leybe is opposed to his daughter’s association with such a peddler. Meanwhile, Samuel Himmelstein, Meir’s business partner in America, comes to Odessa with his son Dave, whom he wants to leave in Odessa for a few months for a business venture. He brings Gitel three thousand dollars from Meir, along with the news that Meir has fallen in love with his bookkeeper in America and wants Gitel to accept a *get* (a bill of divorce in Jewish law). After the initial shock, she is prepared to agree, but Berele intervenes to prevent his mother from so readily accepting a divorce, and he insists on accompanying Samuel back to America so that he can confront his father about why and how he can leave a wife and son. Samuel consents, remarking that young Berele possesses what is called “spirit” in America. As he departs with Samuel, Berele sings *Berele bosjak*, a mixed-

language song with Russian as well as Yiddish lyrics about leaving “Russia” (viz., the Russian Empire, since Odessa is in the Ukraine, not Russia itself), which was published together with *Watch Your Step* as a single folio.

By the second act, set in Meir Fradkin’s mansion in New York, it is the day of his engagement to his bookkeeper and “sweetheart,” Flossie, a name from which the common “floozy” is derived. Samuel—obviously sympathetic to Berele and his mother and suspicious of Flossie’s financial motives—has also brought Sonia from Odessa to spy and to gain Flossie’s confidence while posing as a maid. When Berele arrives from the landing station at Ellis Island, he is introduced to his father as Sonia’s brother. At Samuel’s request, Meir hires Berele as a lift operator. Berele also offers to entertain in a skit that night for the engagement party. Meanwhile, obviously unaware of Berele’s identity, Flossie confides to him that she is marrying Meir for his money.

The rest of the characters from Odessa show up and, together, stage a playlet within the play about a husband leaving his ill wife and small child, whom no one is willing to help because it is known that they have a wealthy husband and father in America. By the end of their playlet, Meir has realized the nature and consequences of his behavior toward his family, and he has recognized his own gullibility in believing Flossie’s declarations of love. Act III finds Meir in hospital, having taken ill at the turn of events. Typically for Second Avenue, all switched identities are eventually clarified, and deserving lovers united.

Watch Your Step appears to have been an afterthought, added to the script after it was completed but still in time for the premiere of the show. Although it is not organically related to the action, it derives from a comic, vaudeville-worthy, and absurd subplot involving Dave and his obsession with Sonia, which is threaded throughout the musical.

When Dave returns to America in Act II from his business-related sojourn in Odessa, he is excited to see Sonia again, not realizing that she is Berele’s sweetheart. He does assume that she is married, but that Leybe, her father, is actually her husband. When he tries to enlist Berele’s aid in winning Sonia away from her supposed husband,

Berele realizes Dave's confusion and decides to play a joke on him by suggesting a plan of action. Accordingly, Dave approaches Leybe with an incentive for him to divorce his wife. Unaware of Dave's erroneous assumption, Leybe is more than happy to have him take his wife, Khayke, off his hands—a stock vaudeville routine “husband's attitude.” (Khayke, meanwhile, suspects that someone is secretly in love with her, but she thinks it is Dave's father, Samuel.) Obviously, the contorted situation made for hilarity onstage. When Dave makes his exit from the scene in which Berele offers to help him in his pursuit of the woman he foolishly thinks is Leybe's wife, Berele remarks on the temporary success of his joke with a bit of vengeful satisfaction—“Now! Have your wedding! Oy, I love such *shtik*”—and he proceeds to comment on the absurdities of American life by singing *Watch Your Step*.

The general theme of the frantic pace in America, which is the subject of the song, has been set up in the first act in Odessa, in dialogue between Dave and Sonia. When he tells her that he fell in love with her the moment he laid eyes on her, she challenges his claim to have developed love with such speed for a girl he doesn't even know. He replies that in America, everything is a matter of moving quickly—of rushing and “hurrying up.” In America, he says, “as soon as a boy and a girl meet and are attracted to each other, they ‘hurry up’ so much so that the morning after the wedding they already have a baby!” In addition to Thomashefsky's wife, Bessie, the cast included Annie Thomashefsky as Khayke; Mathilda St. Claire as Flossie, and Muni Weisenfreund.

9. Together with lyricist Louis Gilrod, David Meyerowitz wrote **GOT UN ZAYN MISHPET IZ GEREKHT** (God and His Judgment Are Just) for a 1903 New York production of Zalman Libin's (1872–1955) serious play *Gebrokhene hertser* (Broken Hearts), known in its original production by the longer title *Gebrokhene hertser oder libe un flikt* (Broken Hearts, or Love and Obligation). A drama rather than a musical, that 1903 production at the Grand Theater apparently had only one other known song, *Sisu v'simkhu*, by Louis Friedsell—a setting from Hebrew liturgy—and it starred Jacob P. Adler, the reigning dramatic actor, who introduced *Got un zayn mishpet* in the play.

Libin's four-act play turns on a major area of conflict in the religious-cultural clash of mores and customs between the insular world of an unmodernized orthodox community and the lure of freer choices for the second generation in the New World. The play also explores timeless tensions between romantic love and moral obligation. Despite the seriousness of the subject and its social commentary, the characters remain mostly the unmined, underdeveloped, and unidimensional stereotypes popular with Second Avenue audiences of that era.

All of the action is set in New York. Nokhum Estrin is an apparently faded cantor of a local synagogue founded and populated chiefly by *landsmen*—immigrants from the same city in the Czarist Pale—whose president is the wealthy Mr. Tashkin. Nokhum and his wife, Feyga, have two daughters. The first is Mekhele, a widow with two small children, who sacrificed a life with the man she loved and allowed herself to be pressured by her family into an arranged marriage. The second daughter is the frail but beautiful and good-natured Gitel, who is passionately in love with Benjamin, although she barely knows him or anything of his past. But Nokhum has in mind an arranged marriage for Gitel with Mr. Tashkin's son, which would solve the family's severe financial predicament and ensure their security. (His comment that in America, Jews seemed less interested in synagogues and cantors than they were in Europe, is not without some truth in that time frame, which preceded the arrival of virtuoso star cantors and the era of their immense popularity in America.) Nokhum has found a *shadkhn* (matchmaker) who can organize the match with Tashkin's son, but Gitel will not hear of it. Imploring her, Nokhum reminds her that he is past his prime as a cantor: “I stand on a bridge that may collapse at any moment,” he pleads. “Your aged mother, your widowed sister and her children, and I will all drown. You alone, Gitele, can save us.” But despite her devotion to her family, it is too late. Not only does she detest Tashkin's son, but she is pregnant with Benjamin's child. And she wants to marry him.

Unknown to Gitel, Benjamin has a wife and children, left behind temporarily in Europe. He has never been able to ignite any love for his wife, and he considers himself

a victim of the arranged marriage system, which claimed him when he was practically a boy. But he agonizes over the inner conflicts generated by the situation and by his love for his children, multiplied by his love for Gitel. He reveals the truth to her, telling her that he wants to divorce his wife, but he has been unable to summon the courage. Rather than encourage him, Gitel, although she is both shocked and even more in love with him, cannot bring herself to be a party to abandonment of a wife and children. She insists instead that he remember his commitments and reunite his family—which he does.

It is in the second act that Nokhum composes and sings—together with the choir—*Got un zayn mishpet*, ostensibly for entertainment at the signing of the *t'no'im* (engagement rituals) for Tashkin's son's marriage to another woman, which—since Tashkin is tantamount to his employer—Nokhum must attend. Obviously the song, which recalls Jews' steadfastness to God and faithful acceptance of His judgments despite suffering, persecution, and injustice throughout history, also reflects his own dejected mood and his family's plight. That it could have been but is not Gitel who would benefit from Tashkin's wealth is yet another painful judgment he must accept. But the song also presages harsher judgments to come at the end of the play.

Gitel cannot hide her condition for long, and eventually she reveals the truth to her parents, without reference to Benjamin. Nokhum ejects her from his home in anger, and she leaves town to give birth and try to rear and provide for her child on her own. When she returns to New York six years later, she is in the final stages of consumption. Benjamin—who is now extremely poor and prematurely aged—visits her, but she sends him back to his children and wife, who is also in bad health. Gitel implores him not to forget her—their daughter after she dies. Meanwhile, Nokhum and Feyge, by now impoverished, visit her as well. Still angry, Nokhum will not accept his illegitimate granddaughter, but he wants to arrange for her to be left permanently in the orphanage where she is staying temporarily. Gitel will not agree. At her deathbed in hospital, her cousin Avigdor accuses Nokhum of responsibility for the tragedy, which he says is the result of Nokhum's earlier insistence on Old World religious

standards and ways, and of his failure to compromise. But Nokhum, who repeats that “*got un zayn mishpet is gerekht* (God and His judgments are just),” begins reciting the *viddu't* (confessional) with Gitel. Benjamin shows up and offers to take Gitel's and his child to his home and rear her. With her last breath, Gitel says that she can now die in peace.

The reference to Haman in the third strophe concerns the quintessential enemy of the Jewish people and the unsuccessful architect of its annihilation throughout the Persian Empire, as related in the biblical Book of Esther. “Ivan” is used there simply to indicate a Russian. And “the dog” Krushevan refers to Pavolaki Krushevan (1860–1909), a virulently anti-Semitic Russian journalist whose series of articles on “the program for the conquest of the world by the Jews” is considered to have formed the “argument” for the infamous *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Krushevan edited a newspaper in Kishinev that accused the Jews of exploiting Christians while at the same time supporting revolution. In 1903 he was instrumental in the manufacture of a blood-libel rumor upon the death of a Christian child, which fomented and became the pretense for the bloody Kishinev Pogrom on Passover, 1903. *Gebrokhene hertser* opened in New York in September of that year, when the pogrom was still very much on the minds of Jews in America. Graphic depictions of rows of Jewish corpses lying in Kishinev streets had appeared in the press, and a wave of immigration was spawned by the pogrom. The reference to Krushevan in the song was not random. In a subsequent variant of the stanza, however, when the name was less recognizable, it was replaced—apparently after the Bolshevik Revolution, when Poland was for a time an independent nation—with a reference to Polish anti-Semitism (in addition to the “Ivan” reference). And mention of the “Czar's Empire” was of course removed and substituted with the words “the same in every land.”

10. Fischel Kanapoff's salty 1924 couplet song *HU-TSA-TSA* is a quintessential vaudeville vehicle in which the sets of couplets—always subject to alteration, variation, addition, or substitution, even on the spot, as well as to augmentation by dance and other stage *shtik*—frame spoken jokes or comic monologues to a muted, vamped

orchestral accompaniment. The title *Hu-tsa-tsa* is meaningless, although the published Yiddish title in Hebrew characters, *O-tsa-tsa*, carries the connotation "That's how it is!" But, inexplicably, the subtitle in Roman characters reads *hu-tsa-tsa [utzatza]*, which is how the song has always been sung.

Little is known about Fischel Kanapoff other than that he was a popular variety-show entertainer who wrote many independent Yiddish songs that once had currency (though this is probably his best-known and the one most frequently sung), as well as lyrics to similar songs by others.

11. OYB S'IZ GEVEN GUT FAR MAYN MAMEN (If It Was Good Enough for My Mother), with lyrics by Molly Picon, is from Rumshinsky's 1927 musical comedy to a book by Meyer Schwartz, *Dos mamele—"Kid Mother"* (lit., the little mother), which became one of Picon's most famous and most enduring roles. The show was also the prototype for the 1930s film *Mamele*, based on a similar story with essentially the same theme, but with a new score by Abraham Ellstein. Whereas the story for the film was set in Poland, the action of Rumshinsky's show, in three acts with a prologue, takes place in the United States.

Molly Picon's leading lady character, Ida, or Khaye Feygl, is the youngest of three sisters, and she has two brothers. Their mother has died, and Khaye has assumed the duties as well as the emotional pillar function as "mother and woman of the household." But neither her siblings nor her father appreciate her devotion and sacrifice, which includes rearing the youngest child, her brother Archie, as well as maintaining every aspect of the home. The two older sisters are preoccupied much of the time with their own social life and romantic pursuits, and with finding husbands. When her sister Gertie's "gentleman caller," Sidney, invites her to spend a weekend with him at a country house he has rented with friends, Khaye, obviously suspicious of his motives, tries unsuccessfully to persuade the oldest sister, Selma, to accompany them as a chaperone. Intent on looking after Gertie's welfare, Khaye insists that if necessary, she will herself go along with Gertie and Sidney. At that, the family mocks her, reminding her of the impossibility of her going to a

weekend party with no fashionable clothes to wear, since she apparently has made do with their mother's old clothes as part of her general selflessness and preoccupation with housework. "*Oy, mame*, what a bunch you left me to look after; but I'm not complaining!" Khaye exclaims, as that line—according to indications in the script—leads into her first rendition of the song *Oyb s'iz geven gut*. "I can look after my sister in these clothes, too; I'm not embarrassed by them," she adds after singing the song, which is repeated before the end of the first act.

Khaye has developed romantic feelings for a man named Louis—identified in the cast list of the program booklet as a "modern cantor"—but he relates to her only as a brother or father. He urges her to realize that she deserves to have a personal life with some enjoyment and a future, and thus she would be even better able to help her family. At one point, a friend counsels Khaye on how to ignite in Louis the response she seeks by exploiting some feminine wiles: "Show a bit of your shoulder, and of your leg—all men like that!" Meanwhile, Sidney reappears to tell Khaye that she is really the one he "loves," not her sister Gertie. Khaye rejects him, but emboldened by her friend's earlier advice, she employs a male jealousy routine by insinuating to Louis that in a moment of weakness something physical occurred between Sidney and herself. The scheme works, and Louis begins to take an interest in Khaye as an adult woman. He suggests that they leave together for a while, so that her family will realize how lost they are without her and all she does for them. That strategy works as well. Before long, she receives word from home that the household is falling apart and she must return to save it.

In the final act, Khaye returns home, now with Louis. The entire family welcomes them, having learned its lesson, and she assures them that a good future awaits all of them (including herself). At or toward the end of the show, *Oyb s'iz geven gut* is repeated, apparently as a finale. This show was first and foremost a vehicle for Molly Picon, providing her, observed a *New York Times* reviewer, "chance enough to sing, to dance, and to mimic Charlie Chaplin when she is not playing in the style of Mary Pickford." Molly Picon wrote the lyrics to many of the other songs in the show as well, and she is listed in

the program as the lyricist of the production. At least a few of its songs, however, appear to have lyrics by others, such as *Hot Dogs*, whose words were by Isidore Lillian.

12. The love song *DU BIST DOS LIKHT FUN MAYNE OYGN* (You Are the Light of My Eyes), with lyrics by Isidore Lillian, was one of the principal numbers in Rumshinsky's 1937 musical comedy (billed as an operetta in the press), *Yosl un zayne vayber* (Yosl [Joseph] and His Wives), to a book and libretto by Louis Freiman. It is the story of the foolish immigrant *shlimazl* Yosl, who is in love with Reyzele, a blind young lady who remained behind in "the old country" when Yosl emigrated.

Yosl borrows enough money to bring Reyzele to America and to seek some medical attention that might alleviate her blindness, and he sends steamship tickets for her and her father. But her sister Rivke comes in her place, disguised as a newly cured and sighted Reyzele, and the gullible Yosl—after only a brief hesitation—is convinced that she is actually his Reyzele. When he introduces her to the wealthy friends who have lent him the money, she falls in love with one of them, who owns a mine. Of course she never had any intention of marrying Yosl and has simply availed herself of the opportunity to come to America, where just such luck might await her. Yosl is now without the bride he thought he had brought. But the real Reyzele manages to get to America and to reunite with Yosl. In the end, there are multiple weddings: Yosl and Reyzele, Rivke and her mine owner, and Yosl's widowed mother with an elderly but sprightly widower.

Du bist dos likht fun mayne oygn is essentially Reyzele's passionate expression of love for Yosl, in which she tells him that—as a blind girl—he and their love provide her sight and illuminate her world: "You are my sight, the light of my eyes." Longing for her in America, Yosl, played by the inimitable Menashe Skulnik (who was also Rumshinsky's business partner that year at the Kessler Second Avenue Theater, the two having just returned after a stint together at the Yiddish Folksteater), reminds himself of how Reyzele used to sing this song to him; and he reprises it at least once to himself, in effect quoting her song. It is also likely that the two of them repeated it together, at or toward the end of the show, with Reyzele singing the chorus, if not most of the introduction as

well. The Milken Archive recording presents the song in its original expression of love for Yosl by Reyzele. The published folio emphasized Skulnik's role ("as sung by ..."). His name ensured increased income for the publishers and royalties for the composer and lyricist. Goldie Ayzman, who played Reyzele, was not so known and had no such following.

The banality and weakness of this plot and its action seem to have exceeded the tolerance even of Second Avenue audiences, and not even Rumshinsky's music—which was actually praised in the press for expressing the libretto's action—could save it.

13. The incipit *shma yisro'el* would normally indicate a recitation of the Judaic credo affirming God's unalloyed essence of unity. Rumshinsky's song discussed here, however, *SHMA YISRO'EL*, is not a liturgical rendition, but the heartrending plea, invoked with religious fervor, of a love-smitten Jew for divine assistance in pursuit of the woman he loves. This is one of the principal tenor vehicles from the popular three-act romantic musical comedy *Di khaznte* (The Cantor's Wife), to a book and libretto by Boris Thomashefsky, who also wrote the lyrics to *Shma yisro'el*, as well as other songs in the show, and starred in the initial production at his National Theater in 1918.

Overall, this musical illustrates the popularity at that time—especially in Thomashefsky's productions—of religious and liturgical themes as a composite frame of nostalgic reference. The show is suffused with entertainment-oriented liturgical and quasi-cantorial numbers, which Thomashefsky perceived would resonate emotionally with his immigrant audiences even though they were mostly nonreligious in terms of observances—especially the Sabbath. Even this proclamation of romantic love, *Shma yisro'el*, is clothed in liturgical references.

The first act is set in a small *shtetl* (market town) in Galicia, in the home of Sheyndle Greenwald, the widow of the town *hazzan* (cantor). She is the mother of four successful sons who have pursued careers in separate cities: Gedalye (played by Thomashefsky), the only one to have continued his father's calling as a *hazzan*; Yakov, a theatrical impresario in America with his own theatrical

and operatic venues in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York; Shloyme, a conductor at the Paris Opera; and the youngest, Nokhum, a Russian opera star. On a return visit from America, Yakov persuades the entire family—assembled at their mother's home for a reunion—to emigrate to America and accompany him on his return to New York, where he is opening yet another opera house. Gedalye has never recovered from the tragic loss of his wife and one daughter, but he has a second daughter, Rokhl, who is also known as Regina. Having been abroad for her education, she has never met her paternal uncles. When she arrives at her grandmother's home before her father arrives, and she meets Nokhum, the two are quite taken with each other—and he is especially smitten with her. But when she realizes that he is her uncle, her enthusiasm fades.

In Act II, the entire family is on a New York-bound ship, on which there is also an aristocratic Austrian—and presumably Christian—woman, Madame Dadei. With her is her son Dadei, a young opera singer who falls for Regina—and she for him. But her own reservations about marriage with a non-Jew are intensified by the expected objections of both families. Her father's heart, say her uncles, would be broken to see his daughter abandon her heritage. For her part, Madame Dadei accuses Regina of being a cheap enchantress who connived to ensnare a young man of means; and in a tirade that smacks as much of anti-Semitism as of social contempt, she tells Regina's uncles that a family such as theirs should more appropriately have been traveling in steerage, not first class. What she learns after those insults, however, is that her son is scheduled to sing at the opening of Yakov's new opera house—under Shloyme's baton, no less—and that Nokhum happens to have been the tenor who replaced him at the Kiev opera.

Act III is set some months later in the Greenwalds' new luxurious home in New York, just before Passover. Regina and Dadei have not seen each other for a while, although Dadei has spoken to Sheyndle of his persisting love for her granddaughter—but to no effect in enlisting her aid, since she reminds him politely that a union between a Jew and a Christian is not acceptable. Meanwhile, Nokhum's love for Regina is also undiminished, and when she

confides to him her lingering confusion and ambivalence about Dadei, seeking his advice, he responds by restating his own undying love for her. But she is unmoved. As his niece, she simply cannot return those feelings or entertain thoughts of marriage (even though, from a *halakhic*, or Jewish legal perspective, marriage between a niece and her uncle is not prohibited and was neither unknown nor considered incestuous). Left alone onstage after her exit, Nokhum sings the impassioned *Shma yisro'el*, in which he pours out his heart to God, imploring Him to grant this one wish—Rokhl's heart and hand—in consideration of his lifelong steadfastness.

Just prior to the Passover seder, Dadei telephones and, identifying himself only as a stranger in town without a seder to attend, asks for an invitation. Since it is obligatory to provide a place at one's seder for a Jew who is left without one, he is told to come. When he arrives, just after the seder has begun, the family is obviously taken aback at recognizing him. He once again openly declares his love for Regina and, in the first of two typical Second Avenue revelations, declares that he is, in fact, not a Christian but a Jew! His mother (obviously a Jewess by birth) long ago completely assimilated and not only renounced her Judaism, of which she is ashamed for its social consequences, but adopted the disguise of an Austrian—probably Viennese—Christian lady of social standing. She has always counseled her son never to reveal his true roots. His revelation backfires as Regina declares that if—knowing that he was really a Jew—he could not love his people and his heritage, then he could never truly love her, since she is an inextricable part of the whole.

Since the time for convenient revelations has come, Gedalye reveals that Rokhl is not his biological daughter, but an orphan he adopted as a child, so that Nokhum is actually not her uncle after all. All of which means that Rokhl need no longer be put off by Nokhum, to whom she was so favorably inclined in the first place. The family gives their blessing to the union, should those two choose to marry. When Madame Dadei storms in, furious that her son has been induced to reveal their Jewishness on the Greenwalds' account, the boomerang comes doubly back to her when she learns that her son has been rejected

because he was complicit in denying their Jewish identity and when she sees that the family is celebrating not only the seder but Rokhl and Nokhem's anticipated engagement.

One can imagine that Madam Abramowitz, who played the role of Madame Dadei in the original production, might have received the customary boos from the audience at her curtain call—not for her performance, but as the “villainess” of the evening.

Even absent profundity, and with typical exaggeration, the play reflects a number of Jewish immigrant themes, concerns, desires, and situations of the day: upward mobility; maintenance of tradition and shunning intermarriage; contempt for negative assimilation (viz., denial of Jewishness); stilted and deliberately de-Judaized names in the service of affected modernization; loyalty to collective Jewry as a people; Zionist references in some of the other songs; and tensions between general and more narrowly circumscribed Jewish pursuits in a modern world.

Di khaznte remained one of Thomashefsky and Rumshinsky's most popular and most often revived shows over the next two decades, with many succeeding productions in which various elements were adjusted according to new sensibilities and current events, including topical references and lines, and additional musical numbers. As a result, the archival evidence includes an unusual number of variant scripts, drafts, and fragments, with many insertions and cut-and-paste amendments, which can complicate reconstruction efforts. A typescript that was used for a production in the 1932–33 season contains an added line in pencil for Gedalye, just before the curtain on Act I: “May God protect us from Hitler and bring us in peace to the Land of Israel.” But whether that line applies to that season's production, to a subsequent one using the same script version, or to both, is uncertain.

The play was subsequently translated, revised, and produced by Harry Thomashefsky, Boris's son, in an English adaptation that was retitled *The Singing Rabbi* for its run at New York's Selwyn Theater in 1931. Despite its substantial plot and character revisions to suit a different

audience, it is usually considered one of the first—if not the first—Yiddish musicals to be presented in English on a Broadway stage.

14. Rumshinsky's song *A BISL LIBE UN A BISL GLIK* (A Bit of Love and a Bit of Luck) is one of his eighteen cited musical numbers in his 1924 three-act musical comedy *Tsipke*, to a book and libretto by Louis Freiman and S. H. Kohn. Molly Picon, who starred in the production at the Kessler Second Avenue Theater, wrote the lyrics to this song, but lyrics for others in the musical were also written by Boris Rosenthal and Yankl Kalich (Molly's husband), both of whom also played and sang in the production—which Kalich staged as well.

The first act takes place in Chicago, shortly after the armistice that resulted in the conclusion of the First World War. *Tsipke*, a young war widow, is the daughter of Yankl “*Shiker*” (the drunk), who pressured her into a loveless marriage with a bartender, Milton Valdner—so that he could receive free service at the bar where Valdner worked. But on their wedding day Valdner was drafted into the United States Army, sent overseas for combat, and killed in action. Living with her parents, *Tsipke* supports them for the most part, since her father is unable to keep a job. She works at what was (until fairly recently) fondly known as a “five-and-ten” or “dime store” (selling items for five or ten cents), and she has no life of her own. Her father is abusive and violent, but she cannot bring herself to leave, because her ill mother needs her care.

When her uncle Benjamin (her father's brother), identified in the program cast list as a gangster, arrives and witnesses her life, he is moved to help. He recalls having read in the newspaper of a young soldier, coincidentally named Milton Valdner, also killed in action during the war, who was the son of an extremely wealthy banker in Peoria, Illinois—a city on the Illinois River about 130 miles from Chicago. Uncle Benjamin proposes that *Tsipke* present herself at the Valdners' home, pretending to be their son's widow, claiming—supposedly difficult to dispute—that he married her secretly just before his unit was shipped to Europe. Her marriage license showed the name Milton Valdner, and even city or county records would not contain contrary information. There was no

such thing as Social Security at that time, and therefore no related identifying numbers.

After some convincing, Tspike agrees to follow her uncle's plan. The second act finds her at the Valdners' home in Peoria, where they are in mourning for their son. Gladys, a cousin, had always imagined herself Milton's fiancée, and she is now living with the Valdners. Meanwhile, Tspike has done her homework in creating a story, and with the aid of her marriage license she convinces the Valdners that she is indeed their widowed daughter-in-law. She makes no effort to hide her own background. To the contrary, she explains that she met their son while working as a salesclerk at the five-and-ten store. He was stationed at an army base near Chicago awaiting shipment overseas, and during a brief courtship they fell in love in Jackson Park—a large, beautiful area adjacent to the neighborhood of Hyde Park, home to Chicago's prosperous German Jewish community then, as well as to the University of Chicago. Rhea Valdner, Milton's mother, is prepared to embrace Tspike as her daughter-in-law, but her husband, Emmanuel, is mortified to learn that his son had married without his knowledge or consent, and he is even more concerned about how public knowledge of his son's marriage to a girl of such low social and economic class might affect his own social standing. He offers to pay Tspike off with ten thousand dollars if she will agree to disappear, and he is even ready to claim, if necessary, that Milton was not really his son. But they allow her to stay the night at their home, and their other son, Archie, becomes sympathetic to Tspike, insisting that she is a "perfect lady."

A telegram arrives announcing that the Peoria Milton has in fact survived the war and is on his way home; he will be there in a few hours. A last-minute homecoming party is organized, and when he arrives, Tspike runs up to him and welcomes him effusively as "her husband," falling at his feet and clinging to him. Milton goes through a moment of shock, but he is instantly attracted to her and to the mystery of the situation, and he goes along with her charade. At the party, upon which the third-act curtain opens, he introduces her as his wife, even though the issues raised by his father have not been resolved. To complicate matters, Gladys, who had always hoped to

marry Milton, feels betrayed. In her anger, she threatens to leave the household. Apparently, part of Emmanuel Valdner's wealth depended on Gladys and her living with them, and he would have to give her one hundred thousand dollars—enough to bankrupt him—if she left. Tspike offers to leave, without taking Emmanuel up on his offer of a bribe. At that point her Uncle Benjamin and her parents arrive, assuming that Tspike's plan has succeeded. In view of the strife and dissension they see, Tspike's mother, Rivke, advises her to give up the deception—even though Milton is obviously ignoring it—and "tell all." Her father urges her at least to take the ten thousand dollars Emmanuel has offered, but Tspike, after revealing everything, determines to leave without the money. When Milton's brother Archie sees how heartbroken he is at Tspike's decision to leave—since by now Milton is truly in love with her despite (perhaps even in awe of) her ruse—he lectures him on the value of true love over social status and on the importance of following one's heart. Rhea is so moved by Archie's emotional but sensible case that she manages to persuade her husband to back down and withdraw his opposition. Milton runs after Tspike just as she is departing, and the two are married.

The script does not specify where in the action the song *A bisl libe* occurs, but it could have been sung at any number of points, or more than once. It is easier to know when it would not have been sung—at the end of the play, for example, when the lyrics would no longer have applied.

Tspike became one of Rumshinsky's most beloved musicals and one of Molly Picon's most acclaimed roles. She played and sang in many subsequent performances on tours throughout the United States and abroad, including one in Buenos Aires in 1932.

15. The zany musical comedy in two acts and a prologue to a book by Louis Freiman, *Fishl der getotener* (Fishl the Successful One), which featured Rumshinsky and Isidore Lillian's puckish song *DIR A NIKL, MIR A NIKL* (A Nickel for You, and a Nickel for Me), opened at the Yiddish Folksteater in 1935. It was an admittedly silly, farcical, and lightweight burlesque (even by Second Avenue standards), with all the signs of having been conceived as a vehicle for the signature talents and stage *shtik* of its well-tested star—Menashe Skulnik (1892–1970), one of

the greatest, funniest, and most original comic character actors and singers in the history of Yiddish theater and popular entertainment.

The title of the show is deliberately facetious, far from being successful, Fishl is the quintessential luckless, impractical, and meek victim of circumstances, and sometimes an outright fool, known in Yiddish as a *shlimazl*—a role Skulnik played to perfection in countless shows during his long career. Press previews for the season even gave the English title as *Fishl the Perfect*, adding to the mockery, although the actual production was eventually called, simply, *Fishl*.

Fishl and his boyhood friend Berele, who has become Bernard in America, have immigrated to New York from their hometown in Poland. During the seventeen years since his arrival, Bernard has become a successful photographer, and he is engaged to Alice. Fishl, however, is a streetcar conductor (to whom passengers pay their fare upon boarding). In a comic moment, poking fun nonetheless at a serious topical political issue, he tells of his court appearance for citizenship. When the judge quizzed him on his awareness of American government by asking the name of the First Lady, Fishl replied—instead of Eleanor Roosevelt—that “there is no First Lady, since the First Lady used to be the Statue of Liberty; but ever since America closed its doors to immigrants, the First Lady has died.”

Bernard's sister Teme becomes interested in Fishl. But he has not forgotten his childhood attraction to Fanytsheke, who told him that she loved him when she was eight years old, and he sends for her. In this connection the audience is treated to a variant on a stock comic device of false or manipulated photographic identity, which is found in numerous plays, skits, and shows—most notably Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella* (1957)—and even up through 1950s American television (in shows such as *Sergeant Bilko*, for example). Fani has asked him to send a photograph of himself, since she has not seen him since childhood. But he is uneasy about his appearance and clothing (even though, in those days, photographers routinely hired out suits and various regalia for just such purposes or to reassure parents in Europe that their

children were doing well). Fishl sends a picture of Bernard instead, claiming it is of himself. Even when Fani arrives, he asks Bernard to exchange identities for a while, which seems safe since Bernard already has a fiancée. As any audience could guess, Fani proceeds to fall in love with the real Bernard, romantically thinking he is the Fishl of her childhood; and she shuns the disguised real Fishl, since she never liked Bernard when he was little Berele in Poland.

At a summer resort hotel in the district north of New York City known as the Catskill Mountains (usually the foothills region, later known as the Borscht Belt), which is managed by Alice together with her father, Fani's brother Hershl arrives as one of the entertainers for a Fourth of July program. He and Alice become attracted to each other despite her engagement to Bernard, and they are “in love” in short order. But this is no calamity for the real Bernard, who arrives with Fani. Still pretending to be Fishl, he has gradually fallen in love with her, returning what she thinks are her feelings for Fishl. Meanwhile, the real Fishl happens to have a summer job as a bellboy at a nearby hotel, and when he comes on the scene for a visit, he and Bernard finally give up the gag and explain everything to Fani. She is so furious that she will have neither of them—preferring, if necessary, to remain unmarried. But Fishl, realizing that he can never have her love, convinces her to follow her heart and forgive and marry Bernard. He disappears, and shortly afterward his clothing and a suicide note are found near a lake. *Shlimazl* that he is, however, he chose a lake too shallow for drowning and survived his attempt. In the end, he marries Teme; Bernard and Fani marry; and Alice and Hershl pursue their romance. Everyone is content. The audience, even happier, can—after the ovation and cheers that always followed a Menashe Skulnik performance—now proceed to the various Romanian, Gypsy, and Russian restaurants and cafés in the area for a glass of tea or something stronger, maybe with some stuffed cabbage or an old-fashioned Romanian skirt steak—and perhaps some live *tsimbalum* music.

Fishl sings *Dir a nikl* midway through the first act, when he appears in a streetcar conductor's uniform and explains the nature of his job. Other songs from the show that

became popular were *I Like Soup*, also sung by Skulnik, which also transcended Second Avenue as a household expression; the slightly risqué *S'heybt zikh on mit dir, un es lost zikh oys mit dir* (It Begins and Ends with You); and *Dos zelbe fun dir tsu heren*, a comic “letter song” with the message: “I’m sending this little letter to you. I’m sick, alone, without a penny, and being sued; and I hope to hear the same from you.”

16. At first glance, Rumshinsky and Isidore Lillian’s love duet, **SHLOYMELE MALKELE**, from the 1937 musical production *Dos galitsyaner rebele* (The Little Galician Rabbi), to a book by Louis Freiman and Shlome Shtaynberg [Steinberg], presents a perplexing scene that is bound initially to raise one’s eyebrows. The lyrics appear to reveal a brother and sister openly expressing romantic love for each other. Yet, without knowing anything whatever of the story line, one thing is certain: Shloyme and Malke are not really brother and sister. For all the crudeness of Second Avenue at its worst (which this play was not, despite its shortcomings), nothing so hideous as incest would ever have been considered. What these lyrics tell us is that these two have become “crazy [*meshuge*] for each other” only upon confirming that they are biologically unrelated, and that until then, their strong quasi-brother/sister relationship had been confined (or, for future pseudo-Freudians, repressed) to the level of friendship.

The script for this musical, which was produced at the Yiddish Folksteater, has not been located as of this writing. But a rare consensus among reviewers was that—*notwithstanding* the amateurish press advertisement as “the success above all successes” and “the greatest and most beautiful of all Yiddish operettas”—the plot and story line were among the weakest, most implausible, most incongruously juxtaposed (“a mishmash of situations and types from other Second Avenue pieces”), and least coherent of all Second Avenue shows.

What we can ascertain about this musical from secondary documents is that it concerns a Hassidic *rebbe*’s son (the *rebele*, or “little rabbi,” who we assume is heir to his father’s court) who was somehow separated in childhood from his family and his home. His young adult identity is

later assumed by a survivor of a shipwreck in which the actual *rebele*, Shloyme, is thought to have been drowned, and it is the imposter who returns home as Shloyme to the *rebbe*’s court. He is accepted and “welcomed back” by the family, and he becomes close to the real Shloyme’s sister, Malke. But they are close on a brother-sister plane, which, for him, grows into an attraction on another level, since he knows that Malke is not his sister. There is the suggestion that he has resisted his impulses for as long as he could. By the time this song occurs in the action, the truth has obviously been revealed. She seems to have begun to suspect it already, so the mutual feelings might at least subconsciously have begun to develop. She is briefly torn between not allowing these feelings to surface and surrendering to them, but now that it is clear that there is no biological relationship, she needs little persuasion.

In the end, the real Shloyme, who has in fact survived the shipwreck and been taken in by Second Avenue’s favorite fantasy, Gypsies—which provides the stage opportunity for the romanticized Gypsy motifs, music, dance, and visual paraphernalia the audiences so adored—surfaces and returns home. The result is a doubly “happy ending.”

All reviewers had praise for Rumshinsky’s music, even though *Der Tog* referred to it as good music adorning an unappetizing story. “Here, in this piece, the music is everything.” Once again, Rumshinsky had demonstrated even to the severest of critics of the play that he had not lost “his craft in composing colorful music for the stage”—of which *Shloymele malkele* was one of many numbers.

1. MAYN GOLDELE (My Goldele)

Goldele:

When you were away,
I suffered so terribly.

Misha:

Me too, me too.

Goldele:

I was suffering so terribly,
always longing for you.

Misha:

Me too, me too,
Always thinking only of you,
both day and night.

Goldele:

Me too, me too.

Both:

Many times my heart was longing for you,
for just one glimpse of your sweet eyes.

Misha:

My heart, my soul.

Goldele:

I love, I love only you.

Misha:

My Goldele, my dear bride,
my beautiful, sweet little angel,
my only desire is to be with you,
with you forever and ever, I swear.

Goldele:

Oh, at this instant I feel
that my happiness has returned to me.

Misha:

Me too, me too.

Goldele:

Oh my, I feel it burning!
Oh my, I'm so drawn to you!

Misha:

Me too, me too.
I feel in this moment
that I'm burning to ashes from love.

Goldele:

Me too, me too.

Both:

Oh, you have captured my heart
with those beautiful songs that ring so sweetly.

Misha:

My heart, my soul.

Goldele:

I love, I love only you.

2. FIFTY-FIFTY

I hope we will live to see the day, the time should only come,
when there will no longer be any bosses and workers;
the socialists will make an end to poor and rich.
The bosses and workers will share things equally!

Fifty-fifty, oy, fifty-fifty!

Vanderbilt will sit and
sweat like an ox, sewing cloaks.
Let's try it everywhere and not waste any time,
quickly enacting the "fifty-fifty"!

Fifty-fifty, oy, fifty-fifty ...

My brother went around jobless for a long time,
but nothing worked for him, no matter what he tried.
One day he comes home with money and says to me:
"You see, I am a conductor on a trolley car and split it
with the company—

"Fifty-fifty, oy, fifty-fifty!

I ring the bell incessantly.
It's a nickel for them, a nickel for me.
Fifty-fifty, it goes so smoothly, a tug on the bell rope,
and a nickel flies into my pocket."

3. *IN A KLEYN SHTIBELE* (In a Little Cottage)

Lyrics: Isidore Lillian

Benish:

Day and night I think of you;
you have brought me sunshine, Diana.
I can no longer concentrate on my studies
ever since I noticed you, Diana.

Tell me, beloved, did you miss me?
Oh, have I thought of you a great deal, Diana.
I cannot be without you even for a minute.
With you everything is so good, Diana.

We will live in a little cottage,
just you and me together in love.
Our love is heavenly; you delight me.
God sent you down from heaven.
We will live in a little cottage,
just you and me together in love.
When I become old and gray
and my final hour comes,
my last words will be, "I love you."

Diana:

You are the balm of my heart,
You can heal the greatest pain, my Benish.
In sorrows and in joy,
only death can separate us,
You, my Benish.

I love you with all the fire in me.
You, only you, are so dear to me, Benish.
You are my life.
I will be devoted completely to you, Benish.

Both:

We'll live in a little cottage....

4. *OY, IZ DOS A MEYDL* (Oh, What a Girl)

Every girl hopes that
there's somewhere
in the world
a man just for her.
And she weaves her dream:

He is good and fine,
such a handsome man,
everyone will be jealous of her.
He will love her,
forever love her.
With a tender voice
he will sing only to her:

Oh, what a girl!
How lucky am I!
Oh, what a girl!
I am in love with you!
In your beautiful eyes
one glimpses rays
like a rainbow
when the sun sets.
Your heart is beautiful and gentle.
Therefore I say to you:
Oh, what a girl!
How lucky am I!

5. *ES TSIT, ES BRIT* (It Tugs, It Burns)

What is this? I must
figure it out already.
What am I thinking? What am I longing for?
Why am I getting hot and cold?
Why am I crying?
It feels like the world is about to end....
I want to shoot myself.
Who knows what's happened to me?

It tugs, it scorches, it seethes, it burns
here, in my heart;
It gnaws, it flicks, it rips, it nips,
It leaves me without a moment's peace.
I cannot sleep; I cannot eat,
Oh, it thumps and drains.
I cannot forget that face.
Something knotted itself up in me.
It pricks, it breaks, in short, it's bad.
I think I'm in love!

Poets have written
many sonnets

about love,
why it makes one crazy, mad.
Vengeance and war
it has already brought.
Love's arrows can travel miles—
It is the greatest power.

6. HAMAVDIL

He who makes a distinction between the sacred
and profane,
Will pardon our transgressions.
A good week, have a good week
A good week, a pleasant week ...

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
watch over Your people Israel,
protect Your people Israel.
The Holy Sabbath is taking leave;
may the new week arrive with good fortune
and blessing,
with all things good and with success.
To You alone we pray,
dear God! And let us say: Amen.

He who made a distinction between the sacred
and profane,
between the Sabbath and the rest of the week,
"Hamavdil ben kodesh l'hol."

He will multiply our seed and our means
as the sand of the ocean.

We should multiply, and belong only to you,
"Hamavdil ben kodesh l'hol."

O, good Creator, O dear Creator,
Sing the *"Hamavdil,"* sing unto Him.
Praise our Creator. Praise only Him.

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
our belief in You is strong.
Watch over us and protect us from any new disasters.
Give us and send us a new, good week.

7. A BRIVELE DER MAMEN

(A Little Letter to Mama)

My child, my comfort, you are going away.
Remember to be a good son.
With anxious tears and fear I beg you,
your loyal, dear mother.
You are traveling, my child, my only child,
across distant seas.
Just arrive in good health
and don't forget your mother.
Oh, travel in health and arrive in good spirit.
Please send a letter every week,
and thus lighten your mother's heart, my child.

REFRAIN:

A letter to your mother
you shouldn't delay.
Write right away,
dear child.
Grant her this consolation.
Your mother will read your little letter
and she will recover.
You'll heal her pain,
her bitter heart.
You'll delight her soul.

These eight years I've been alone.
My child has sailed far away.
His childish heart is hard as stone:
Not a single letter has arrived.
How can my child go on?
How is his life going?
He must be doing very well there,
since he's forgotten me.
I've sent him a hundred letters,
and he still has no sense
that my pain is so deep.

[REFRAIN]

In the city of New York there's a wealthy home,
where the hearts are cold, without feeling.
Her son lives there in lavish style.
He has a lovely family:
a beautiful wife and two children

with radiant faces.
And as he sits and beams with pride at them,
he receives a letter:
"Your mother dead," it has happened.
In life you neglected her.
This was her last wish:

Say a *kaddish* for your mother,
don't delay.
Say it now,
dear son.
Grant her this consolation.
Your mother will hear the *kaddish*
from her grave.
You'll heal her pain,
her bitter heart.
You'll delight her soul.

8. WATCH YOUR STEP

America, a land of nothing but "hurry up!"
One is running to do business, one is running to the shop.
One has a date, she's running late.
One is running to pinochle, then pays "double bête."
One is running to a poker game.
One is running to pawn his watch and chain.
One is running to a play, one is running to a cabaret.
One is running to the drugstore because of
his upset stomach.
"Watch your step," they shout straight out.
"Watch your step," you can see it everywhere.
In the subway—in the car, up and down the steps—
One is shouting loudly with all his might,
"Watch your step!"

America, a land of nothing but "hurry up!"
One is running to do business, one is running to the shop.
One is running to the store, one is running to the train.
One is running to pawn his watch and chain.
One eats *khale* every day of the week.
One eats only the hole of the bagel.
One is running to the drugstore because of
his upset stomach.

Watch your step....

9. GOT UN ZAYN MISHPET IZ GEREKHT (God and His Judgment Are Just)

Throughout his life the Jew has
a word of consolation for his misfortunes,
and this was passed down to him through the
generations.
And whatever misfortune befalls him,
whatever happens to him,
he bears it all and is content,
as though it were nothing at all.
But his face becomes pale,
his eyes become wet,
his heart gets drained of blood.
To uplift his heart
and to ease his suffering,
he consoles himself with this:

God and His judgment are just!
One may never say that God is wrong;
God knows what He is doing:
He punishes no one without just cause.
God and His judgment are just....

The Jew never finds happiness;
He has always suffered.
Broken into little pieces
is the Jewish nation.
He has no home, no land, no friend;
no warm, consoling words.
The beautiful sun doesn't shine on him.
He is hated everywhere.
An accursed stranger,
he is a foreigner;
everywhere he is tormented.
He has countless sorrows.
Yet he bears his sufferings in silence;
he cries his eyes out and he says:

God and His judgment are just....

In nearly every generation
a Haman arises
and attempts with all kinds of terror
to destroy the weak, defenseless Jew.
Now too, in the twentieth century,
recall how he is without friends.

They rob the Jew and plunder him,
in the Czar's empire.
An evil Ivan,
a dog, Krushevan,
has spilled the blood of the Jew.
A sea of blood was caused by the pogrom.
Yet the Jew keeps on singing his song:

God and His judgment are just....

10. HU-TSA-TSA

I'm going to sing a song for you now, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
I believe this song is very good, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
If the song pleases you, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
I'll be making you happy, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*

It's a cold night, frosty, raining, and hailing. A wind is blowing in all directions. It's slippery. I wouldn't even wish such a night upon my enemies. At a bakery, there's a knock on the door,
And the baker runs to answer the door.
Before him stands a Jew, soggy and frozen, and then he says: "Mister baker, would you be so kind as to give me one roll with caraway seeds."
The baker looks at the man and asks, "Mister, what are you, crazy? You went out in such weather, such cold, such rain and snow just for one roll with caraway seeds? Tell me, are you married?"
The man replies, "What do you think? My mother would have sent me out on a night like this?"

I went into a restaurant, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
And ate very well, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
The food was very tasty, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
But at night it woke me up, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*

At the cemetery I see a Jew lying prostrate on a grave.
He's beating his chest, pounding and sobbing; he's crying hysterically: "Oy, oy, why did you die, why? Why did you die?" I go up to him and ask, "Mister, who died?" He answers me: "My wife's first husband.
Oy, why did you die, why?"

My neighbor says she's in love with me, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
So I went over to her house, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*

She gave me quite a welcome, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
But her husband walked in right in the middle,
hu-tsa-tsa ...

Two old Jews are sitting in a steam bath.
One stirs from his place. "Oy, oy, oy, oy ..."
And he picks up his cane and says again,
"Oy, oy, oy, oy ..."
He slowly draws himself to his feet: "Oy, oy, oy, oy ..."
until finally he's standing upright.
The second one says to him,
"Moshe, where are you running?"

I was sitting on the upper bench of the steam bath,
hu-tsa-tsa ... Singing with all my might, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
With boiling water some Jew, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
Scalded me all over, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*

My grandma bumps into her doctor while taking a stroll. The doctor says, "Grandma dear, how're you doing?" She says: "Oy, doctor, oy, doctor,
I don't feel very well. I ache everywhere from my head to my feet; I can barely walk or stand." He says to her, "So, come see me at my office." She replies, "Perhaps next week, when I feel a bit better."

True story, true story:
On the way here I see an old Jew sitting on the curb.
He's weeping bitterly: "*Oy gevalt!* Oh God, what should I do? My people, save me!" I run up to him and ask, "Hey Gramps, what happened? Why are you crying? Is life that bad?" He says, "No, on the contrary, things are good for me. Oy, are things good for me! Last week I got married to a twenty-eight-year-old girl. I'm already ninety-three. Oy, things are good for me! She's so pretty, so good, my bride. She does everything for me. She cooks for me, she cleans for me, she makes hanky-panky with me. It's heaven on earth. Oy vey, things are good for me. Things are so good for me...." I ask him, "So what are you crying about?" He replies, "I can't remember where I live!"

I've now finished my song, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
And if it you want some more, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
If the song is to your liking, *hu-tsa-tsa ...*
Then you can all do "*hu-tsa-tsa*" ...

11. OYB S'IZ GEVEN GUT FAR MAYN MAMEN

(If It Was Good Enough for My Mother)

Everyone is always saying,
everyone is always whining:
"These are new times, these are new times!"
In response to anything you ask
they get annoyed and say to you:
"These are new times, these are new times!"
They laugh at the old
and even mock them.
"It's old-fashioned," they say. "It's passé."
And I say to you: That's not so.
Who cares what they think.
And that's why I think to myself thus:

If it was good enough for my mother,
it's good enough for me.
Everything she did or said
was in such good taste;
People didn't put on airs.
Everyone was happy back then.
To all those who say,
"For the Old World I don't care,"
I don't begrudge them the new one,
but the old one is more appealing to me.
If it was good enough for my mother,
it's good enough for me.

It's comical these days to see
women walking in the street—
"These are new times, these are new times!"
A woman wouldn't even think of settling down and
starting a family.
She is "busy" day and night—
"These are new times."
She has a poodle, a canary,
and a bulldog named Mary,
but she has no time for a child.
And my mother, to no one's amazement,
gave birth to eleven children;
and she was all right.

12. DU BIST DOS LIKHT FUN MAYNE OYGN

(You Are the Light of My Eyes)

"Oh my dear Yosele,
you are fine and good."
So Reyzele would sing
into my ears.
"When I feel you're next to me,
my heart pounds.
You have given me heart.
Do not take it back.
I cannot live without you;
I want you to know.
Do you know what you mean to me?
Yosl, listen to this:

You are the light of my eyes.
Only you illuminate my world for me.
You have seduced me,
so that I cannot live without you.
You make my night shine so brightly.
You bring me the blue sky.
You are my bright morning star.
So shine for me, I beg of you.
When you are not near me,
everything feels so dark, so gloomy;
and then when I hear your voice,
it's as if it were daylight everywhere.
You are the light of my eyes.
Only you illuminate my world for me."

13. SHMA YISRO'EL

Shma Yisro'el! Hear me out!
Elohim, Your world is great!

I plead with You for one gift.
Dear God, grant her to me.
I pray to You today and at all times;
I cry and scream "*Shma Yisro'el*."

"*Shma Yisro'el*"—an old song,
sounding forever new.
"*Shma Yisro'el*," the Jew cries out when in distress.
"*Shma Yisro'el*," the Jew cries out before death.

I'm now calling out to You,
Grant me, God, the hand of this Jewish girl.

"Shma Yisro'el"—a wanderlied.
O *"Shma Yisro'el"*—the Jew wanders.
Don't rebuke me, just give me Your blessing.

[Variant: Make Rukhele my bride. Give me Your blessing.]

14. A BISL LIBE UN A BISL GLIK
(A Bit of Love and a Bit of Luck)

When I was a child, I remember it so clearly.
My life was good then;
I had no cares.
When I grew up and went out into the world,
I saw how false people can be:
My world became a dark place.

A bit of love, and a little bit of luck,
the sun shall shine for just one blink of an eye.
If I could only bring sunshine into my heart
for just one minute.
A bit of love and a little bit of luck,
let the sun shine for only the blink of an eye.
Dear God gave to all so much joy in life,
but for me, nothing at all.

15. DIR A NIKL, MIR A NIKL
(A Nickel for You, a Nickel for Me)

Everybody knows me;
when they see me, they give a shout:
"Fishl the Conductor! Fishl the Conductor!"
They know me on Delancey Street,
They know me on Broadway.
"Fishl the Conductor! Fishl the Conductor!"

I don't ring up each and every nickel,
I must confess.
I've noticed that the company
already has lots and lots of nickels,
so I've decided that
I'll split things with them evenly.
Fishl, Fischele ...

A nickel for you, oy, oy, oy ...
A nickel for me, oy, oy, oy ...
That's the plan—you get it of course.

A nickel for you, oy, oy, oy ...
A nickel for me, oy, oy, oy ...
Half is mine, half is yours.

The company should
be getting up and dancing,
thanking God I don't take it all.

A nickel for you, oy, oy, oy ...
A nickel for me, oy, oy, oy ...
Half is mine, half is yours.

16. SHLOYMELE, MALKELE

Malkele:
I am a loyal sister to you,
Oh brother, just listen to me...

Shloymele:
You're like a picture—a joy to look at.
Must I really be your brother?

Malkele:
Brother, I will always protect you
and look out for you at every step.

Shloymele:
Oh, kiss me and don't think of me
as your brother.

Both:
Oh, Shloymele, Shloymele, brother, come closer to me!
Oh, Malkele, O, Malkele, sister, come closer to me!
Oh, Malkele (Shloymele), I'm crazy for you!

1. **Mayn Goldele**
Publisher: Music Sales (Metro Music)
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning
2. **Fifty-fifty**
Publisher: Music Sales
Arranger : Zalman Mlotek / Harvey Cohen
Orchestrator: Harvey Cohen
3. **In A Kleyn Shtibele**
Publisher: Music Sales
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning
4. **Oy, Iz Dos A Meydl**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen
5. **Es Tsit, Es Brit**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
6. **Hamavdil**
Publisher: Music Sales
Arranger / Orchestrator: Joseph Ness
7. **A Brivele Der Mamen**
Publisher: Music Sales (Ethnic Music Publ)
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning
8. **Watch Your Step**
Publisher: Music Sales (Kammen)
Arranger / Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
9. **Got Un Zayn Mishpet Iz Gerekht**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
10. **Hu-Tsa-Tsa**
Arrangers: Zalmen Mlotek / Paul Henning
Orchestrator: Paul Henning
11. **Oyb S'iz Geven Gut Far Mayn Mamen**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
12. **Du Bist Dos Likht Fun Mayne Oygn**
Publisher: Music Sales
Arranger / Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
13. **Shma Yisro'el**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning
14. **A Bisl Libe Un A Bisl Glik**
Publisher: Music Sales
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning
15. **Dir A Nikl, Mir A Nikl**
Arranger / Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen
16. **Shloymele, Malkele**
Publisher: Music Sales (Metro Music)
Arranger / Orchestrator: Paul Henning

Arrangements 1–5, 7–16 copyright Milken Family Foundation

Recording: Baumgartner Casino
(tracks 2-5, 7-9, 11, 13, 14, 16), Sofiensaele (tracks 1, 12),
Vienna, May/October 2001

Recording: Sala Sinfonica del Auditori (tracks 6, 10, 15),
Barcelona, July 1999, June 2001

Recording Producer: Simon Weir

Recording Engineer:
Campbell Hughes
(Bertram Kornacher, track 6)

Assistant Recording Engineers:
Andreas Hamza (tracks 2-5, 7-9, 11, 14, 16)
Bertram Kornacher (tracks 10, 15)

Technical Facilities:
The Classical Recording Company Ltd., London
Recording Project Manager: Paul Schwendener

**NOTE: Biographical sketches of the performers on this recording can be found
on the Milken Archive Web site: www.milkenarchive.org**

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

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Eliyahu Mishulovin—for his indefatigable and in-depth research on the historic context of these songs and productions.

Zalmen Mlotek—Co-Artistic Director of the Yiddish Theater Song project, advisor on repertoire and arrangements, vocal coach.

Henry Sapoznik—whose research and information on early Jewish bands in America have been extremely helpful.

**For purchasers of this CD, these liner notes are available in a large-page format.
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Yiddish Theatre V3