

# Cover Art

Yiddish Vol.2

## A MESSAGE FROM THE MILKEN ARCHIVE FOUNDER



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

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

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



Lowell Milken

## A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



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

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



Neil W. Levin

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## About American Yiddish Theatrical Songs

The selections here derive from the genre 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 immigrant generations in America. This aggregate genre includes:

- The American Yiddish musical theater, now more commonly known as Second Avenue, named after the lower Manhattan district where it made its American debut and gained its first audiences, and where the most important and prestigious Yiddish theaters stood. Songs in this category are from full-length theatrical productions based on plays, which were variously called operettas, musical comedies, romantic musicals, melodramas, or musical shows. These are to be distinguished from two more sophisticated literary Yiddish theatrical forms in America: (1) the Yiddish Art Theater, introduced to New York by the famous actor Maurice Schwartz in 1918, for which incidental music was often written by composers otherwise associated with serious classical music; and (2) the Arbeter Teater Farband, better known as ARTEF—a Yiddish worker’s art theater that operated during the Depression years.
- Yiddish vaudeville, which played in music halls and variety houses, whose introduction preceded American-born Yiddish theater. Vaudeville ranged from single songs and acts to revues to skits and even one-act sketches.
- Yiddish films.
- Yiddish radio, which generated a large repertoire of new popular songs, many of them in the so-called Second Avenue style, but not necessarily written for larger productions or related to plays.

The American Yiddish musical theater was a powerful product of the immigrant experience, and it became a highly successful export to Europe, England, South Africa, and South America. During its peak years, many of its leading stage personalities were virtual folk heroes among certain segments of American Jewish society.

The musical style of Second Avenue grew out of and relied heavily on Viennese light operetta and also built upon the European Yiddish musical theater as founded by Abraham Goldfaden (1840–1908) in Romania. The imported 1882 production of his operetta *Di kishefmakhern* (The Sorceress, or The Witch) is generally considered the watershed that set the tone for the development of an indigenous American Yiddish theater. The music of Second Avenue also came to be informed by some of the extrinsic gloss of perceived Jewish, Ukrainian, Gypsy, and other folk motifs and tune styles that resonated well in popular imagination—as well as by references to traditional liturgical modes and influences, especially where those elements related to specific characters or plot situations. But commercially driven songwriters rarely attempted to mine the wellsprings of genuine eastern European Jewish folksong, 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 ORCHESTRATIONS

Few complete or authoritative orchestrations of these songs have survived, and in many cases full orchestrations 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, if not always, for far

smaller ensembles than the actual full pit orchestras in theaters. Conductors worked from sketches or charts, a not uncommon practice, and those sketches also often 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. But it is a mistaken presumption to link the original authenticity of orchestral quality or sound to the more crude accompaniments on contemporaneous but inferior old recordings, which were made hastily, with minimal financial investment, and for a different purpose. Most of the major shows were orchestrated not by unskilled scribblers, but by the composers themselves—who often had solid classical training—or by accomplished professional orchestrators. Nor 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 union 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. But apart from the specifically comic character roles that generated vocal personalities of their own, the theater, with its pretensions to operetta, required—and presented—legitimate and even classically trained voices as singer-actors (much as did Broadway, at one point). 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 wanted—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; and 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. A favorite predigested routine formula concerns 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.

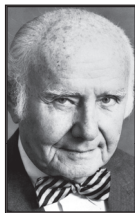
Among the many stock song patterns was the “couplet song,” to which newly invented or improvised couplets dealing with topical situations or personalities would be appended to the original song at any particular performance—often on the spot, since the conductor had only to be signaled.

### 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



**SOLOM SECUNDA** (1894–1974) was among the most distinguished and preeminent composers associated with the American Yiddish theater. Born in Aleksandriya, in the Kherson region of the Ukraine, to a father who was an amateur *badkhan* (folk entertainer and singer at Jewish celebrations) who routinely taught songs to the family, the young Secunda became a coveted boy alto soloist in major synagogue choirs. He soon had a reputation as a brilliant wunderkind boy *hazzan* (cantor), and he also gained his first theatrical exposure at the age of eleven in Goldfaden operetta roles at a children’s drama club. Following a pogrom in Nikolayev, where his family had relocated, he emigrated to America with them in 1907 and, until his voice changed, was known there too as “the prince of the young *hazzanim*.”

In 1913 Secunda was engaged as a chorister in Yiddish productions at the Odeon Theater in New York, for which he began writing Yiddish songs. A year later he began studies at the Institute for Musical Art (now The Juilliard School), and in 1916, together with Solomon Shmulevitz (1868–1943), who was well established by then as a songwriter and lyricist for theater and vaudeville, Secunda wrote his first full-length score for *Yoysher* (Justice) at the Eden Theater. In that time frame, the legendary prima donna Regina Prager introduced one of his songs, *Heym, zise heyim* (Home Sweet Home), which became his first real success.

Around 1919 the legendary singer-impresario-producer-actor and songwriter, Boris Thomashefsky (1865–1939)—who as a young immigrant cigar roller and singer had been instrumental in persuading a benefactor to bring an acting troupe from London for

the first Yiddish theatrical performance in the United States, and had then gone on in effect to found Yiddish theater in America—introduced Secunda to the young, still undiscovered George Gershwin. Thomashevsky suggested that they might form a team to compose for his prestigious National Theater, since he had just fallen out with his resident composer, Joseph Rumshinsky (1881–1956), and was eager to find a replacement. Secunda rejected the idea, citing—at least for the record—his inability to relate to Gershwin’s jazz, rather than classical or Jewish, orientation. But it is tempting to fantasize about the course Second Avenue might have taken had Secunda been amenable. Meanwhile, he became acquainted with Ernest Bloch’s music, and, struck by the level to which Jewish music could be elevated, he took some lessons with Bloch for about a year.



**Cast of *Señorita* at the Rolland Theater in Brooklyn, 1928. Music director Secunda, bottom row, fifth from left.**

In 1921 Secunda worked in Philadelphia for three years in order to qualify for New York union membership. *Moshka*, his first operetta with his own orchestration, was produced at the Hopkinson Theater in Brooklyn in 1926. His children later recalled that by 1930 he was already becoming increasingly disillusioned with the banal and unelevated level of much popular Yiddish theater and with its artistically counterproductive

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star—as opposed to repertory—system. Without ever abandoning Second Avenue altogether, he began turning his attention to serious Yiddish poetry, with a view to writing art songs. After an unsuccessful attempt to break into Hollywood, he accepted an additional position as music director of the Brooklyn radio station WLTH, which programmed Jewish popular and folk music and cantorial selections. There he also wrote jingles, including some for Manishevitz, and inaugurated a children’s program, *Feter sholom* (Uncle Sholom). In 1932 he moved to WEVD (named after the famous socialist leader Eugene V. Debs), which had New York’s largest Yiddish-speaking radio audience (“the station that speaks your language”).



**Secunda conducting from the pit of the Yiddish Art Theater, 1938.**

Between 1935 and 1937 Secunda wrote scores for at least seven shows. He also began to experiment with incidental music for Maurice Schwartz’s Yiddish Art Theater. It was for one of those plays that he adapted a Polish song to a Yiddish version—*Dona, dona*, which became internationally famous, especially much later, in the 1960s, when it was recorded in English as a folk-type ballad by such singers as Joan Baez and Theodore Bikel.

In the late 1930s Secunda began a rewarding artistic association with Cantor Reuben Ticker, who subsequently became the international superstar opera

tenor Richard Tucker and reigned for many years at the Metropolitan Opera House. Secunda arranged and composed a considerable amount of Hebrew liturgical music for Tucker's cantorial recordings and concerts, as well as for his ongoing synagogue services, which he continued until his death. And Tucker became the principal advocate of Secunda's synagogue music.

In 1945 Secunda became the music director of the Concord Hotel, one of the two leading upscale resorts in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains (north of New York City) that catered to a Jewish clientele. He held that position for twenty-eight years, conducting holy day synagogue services and weekly summer concerts with full orchestra. Despite its popular and sometimes coarse "Borsht Belt" connotation, it was a serious musical opportunity, especially when Tucker became the Concord's cantor.

By the 1940s, when Secunda had returned more fully to the theater, Second Avenue audiences were beginning to shift from an immigrant-based to a nostalgia-oriented group, which led to increasing amounts of English interspersed with the Yiddish. Secunda's score for *Uncle Sam in Israel* (1950) reflects that trend. Although he claimed to have concluded his Second Avenue career after *The Kosher Widow*, in 1959, he still wrote for Yiddish shows in the 1960s. His final Yiddish musical—produced as late as 1973, long after the thriving days of Yiddish theater had become memory—was *Shver tsu zayn a yid* (It's Hard to Be a Jew), a musical version of a well-known Sholom Aleichem play that had first been presented in New York in 1921.

From the 1960s on, Secunda accelerated his energies toward serious concert music. His aggregate output—in addition to more than eighty Yiddish operettas and musicals, many dozens of independent songs, and dozens of cantorial-choral settings—includes a string quartet, a violin concerto, and an orchestral tone poem, all recorded for the first time by the Milken Archive. His two major cantatas, *If Not Higher*, on a familiar story by Yehuda Leib Peretz (also recorded for the Milken Archive), and *Yizkor*, were sung at live

performances and on television broadcasts by Richard Tucker. Secunda made no secret of his hope that he might be remembered primarily for those classically oriented accomplishments rather than as a Yiddish theater composer. That hope, however, in view of his overriding fame on Second Avenue, will probably go unfulfilled.



**ALEXANDER OLSHANETSKY** (1892–1946) was also among the most prominent and prolific Second Avenue composers and conductors, and one of the musically most sophisticated exemplars of the Yiddish theater. He was born in Odessa, the Ukraine, where he had both a traditional Jewish and a modern Western-oriented gymnasium education. As a boy, he

sang in synagogue choirs and began violin studies at the age of six—learning several other instruments as well. He then played in the Odessa Opera orchestra and toured with them throughout Russia and Siberia, after which he became the choral director for a Russian operetta company. While in the Russian army as a regimental bandmaster, he traveled to Kharbin, Manchuria, in northeast China, where he encountered a Yiddish theater group whose conductor was Peretz Sandler—later the composer of the famous song *Eli, eli*. When Sandler emigrated to America, Olshanetsky replaced him in Kharbin and also began writing Yiddish songs and music for Yitzhak Kaplan's play *Tsurik aheym kayn tsien* (Going Back Home to Zion). After touring Siberia, Japan, China, and India with another Russian operetta company, he returned to Kharbin in 1921 to find all Yiddish theater gone.

In 1922 Olshanetsky emigrated to the United States, where his uncle Hyman Meisel (eventually his father-in-law too, when he married his Yiddish actress-singer cousin, Bella Meisel [Myself]) already lived. Olshanetsky had some initial involvement with the Yiddish Art Theater and then traveled to Cuba to direct a theater company there. When he returned to New York, he served suc-

cessively in two Yiddish theaters (the Lenox, in Harlem, and the Liberty, in Brooklyn), before “graduating” to the more prestigious downtown National Theater. And in 1929, after many successful operettas of his own, he rewrote some of the music for Goldfaden’s classic *Bar khokhba* for its radio debut.

From 1925 on, throughout the 1930s and until his death, Olshanetsky’s name was ubiquitous throughout the Second Avenue world, and his operettas played in nearly all its major theaters. He also became the first musical director of the Concord Hotel. Some of the most sophisticated cantors of the time considered him among the very best choirmasters in terms of understanding the special sensitivities of cantorial idioms and rhythmic freedom. He wrote a small amount of liturgical music as well—unabashedly theatrical in character and style—which remains mostly unpublished.

Olshanetsky had a particular gift for elegant melodic lines and a well-developed dramatic sense. He was able to fashion these elements into vehicles that spoke to popular taste. Joseph Rumshinsky, his senior colleague but also a commercial rival, wrote in his memoirs that Olshanetsky understood innately the musical yearnings of the immigrant Jewish masses and introduced both “dreamy romances” and a perceived Russian Gypsy idiom to the American Yiddish theater. His last operetta was *Ale viln khasene hobn* (Everyone Wants to Get Married).

**ILIA TRILLING** (1895–1947) was born in Elberfeld (now Wuppertal), Germany, to parents who were Yiddish actors with various touring groups. In 1910, when his parents settled for a while in Warsaw, he began formal musical studies, and during the First World War he became the director of a Yiddish theater in Kiev. Throughout the 1920s, until he emigrated to America in 1929, Trilling was involved with a number of Yiddish theatrical troupes in the Ukraine and Russia. In New York he became a dance instructor for a theater company and then took a position as choirmaster of the major Yiddish theater in the Lawndale district of Chicago, the heart of that city’s eastern European

Jewish population. A few years later he was engaged as the composer-in-residence of the Hopkinson Theater in Brooklyn, and he began writing for full-length Yiddish theatrical productions, which eventually played in all the major houses.

**LOUIS GILROD** (1879–1930) was born in the Poltava region of the Ukraine and was brought to New York at the age of twelve. As a budding tunesmith and penman of appealing verse, by the turn of the century he was engaged to write—for commercial publication—Yiddish counterparts to American popular songs, and he wrote many individual topical songs and parodies. Taking advantage, for example, of the initial American Jewish elation sparked by news of the beginning of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia—as did a number of songwriters and comic performers—he collaborated with Gus Goldstein on a satiric vaudeville skit titled *Tsar nikolay un tsharli tshaplin* (Czar Nicholas and Charlie Chaplin). Eventually Gilrod became a successful professional lyricist for Second Avenue, teaming up with its leading composers—many of whose most acclaimed songs contain his lyrics—but he composed a good number of melodies for such songs himself, and he also appeared on the stage as an actor.

**HERMAN WOHL** (1877–1936), who was instrumental in the musical development of American Yiddish theater during its early phases, was born in Otynia, in the province of Galicia (now northwest Ukraine), and spent his youth in a Hassidic environment. That experience may have influenced and informed the melodic character of his own songs, many of which were written for operettas with religiously related themes or subjects, with European settings. Before coming to America as a young man, Wohl directed synagogue choirs for prestigious cantors; and in America he pursued a dual career as a Second Avenue songwriter and composer and as a synagogue choirmaster and liturgical composer. For many years he conducted the choir for the most widely acclaimed and revered cantor of the time—and probably of all time—Yossele Rosenblatt. His many cantorial-choral compositions for Sabbath, High Holy Days, and Festivals remain



in manuscript, and the whereabouts of many of these are not even known.

The blossoming of Wohl's Second Avenue career coincided with that of the American Yiddish theater itself around the turn of the century in New York. Many of his successful songs were musical collaborations with **ARNOLD PERLMUTTER** (1859–1953), who had been Goldfaden's orchestrator and “take-down” song notator, and who also wrote incidental music to purely spoken plays. This symbiotically productive “Perlmutter and Wohl” duo, a recognized team as early as 1903, eventually became a ubiquitous fixture of Second Avenue—working at first with the playwright Moshe Hurwitz and then with numerous lyricists and librettists. They wrote their own lyrics as well. Among their most celebrated operettas is *Dos pintele yid* (The Essence of Being a Jew). After the 1920s, their teamwork diminished, and each reverted to solo writing.

## Program Notes

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1. Confirming supremacy of fame for any one song is nearly always a dangerous business for the musical-cultural historian, but Secunda's **BAY MIR BISTU SHEYN** is an exception. There is little risk in asserting that it is simply the world's best-known and longest-reigning Yiddish theater song of all time, familiar among non-Jews as well as Jews—in Europe, the Americas, and even Japan. The catch in that declaration, however, is that few who know the song, even its Yiddish lyrics, are aware of its birth in the theater—like so many theatrical songs that later achieved independent popularity. More ironic is the lack of awareness in the general world of its Jewish origins or even associations, since its more famous English version (and its subsequent sister adaptations in languages other than Yiddish) is nearly always perceived merely as an icon of 1930s American popular song, in which the words

of its title are most often presumed to be some form of Americanized German.

Together with lyricist Jacob Jacobs (1890/91?–1977), also one of Second Avenue's most prominent actors, singers, and comedians, Secunda composed *Bay mir bistu sheyn* (In My Eyes You're Beautiful) for his 1932 musical comedy *M'ken lebn nor m'lost nit* (One Could Really Live, but They Won't Let You)—officially subtitled in English as *I Would if I Could*. With a book by Abraham Blum, the show opened at the Rolland Theater in Brooklyn, and the song was introduced onstage by the beloved Aaron Lebedeff (1873–1960)—often dubbed the Yiddish Al Jolson—as a duet with Lucy Levin (whose part in the song was minor).

According to one not always reliable account, Lebedeff first suggested the title of the song to Secunda as a leitmotif for the show, after which Jacobs furnished the lyrics once Secunda had written the tune. In that account, Lebedeff then vehemently resisted the song, insisting instead on melodic alterations of his own, and he sang it as written on opening night only on a bet with Secunda over the audience reaction. The ecstatic ovation, however, reportedly required three encore repetitions.

As an instant hit in the Second Avenue milieu, the song was published independently by its composer and lyricist. It sold well in the usual Jewish markets and emanated fashionably from Jewish bandstands. But since such hits usually continued to engage that fickle public only for the duration of the season surrounding a show's run, Secunda—unable to imagine its future potential ability to captivate, albeit in a different guise, non-Jewish audiences—sold the rights to a publisher four years later for a pittance. Considerable twaddle has accumulated around the succession of events that catapulted the song onto the international scene as an overnight commercial sensation, which, over the years, has generated gargantuan sums in royalties

and revenues. And the resulting urban legend has become suffused with apocryphal anecdotes and conflicting, self-serving recollections—one of which even questioned Secunda's solo hand in the melody.

What is known is that two months after Secunda's sale of the rights, Sammy Cahn, a well-known lyricist in the general popular music field, wrote (possibly together with Saul Chaplin) an English adaptation of the Yiddish lyrics to *Bay mir bistu sheyn*. Apart from retaining those four words in the original Yiddish, those English lyrics are not a translation, but more simply a frivolous, almost generic expression of courtship that bears no relation to the particular theme of the original Yiddish words. The English version was then recorded by the up-and-coming Andrews Sisters, who had not quite yet achieved their approaching stardom, and who needed a new song for the B side of their second 78-rpm disc for Decca Records. Its release, and the initial radio broadcasts, detonated an explosive coup beyond anyone's expectations, and sales exceeded those of what had previously been the biggest American hit recording. Winning the ASCAP award for the most popular song of 1938, *Bay mir bistu sheyn* was given further new treatments and arrangements in renditions by dozens of singers and orchestras—including Ella Fitzgerald, Tommy Dorsey, Guy Lombardo, the Ramsey Lewis Trio, the Barry Sisters (still in that English version, even though their repertoire was partially Yiddish), Judy Garland, Rudy Vallee, Kate Smith, and many others. But the best-known "swing" version was introduced by Benny Goodman at Carnegie Hall. And the English version has been translated into dozens of languages.

In 1938, when public performances in Germany of any music by composers of Jewish ancestry was forbidden under the Nazi regime, *Bay mir bistu sheyn* was enthusiastically received on German radio broadcasts. Inadvertently presumed to be simply a general pop song with a southern German

dialect, it caused an embarrassing furor and a round of demotions when its identity was discovered. Conversely, a political cartoon that year depicted Hitler singing the song to a personification of the Netherlands. The tune was expropriated by the Soviet Union for an anti-German propaganda song during the war, under the title *Baron von der Spik*, credited fictitiously to a Soviet songwriter.

The plot of the show appears to be decidedly weak, even for typical Second Avenue fare—with even less than the usual degree of excitement or surprise; a review proclaimed it superfluous to summarize the story. Jake, a shoe factory worker who is fired for union organizing activity, is in love with the owner's daughter, Hene. In response to her concern about the endurance of his commitment to her, he sings *Bay mir bistu sheyn* to her at some point in the first act. Despite a series of predictable attempts to thwart the marriage, they are, of course, wed in the end.

Although it was sung as a duet in the original production, the song became known thereafter as a solo rendition—even in its ensemble arrangements. Hene's vocal appearance in a recording could be jarring without having been set up by her preceding spoken lines. The solo performer thus simply echoes her question, "How do you explain it?"

In 1961 Secunda and Jacobs were finally able to regain a portion of the rights, and they recycled the song for a new, unrelated musical built around it, which was produced under the title *Bay mir bistu sheyn* at the Anderson Theater. But shortly thereafter, following the critical success of Secunda's classically oriented cantata *If Not Higher*, he expressed the hope that this serious work might make people forget that he was the composer of *Bay mir bistu sheyn*. That appears unlikely.

2. The heartrending lament *IKH HOB DIKH TSUFIL LIB* (I Love You Too Much), one of Second Avenue's

most enduring and familiar love songs, is the best remembered number from Olshanetsky's musical comedy *Der katerinshtshik* (The Organ-grinder). The show, with lyrics by Chaim Tauber (1901–72) and a book by Louis Freiman, opened at David Kessler's Second Avenue Theater in the 1933–34 season, which had proved to be a particularly difficult one economically. Some theater managers who had gambled earlier on more artistic ventures seemed to be scrambling to save the day by reverting, in the words of one critic, to the good old hokum its [the Second Avenue] public used to cry for"—providing safe crowd pleasers that would avoid the financial risk of more serious Yiddish drama.

*Der katerinshtshik* opened with a stellar cast that included Julius Nathanson in his first "downtown" role; Annie Thomashevsky, sister of Boris Thomashevsky; and Luba Kadison, who introduced this song in that production. Kadison was known for her acting in literary and classical Yiddish plays, and this was her first involvement in a popular musical vehicle.

The story concerns Tsirele, the daughter of a Jewish widow and innkeeper in a small Polish town, and Abrasha, a presumed Gypsy organ-grinder (street beggar and entertainer) and pickpocket, to whose mystique many women are nonetheless attracted, and whose parents—also organ-grinders from a Gypsy camp—are perceived by the townspeople as "thieves from gutter society." Tsirele and Abrasha are truly in love and intent on marriage despite her family's vigorous objections. Her mother, Rivke, has selected a different match for her, Pinye, who consults Masha, a Gypsy fortune-teller and card reader, for a prediction about his future with Tsirele. It happens that Masha is deeply in love with Abrasha, who apparently once had some romantic relationship with her. Masha reads her own fortune, and learning that Abrasha expects to marry Tsirele, she pours out her heart in this lament—or "torch song" as it was referenced

then—*lkh hob dikh tsufil lib*. In the song, Masha articulates her grief while simultaneously and unselfishly wishing Abrasha happiness: "I love you too much to be at all angry with you." In an additional strophe she tearfully promises her blessing, rather than a stereotypical Gypsy curse.

Luba Kadison, who became identified with the song for years, later claimed credit for having inspired the songwriters to give it its present shape and its role in the play. She referred to the song that she was originally given for her principal solo as a "hearts and flowers tune," which, she protested, neither provided exploration of Masha's character nor furthered the plot—a weakness of many songs in Second Avenue productions. According to Kadison's account, it was she who insisted that the song be rewritten so that it would arise naturally out of her onstage fortune-telling activity. And she maintained that it was also she who suggested both the card-reading scenario and the song's specific human expressions of painful acceptance and lifelong heartache.

Just as Tsirele and Abrasha are about to go to the wedding canopy without her mother's consent, agents from another town arrive to reveal that the Katerinshtshiks are not Abrasha's real parents, and that Abrasha is no Gypsy, but a Jew who was kidnapped as a baby by them and reared as their own son in a Gypsy camp. In fact, Abrasha has an enviable Jewish pedigree as the grandson of a prestigious living *tzaddik* and *rebbe* (pious charismatic rabbinical-type leader), the Makarover Rebbe, whose own deceased daughter—Abrasha's mother—married a doctor against his wishes and incurred his condemnation.

Abrasha is forced to comply with the *rebbe's* demand that he be returned to him and his court, where another religiously appropriate match for him is attempted. Ultimately Rivke relents—as does the Makarover Rebbe, in time to appear uninvited at the wedding, this time to bless rather than curse

the union he had opposed, and even to acknowledge its divine preordination.

As was frequently the case, the music was enthusiastically received by the critics, while the play was dismissed for, among other things, its holes and implausibilities: "And don't ask, I plead with you, why and how." The music was called "a classic that would have been appropriate for the best Viennese operetta... a jewel of the Yiddish stage." *Ikh hob dikh tsufil lib* was praised for its fresh invention and form, and Kadison's rendition won accolades for "taste and restraint conspicuously absent from too much of the [Second Avenue] entertainment." Over the next few years, the song, in vocal and instrumental versions, was a favorite of Jewish wedding bands and popular entertainers, for whom it became completely divorced from its original theatrical context. In 1940 it was recorded in an English version, *I Love You Much Too Much*, by Bob Zurke and his Delta Rhythm Band, and it achieved recognition in the non-Jewish world. Subsequent recordings included renditions in a host of styles by Gene Krupa, Ella Fitzgerald, Jan Peerce (in the original Yiddish version), Connie Francis, Dean Martin, and Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians—in a choral arrangement. At a memorial tribute at the Concord Hotel following Olshanetsky's sudden and early death, a large banner poignantly expressed the feelings of so many there who had known him: "Olshy, we loved you too much!"

3. **EYN KUK AF DIR** (Just One Look at You), with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, is one of the principal songs from Olshanetsky's operetta *Di eyntsike nakht* (The One and Only Night), with a book by Abraham Bloom. It was first produced in 1929 at the Downtown National Theater in New York. Although it ends happily, the play addresses one of the most brutal and tragic long-running episodes in European Jewish history: the era of rigorous enforcement of the Cantonist laws in the Czarist Empire from about 1827 (when, under the reign of Nicholas I, military service was made compulsory

for Jews) until 1856, when they were abolished under Alexander II.

Under the Cantonist decrees, Jewish boys of age twelve or older were subject to seizure by military agents—known by the Jews as *khapers* (grabbers, or kidnappers)—according to a quota system. However, even those rules were often ignored and abused, and sometimes very young boys were taken—as in this play. The children were placed in military-type institutions, or Cantonist units, where they were given Christian religious instruction and induced to accept Christianity and baptism. At the age of eighteen they were conscripted into the army or navy for a period of twenty-five years. Estimates of the number of Jewish youth thus seized and impressed during that time frame range from 30,000 to 40,000.

The Cantonist laws were part of an overall imperial scheme to address the "Jewish problem" in the empire by forcing complete assimilation into Russian society—which included the shedding of all Jewish heritage and associations and the adoption of Christianity. The goal with respect to the Cantonist children was to separate them as far as possible from Jewish life, and the Cantonist units were located far from the Jewish populations in the Pale of Settlement, from which the children were taken. The laws also served as a secondary vehicle for encouraging Jews to conform on their own to Russian norms. Jewish boys who attended state-sponsored rather than Jewish schools, for example, were protected from seizure and exempt from conscription.

The action in the play occurs between 1830 and 1850. Hanyim, the young son of Reb Mendele, a Hassidic *rebbe*, is seized by *khapers*, but he is befriended by a Russian general, Rudinsky, who rears him as his own son—with a new Russian name, Vitalin. As he grows up, Vitalin recalls nothing of his Jewish origins or family, but he has a naturally friendly attitude toward Jews

and an inexplicable attraction to Jewish songs. Eventually he goes on to a brilliant military career and becomes a famous general. Meanwhile, his real parents, together with Esther, an orphan they had adopted as a young girl, and a group of other Jews, are arrested by Cossacks and falsely accused of spying. General Vitalin's intercession saves them. In the process he hears some of the detained Jews singing another of the operetta's most successful songs, *Az got iz mit mir* (When God Is with Me), which ignites a mysterious internal echo within him. He thinks he has heard the song, but cannot recall where or when. He then meets Esther, now a young woman, and falls instantly in love with her, neither one realizing that they were childhood playmates. He begs her to sing *Az got iz mit mir* again as he tries unsuccessfully to jog his memory, and he is strangely affected and agitated by it. The typed prompt script indicates an unidentified duet here, and it is likely therefore that *Eyn kuk af dir* was sung at this point.

After his departure, Vitalin remains preoccupied with the song (*Az got iz mit mir*) and with Esther, and he travels to her (and his own childhood) town—arriving just as she is about to wed someone else. He proclaims his love again, recalling that the night he met her was “the one and only night” he ever felt “true love”—hence the title of the operetta. The known lyrics of *Eyn kuk af dir* seem to apply more directly to this moment than to the initial meeting in the first act, especially given his words: “Everyone knows that because of you, I’m a changed man.” Or it may have been repeated here with these lyrics. In any case, they now sing that they know they must be separated, without stating the obvious reason: the adopted daughter of a Hassidic *rebbe* cannot possibly marry a non-Jew. To save the day, Vitalin's father arrives and reveals to Vitalin his true identity, which allows them to marry. “The story is more fitting for an opera,” wrote a favorable reviewer for the Yiddish press, “than for an operetta.”

4. Although it exudes the spirit of the vaudeville stage and music hall, Louis Gilrod's **A MALKE AF PEYSEKH** (A Queen for Passover) was one of the numbers in the musical comedy *Tants, gezang un vayn* (Dance, Song and Wine), with a book by Harry Kalmanovitch. It first played in 1922 at the Thomashevsky Theater in New York, with Aaron Lebedeff (who played the lead role and also sang this song), Bessie Wiseman (his wife), and Boris Thomashevsky himself. More than one songwriter had a hand in the show (with respect to both lyrics and music), which appears to have featured an especially large amount of music. Most of the music, however, was composed by Joseph Cherniavsky (1895–1959), originally a serious classical musician who had come to New York a few years earlier as a member of the Zimro Ensemble—an artistic Zionist-affiliated group that had been on a concert tour from Russia en route to Palestine. He remained in New York and soon became deeply involved in the theater as well as in vaudeville, in which he pioneered a purported fusion of popular Jewish music and jazz—his brand of “Jewish jazz”—by establishing Joseph Cherniavsky's Yiddish American Jazz Band and bringing it on the vaudeville circuit.

Our information is too sketchy to know whether or not *A malke af peysekh* was written expressly for this show. Second Avenue was not always guided by artistic integrity, and insertions of independently written songs were motivated by various factors: a guaranteed ovation, the need to fill or liven up a lagging spot, or a song's association with a particular cast member. Lebedeff's performances, for example, are known to have elicited cheering demands from audiences that he sing one of his famous hit songs on the spot, even if there was no connection to the production in progress; and pit orchestras were often supplied in advance with those instrumental parts as a contingency. While *A malke af peysekh* was indeed one of Lebedeff's renditions in this show, and souvenir copies of its printed folios were sold at the theater, there is no reference to it in any of the located scripts.

How indelibly wedded this song was to *Tants, gezang un vayn*—especially for later productions—is therefore uncertain.

“It is difficult really to say what the show is about,” commented Abraham Cahan, the longtime editor of the *Forverts* (at its peak the most widely circulated of the several Yiddish daily newspapers in America). Certainly, Passover plays no part in this loosely pasted mélange of scenes and numbers. There is, however, ample content related to marriage, including the usual array of both stereotypical jokes and jibes from the male perspective. The Passover seder provides the backdrop to the singer’s ode to marriage and the benefit a wife would bring him as his “queen” at the festive table, completing for him the status of king in the household that tradition accords him at the seder. But the second strophe, in which he feels tricked into having to take in her two previously concealed children, is consistent with similar humor elsewhere in the show. *A malke af peysekhn* was probably one of several “couplet songs” in the show. The publishers sought further mileage from its seder setting by subtitling it “A Passover Song” (actually “An Easter Song,” since immigrant-era Jews in that milieu commonly confused Easter with a proper translation of *pesah* sometimes identifying it as “Jewish Easter”).

5. The heartrending and tragically bittersweet song *GLIK* (Happiness) was composed by Olshanetsky to Bella Meisel’s lyrics for *Der letstet tants* (The Last Dance), with a book by Louis Freiman and other lyrics by Isidore Lillian (1882–1960) and Israel Rosenberg and produced initially at the Prospect Theater in the Bronx in 1930—the first major production for any Bronx theater. The central story revolves around yet another variation on a hackneyed archetypal theme—an elderly father desperate to ensure a marriage for his daughter before he dies. So ingrained was this basic leitmotif in Jewish lore that one reviewer, knowing nothing in advance of this particular story line, recognized

what he called the clichéd scenario and “saw it coming the moment the curtain rose.”

We can determine that *Glik* was sung at a climactic moment in a dramatic and pathos-filled scene (whose tragic consequence would soon be averted) in an otherwise lighthearted musical that was also—judging from reviewers’ descriptions, from the large cast of supporting and tangential roles, and from extraneous subplots—a bit of an extravaganza, replete with burlesque elements, magicians performing black magic, cabaret scenes, and pre-Damon Runyon glimpses of the underworld.

An aged wealthy man has specified in his will that his daughter Mildred must marry by a certain date or forfeit her inheritance. Her lawyer organizes a “marriage of convenience” to Misha Feinman, a convicted but completely innocent prisoner awaiting execution on death row at Sing Sing prison. He agrees to the apparently legal scheme in return for money that he can leave to his sister. On the day before Misha’s scheduled execution, a proper Jewish wedding ceremony is conducted at Sing Sing by its Jewish chaplain and a cantor. Even the usually critical and demanding Abraham Cahan reported that this prison scene was deeply moving. After the ceremony Misha is granted a few moments alone with his new bride, essentially just to have a few words with her for the last time and to assure her that she will, in fact, be the widow of an innocent man. But during that brief encounter they fall in love. Hence the reference in the lyrics to the strange vicissitudes and twists of fate that have given him only one moment of joy at his life’s last moment. The show itself, of course, was no tragedy. The poignancy is short-lived, for the next day Misha receives a full pardon from the governor, and eventually, he and Mildred marry.

*Glik* was introduced in that production by Michal Michalesko (1885/88?—1957), one of the reigning leading men of the Yiddish stage, who, in addition to playing the part of Misha, also

produced the show. The song was written and sung as a duet between Misha and Mildred (played by its lyricist, Bella Meisel). But Michalesko, for a long time almost inextricably associated with the song, also sang it frequently as a solo rendition at public performances.

6. **LEBN ZOL KOLUMBUS** (Long Live Columbus!), which expresses a primitive platitudinous side of immigrant enthusiasm for the “new land” and its supposed beckoning socioeconomic opportunities, has remained an adjunct of the genre of humorous American Yiddish popular songs ever since its introduction and immediate success in 1915. The song is from an early staged musical comedy, *Der grine milyoner* (The New Millionaire), produced in New York in 1915 with a book by Abraham S. Schomer, who claimed to have based it on an actual 1894 incident. Boris Thomashevsky played the role of the hero, Zalmen Puterknop, and he also wrote the lyrics for *Lebn zol kolumbus*, for which the songwriting team of Arnold Perlmutter and Herman Wohl provided the music. (The song was first published in 1915 with those attributions, but a 1918 publication claimed Louis Gilrod as the lyricist. No satisfactory explanation has been offered, since only the first few words differ.) Authorship of other songs in the show, or even their titles, has yet to be established. The plot is a bit coarse and transparently stereotypical, as are some of the characterizations. Zalmen is a poor immigrant who has come to America in advance of his wife and family. Back in his hometown, Motol, a son of the wealthiest Jew there, Reb Zimel, is in love with Zalmen’s daughter. But Reb Zimel will sanction no such marriage to an indigent young woman. Then Zalmen’s wife receives a letter from Zalmen with the generous sum of fifty dollars and a picture of himself in a borrowed suit. The letter leads her to infer, and then to boast, that he has become prosperous in coal, lumber, ice, and related businesses—when in fact he lives with a roommate in a tiny coal cellar and only works as a deliveryman for these

commodities. Reb Zimel quickly changes his tune and facilitates the marriage.

Zalmen and his roommate are visited by a huckster who offers them a “get rich quick” land scheme, and as they consider the scheme, they reflect on how easily other immigrant Jews have succeeded in business and they praise America’s openness, opportunities, mobility, and (with no idea that the United States would enter the war that had begun in Europe) its freedom from wars and conscription. While drinking a toast to America—“Columbus’s land”—they sing *Lebn zol kolumbus*. Meanwhile, Reb Zimel liquidates all his holdings and brings his and Zalmen’s family to America, where he assumes he can increase his fortune many times by participating in Zalmen’s business ventures, only to discover the ironic truth. Later, Zalmen emerges triumphant. Having lost his modest investment in the land scheme, he wins a lottery prize of \$24,000—an unimaginable sum in 1915.

The lyrics in the earliest extant typed script (1914) contain an additional trope that was eliminated by the time the show opened. It refers to the infamous case of Leo Frank, a Jewish businessman in Atlanta, Georgia, who was framed and falsely convicted on trumped-up charges for the murder of a fourteen-year-old non-Jewish female employee, and who was then lynched by a mob after his death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment by the outgoing governor. The lyrics, obviously penned before the lynching, assert: “It will turn out alright: an innocent Jew will never be hanged in America.” *Lebn zol kolumbus* was also updated periodically with additional topical strophes. They allude to such current issues as Henry Ford’s virulently anti-Semitic diatribes, anti-Semitism in Poland, an American bank failure, a Jewish candidate in a New York gubernatorial election, an anti-immigration bill vetoed by President Woodrow Wilson, Prohibition (joking that if a Jew ran the government, there would be plenty to drink), and papal silence on anti-Semitism.

The tune of the chorus (refrain) as printed in the original 1915 folio contains a raised 4th degree in the first phrase, which creates an augmented interval (C sharp to B flat, within the key signature of G minor), although the song is rarely if ever heard that way now. Nor is that interval contained in later published versions. But this detail mirrors a perceived stereotype of eastern European “Jewish” modality (although it is equally related to Gypsy and Ukrainian scales) that the public welcomed then as “authentic.” *Lebn zol kolumbus* soon became popular as an independent rendition whose strains wafted from vaudeville houses, music halls, cabarets, floor shows, and bandstands, sung as often by female as by male soloists.

7. **A GUTE HEYM** (A Good Home), Olshanetsky and Jacob Jacob’s song about the preciousness of a traditional family environment, was sung in William Seigel and Harry Kalmanowitz’s musical comedy *In gortn fun libe* (In the Garden of Love), produced and staged in 1926 at the National Theater in New York. In the absence of the script, we cannot know much of the plot or how the song fit into it—if at all. Apparently, the heroine (played by the celebrated Bella Meisel) is saved from a financially driven but unwanted or forced marriage by an eleventh-hour revelation of mistaken or hidden identity, and she is then able to be united instead with her true love, Misha.

By 1926 the play’s favorable conclusion was so predictable in the context of the standard Second Avenue fare that one reviewer commented, “There were no tears [even] from the women.” Veteran theatergoers knew that one way or another, the story would not end unhappily. The redeeming elements of the production appear to have resided, according to press reactions, in the humor provided by two supporting roles played by the character actors Hymie Jacobson and Betty Jacobs (wife of the lyricist) and, as was more often than not the case, in some of the music—including this song.

8. **NU, ZOG MIR SHOYN VEN** (So Just Tell Me When, Already), with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, is a love duet between Misha, a young doctor completing his residency, and Tootsie, an orphaned young lady who operates a newsstand on New York’s immigrant-saturated Lower East Side and anonymously finances his advanced medical studies abroad. The song is from Olshanetsky’s operetta *Vos meydelekh tuen* (What Girls Do), with a book by William Siegel. The original production played in 1935 at David Kessler’s Second Avenue Theater, with Molly Picon and Muni Serebrow in those lead roles. Molly Picon’s husband, Jacob Kalich, produced the show and also collaborated with Olshanetsky on some of its music.

The plot revolves around a love triangle, in which Tootsie is in danger of losing Misha to the social-climbing Sylvia. And “if you can’t imagine the rest, it doesn’t matter,” commented the *New York Times* reviewer.

9. Ever since **DOS YIDISHE LID** (The Jewish Song) was made famous in the mid-1920s with its premiere recording by the world-renowned cantor Mordecai Hershman, it has been perceived as an independent, quasi-cantorial Yiddish concert number. In fact, *Dos yidische lid* began its life as a showstopping rendition written expressly for a newly expanded 1924 production of Sholom Secunda’s full-fledged musical melodrama *In nomen fun got* (In the Name of God)—with lyrics by Anshel Schorr (1891–1942) and a book by Shlome [Solomon] Shtaynberg [Steinberg].

An earlier version of the show was produced in Brooklyn in 1923, and it also played the next year in Montreal. But for its 1924 production at Philadelphia’s Arch Street Theater, where Secunda was the resident composer, the show was augmented to include several new musical numbers (the advance publicity boasted ten)—*Dos yidische lid* among them.



Press descriptions refer to *In nomen fun got* as “an old style melodrama.” Indeed, its story, in which separated lovers are reunited only through ironic tragedy, exhibits pretensions to moral and ethical counsel. But there is still a sufficient amount of requisite comedy in its subplots, satirical character portrayals, and routines. “Something for those who come to cry, and something for those who come to laugh,” wrote a reviewer of the 1923 production.

The plot unfolds in a small eastern European town, where a wealthy and religious elderly widower and curmudgeon, Reb Nison Kluker, also the town’s cantor, seeks to marry a much younger woman—D’vorale—the daughter of a poor tailor. Though her father welcomes it, she resists, primarily because she is having a secret love affair with Reb Nison’s son, Yitzhak, who has inherited his father’s musical talent. When D’vorale becomes pregnant and is about to be driven from the town, Yitzhak swears “in the name of God” that he will always love her. But she disappears, and he loses touch with her completely, going to Italy to study music. The surviving scores indicate that he sings *Dos yidishe lid* at some point in that first act.

Secunda wrote *Dos yidishe lid* expressly for Joseph Shayngold, an accomplished singer-actor (and son-in-law of the Yiddish stage idol Jacob P. Adler) who also had the ability to interpret the idioms of virtuoso cantorial art and who had already been engaged to play the part of Yitzhak. Because Shayngold possessed what Secunda considered one of the “few cultivated voices in the Jewish [Yiddish] Theater,” he decided to compose something that would justly exploit his gifts. At the same time, since the show was scheduled to open just around Rosh Hashana, he aimed at something that would represent Judaic religious culture while resonating equally “with those who attend synagogues and those who don’t.” What emerged was a song that contains, integrated within its descriptive Yiddish “lied” framework, three of the most familiar Hebrew prayers and

cantorial harbingers of the upcoming holy days: *hinn’ni he’ani mimma’as*, the cantor’s plea on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur for worthiness to intone the liturgy on the congregation’s behalf; *kol nidrei*, the recitation on the eve of Yom Kippur of an ancient legal formula absolving Jews from vows they are unable to keep; and *sisu v’sim’hu*, a traditionally lively expression in the liturgy for Simhat Torah.

It is not clear how—or on what dramatic grounds, if any—this song was made to fit into the show. By the last act, all the characters have immigrated to New York, where Reb Nison has become a well-known cantor. Yitzhak is engaged to a millionaire’s daughter. While driving himself to his wedding, he accidentally runs over and kills a young boy who has darted in front of his motorcar chasing after a ball. The child turns out to be D’vorale’s and his own son. He and D’vorale reunite in grief, and instead of going through with his wedding, he pulls the ring from his pocket and presents it to her as a marriage pledge—renewing his vow “in the name of God” to remain steadfast forever.

10. Ilia Trilling and Isidore Lillian wrote the love duet **MIT DIR IN EYNEM** (Together with You) for an exceptionally elaborate musical spectacle, *Leb un lakh* (Live and Laugh), with a book by Harry Kalmanowitz. Its first production, at the Second Avenue Theater in New York in 1941, turned into a six-month run, followed by a run in Brooklyn’s Parkway Theater and another in Chicago at its primary Yiddish stage, the Douglas Park Theater. In New York, the very large cast included Menashe Skulnik (1892–1970, who introduced in this show what became one of the most famous comic songs associated with him, *S’iz kalye gevoren, s’iz kalye geven*) and, among many other stars, Bella Meisel and Muni Serebrov—who sang this duet.

The story is told—acted, sung, and danced—in flashback, and it occurs over a ten-year time frame

dating back from “the present time,” 1931–1941 (adjusted for later productions). Samuel Shtrai, an American businessman whose wife has left him and their young daughter, falls in love with Miriam, who becomes his second wife. Even before the marriage Miriam candidly reveals to Samuel the details of her stained past in a sordid affair with Max, an unsavory gambler and charlatan, and Samuel assures her that he will never allow that past to mar their future happiness. In a tender scene, in which Miriam is still concerned about the effect her past might have on their marriage, Samuel reassures her that now that they are together, they will always remain so. They conclude the scene with the duet *Mit dir in eynem*, which, according to press accounts, was repeated a few times during the production. The tune also functions as a leitmotif in the orchestra at various appropriate places in the show.

Later, when Max learns that his former girlfriend is married to a man of some means, he extorts money from Miriam on the threat of otherwise revealing her past to Samuel, not realizing that Samuel is already aware of it. Miriam complies for a while, since he also threatens to expose her publicly. When the extortion escalates into a demand to renew their sexual affair, however, Miriam shoots him. To save her from the consequences, Samuel confesses to the murder. He is sentenced to sixteen years in prison, but is paroled after ten years.

11. **MAYN YIDISHE MEYDL** (My Jewish Girl), with lyrics by Anshel Schorr, was the signature song in Secunda’s 1927 musical production (billed then as a “grand [groyse] Yiddish operetta”), *Zayn yidishe meydle* (His Jewish Girl). Composed to a book by Isidor Lash, it was first produced in New York at Schorr’s Liberty Theater in Brooklyn.

If the play purports to address Jewish-Christian intermarriage, it does so only superficially in the context of a grandiose offering of popular entertainment that included “something for every-

one”—everyone, that is, who patronized Second Avenue in the 1920s and 1930s. Apart from emotional volleys of parental opposition to a mixed match, and a daughter’s sympathy-evoking willingness to sacrifice her own happiness “on the altar of *kibbud av* (honoring one’s father),” there were Jewish and general popular songs, quasi-Hassidic tunes, dances, typical Broadway set numbers, brushes with superstition in the form of demonic possession, parties, synagogue and other Judaic ritual scenes (including a bit of cantorial display), comic routines and hilarious stage “shtik” (guaranteed with Menashe Skulnik in the cast), jazz, and perceived Russian music and song associated with “Old Russia,” which always resonated well with those audiences as a bit of welcome exotica. “*Zayn yidishe meydle*,” commented one reviewer of a revival—but without disapproval—“is really just one song and dance after another.” As usual, the musical parameter came out on top. “Clear out the libretto,” continued that critic, “and there remain the tuneful numbers of Sholom Secunda.”

The story takes place somewhere in the Russian Empire prior to the First World War. Grisha, a non-Jewish Russian army officer whose father is a general, and Aniuta, the only daughter of a well-to-do Jew, are in love and intent on marriage. But Aniuta cannot bring herself to defy her father, and just as she is about to sign the *t’naim* (betrothal contract) together with an elderly Jew her father has selected for her, Grisha comes on the scene with startling news. He has just learned that he is, in fact, a Jew, since his mother—whom apparently he never has known—is Jewish. Known as Khayke the *meshu’gener* (the crazy one), she is said to have gone mad when Grisha’s father abandoned her, took the children with him, and had them converted to Christianity. Not only do Grisha and Aniuta wed in a proper Jewish ceremony, but the entire family emigrates to Palestine.

The lyrics of *Mayn yidishe meydle* render it suitable for more than one spot, and it is likely that

it was intended for the scene in which Aniuta and the elderly Jew are about to become engaged. We know from press accounts that Grisha repeated it following the wedding. And *Der Tog*, one of the major Yiddish daily newspapers, reported that the ovation from the women in the audience required a reprise after his first rendition.

*Mayn yidishe meydle* is one of sixteen musical numbers in the original version of the show. The remains of the performance materials also contain the song *Sing, Sing, Sing*, by Louis Prima, and Irving Berlin's *Puttin' on the Ritz*. For one revival, in 1937, a review referred to it as a "new musical by William Siegel and Secunda," which suggests that Siegel might have made revisions to Lash's original book. In 1949 Secunda revised the song for its publication.

12. **SLUTSK** is one of an entire category of theatrically sentimental—but not necessarily theater-born—American Yiddish songs with romanticized visions of immigrants' former life in eastern European towns. This one differs a bit in that its nostalgia resides more in recollections of family Sabbath observance and early childhood Jewish learning than in painted pictures of the town itself—in this case, Slutsk, in Belarus (formerly Lithuania). And one could argue that for many, adherence to orthodoxy, especially with regard to Sabbath observance, was more difficult to maintain in the early period of eastern European immigration, with six-day or even seven-day workweeks often required for survival, than it had been in Europe—where Jewish religious life was simply a given condition for those who wanted to perpetuate it. In America, there was also the newly available array of temptations (including the Yiddish theater itself, which ignored the Sabbath altogether). In general, however, the "longing for home" songs of that era were not meant to be taken literally in their imaginations of the *shtetl* or, for that matter, of anything to do with Europe. These songs—including *Slutsk*—are basically fictional and, in that sense

at least, theatrical. As a group, such songs reflect little actual sentiment among Jewish immigrants, precious few of whom missed the Europe they had so eagerly left. Even among the most disillusioned laborers in sweatshop conditions, there was never any organized expression of a desire to return (witness the song *Lebn zol kolumbus*, on track 6 here), although a very small number of orthodox Jews did occasionally go back for religious reasons. Still, these songs of an idealized (fanciful) past made for emotionally satisfying entertainment.

*Slutsk* has not been identified as belonging to any larger theatrical piece, although it could easily fit into any number of shows. The song as recorded here was published in 1936 with attributions to Herman Wohl (melody) and Aaron Lebedeff (lyrics), and a notation, "as sung by the famous stage and radio artists, Mischa and Celia Boodkin." Whether the inference was that they were performing or had performed "Wohl and Lebedeff's" song, or that Wohl and Lebedeff had formulated the song as they had heard it sung, liberally claiming authorship in connection with notating it and reshaping a few details, is impossible to know. The song's popularity seems in any case to have stemmed from that time frame. The same song, with only minor variances in the lyrics, was published in Buenos Aires (undated) simply as an anonymous "popular song"—leaving the impression that at least there it was perceived almost as a folksong. Twice in 1925, however, Lebedeff registered a copyright for himself as author of both the lyrics and the music for a song of the same title. Other than the first strophe, the lyrics and the tune are similar to those of the 1936 publication, but we do not know how to account for the apparent discrepancy in the attribution of the tune's composition. Further frosting our looking glass is the song's inclusion, with minuscule text variances, in Abraham Zvi Idelsohn's scholarly anthology of eastern European Jewish folksong, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies* Vol. IX (1932), as Idelsohn heard it sung by an informant who had come from the

Russian sphere. Perhaps only the words of the first strophe of the 1936 published song, which is not in these other sources, was actually Lebedeff's original work—appended to a preexisting anonymous song. European folksongs have on occasion been registered with the United States Copyright Office as original items. Still, these nostalgic, backward-looking lyrics do suggest the American immigrant-era *shtetl* song repertoire. The haze surrounding the true identity of the melody is even thicker.

13. More than one song titled **SAMET UN ZAYD** (Velvet and Silk) was written to the same set of lyrics by Louis Gilrod and associated with various productions and versions of the same musical show, *Hayntike meydlekh* (The Girls of Today), with a book by William Siegel. The best known of these songs, whose melody is attributed to Herman Wohl and which is recorded here, was sung by Jennie Goldstein, one of the towering stars of Yiddish melodrama, in that show's 1924 production at Max Gabel's Peoples Theater in New York. The production was advertised as a "drama of present-day life." The song's English title was given as *Silks and Satin*, probably for its more attractive alliteration. Wohl was credited as the principal composer of the show for that production. But Olshanetsky's name in particular was prominently associated with other productions of this show, which were sometimes staged under the name *Samet un zayd* and also involved other composers and lyricists, and his hand in this song remains in question. The music for another extant song of the same name was attributed to the now unidentifiable team of Reuben Osofsky and Jacob Mushnitsky, yet the two chorus (refrain) melodies are suspiciously similar.

The play urges caution for young women in responding to social temptations in "the new American life." It is a warning to guard against seduction by unscrupulous men with less than honorable intentions who, for the sake of conquest, will lavish material gifts on unsuspecting

women—the "velvets and silks" version of Hollywood's diamonds and furs. This was a recurring theme in many songs and plays of that period. As a corollary, *Hayntike meydlekh* also stresses the dangers of misplaced priorities and misguided values as criteria for young women. "A cheap dress and a virtuous girl, people admire," admonishes the singer of *Samet un zayd*. Some advertisements even implored mothers to bring their daughters to the show. The plot has elements of drug addiction, sexual exploitation, abandonment, and redemption through love, but not before it is too late for one of the victims.

*Samet un zayd* does not advance the action of the plot or pertain uniquely to any one role. As an independent encapsulation of the overall message, it was even subtitled "the song with a moral." Its assignment to a particular character—which has included male as well as female singers in various productions—and its moment within the play are left to the discretion of the director, whose decision might be informed by his own dramatic conception or by the available vocal gifts within any particular cast. In the 1924 Peoples Theater production, Tessie (played by Jennie Goldstein) sang it in the second act, after arriving at a hospital, drugged, demoralized, and near death.

14. **HU DL MITN SHTRU DL** (Hudl with Her Strudel) is a paradigmatically raffish document of a side of Yiddish vaudeville humor that cannot be dismissed in any candid consideration of the sociocultural totality of the immigrant experience. Its boisterous delivery, the common character of its tune, and its suggestive lyrics with their thinly veiled double entendres admittedly evoke the cruder moments of the vaudeville and music hall stage. No less distinguished an actor and singer than Aaron Lebedeff recorded the song in 1945 for Banner Records, a firm that specialized in popular Jewish songs, band tunes, Yiddish comedy, and even cantorial renditions. Because of Lebedeff's fame, the song was often assumed to have been written by

him. But the veteran Second Avenue and Yiddish radio actor and singer Seymour Reichtzeit (1911–2002), a founder and proprietor of Banner Records, remembered attending that recording session, and he could recall—albeit fifty-five years later—only that the song was written by “a guy named King.” Possibly he was referring to Adolf King, who is credited with such gently inelegant songs in the 1920s as *Oy, iz dos a rebetsn* (Wow, What a Rabbi’s Wife!)

15. Olshanetsky’s lullaby *UNTER BEYMER* (Beneath the Trees) was featured in the 1940 Yiddish film *Der vilna shtot khazan* (lit., the Vilna Town Cantor, but subtitled in English as *Overture to Glory*), which was based very loosely on the fragmentary evidence concerning the life of Hazzan Yoel David Lewensohn (1816–50)—the legendary Latvian-born virtuoso cantor who assumed the post of town cantor in Vilna (Vilnius) at the age of fourteen, and whose fame soon spread across Lithuania and Poland as the *der vilner balabesl* (the young master of Vilna). Eleven years later he left his pulpit and his family for advanced musical studies and a classical career in Warsaw. Little else of his life has been unearthed, other than that he died in an asylum.

In the film, which alters the facts and the story considerably with popular audiences in mind, the cantor is played by Moishe Oysher (1907–58), who had a brilliant, multifaceted, and also short-lived career as a star cantor, actor, entertainer, and composer. The cantor is urged by his teacher, a classical Polish composer, to relocate to Warsaw and pursue an operatic career there—beginning with a role in that teacher’s new opera. As a devoted Jew, the *hazzan* is torn by inner conflicts over priorities. In his community’s perception, abandoning Vilna and the synagogue for the opera world in cosmopolitan Warsaw, with its host of secular temptations, is tantamount to abandoning Jewish life. It will mean leaving his family, who actually mourn when, unable to resist the oper-

atic opportunity, he does so. He enters his sleeping son’s bedroom late one night and sings this lullaby—for which Oysher also wrote the lyrics—as his farewell. In Warsaw, he becomes enamored of a Polish countess and appears on the opera stage. There is no news from Vilna until his father-in-law arrives one night to tell him that his son has died. The *hazzan*, crazed with grief, begins singing the Yiddish lullaby onstage in the middle of an opera performance, and then he disappears. He wanders inexplicably on foot all the way back to Vilna, where he arrives exhausted and frail at the synagogue just as the services for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) eve are beginning. He walks into the synagogue, where, taking over from the cantor who has just begun to sing *kol nidrei* (the signature melody of Yom Kippur eve), he ascends to the pulpit while singing, but then collapses and dies.

16. Olshanetsky’s *IKH BIN FARLIBT* (I’m in Love), with lyrics by Jacob Jacobs, is a love duet from his operetta *A ganeydn far tzvey* (A Paradise for Two), with a book by Joseph Laineiner and William Siegel—first produced in 1928 at the National Theater in New York. All the action takes place in New York, and the time is given as “now and always.” Leybke and Fanitshke are young lovers, both of whom are poor, and they live—one presumes in tiny tenement apartments—on New York’s Lower East Side, home to the largest concentration of eastern European immigrants. They also knew each other in Europe, where he once saved her life and where the two first became infatuated with each other. Khane Tsipe, her conniving aunt, is portrayed as the quintessential *yente*—the stereotyped combination shrew, henpecker, and meddler made famous by Bette Jacobs (who played the role of Khana Tsipe in this production) through her hilarious radio and vaudeville character Yente Telebende. Khana Tsipe’s second husband was played by her real-life husband, Jacob Jacobs, who also regularly played her scolded husband, Mendel Telebende, in those sparring skits.

Khane Tsipe schemes to accomplish a match for her niece with David—ostensibly because he would be able to provide expensive medical treatment for Fanitshke’s older sister, a pressure to which she yields almost sacrificially. But in fact, such a wealthy and socially prominent “nephew-in-law” would give Khana Tsipe the status she craves as a grande dame of the fashionable Upper West Side. At some unidentified point in that first act, Leybke and Fanitshke sing their love duet, *Ikh bin farlibt*, in which they recall nostalgically their initial love in Europe.

The show contains exaggerated and coarse but sidesplitting comic routines between Khana Tsipe and her husband (probably written with the Jacobs duo in mind), including one in which he knocks her out with boxing gloves. Meanwhile, when David inadvertently overhears Leybke and Fanitshke’s farewell to each other, he realizes that his marriage to her is ill-advised, and he relinquishes her to Leybke.

17. **SKRIP, KLEZMERL, SKRIPE** (Fiddle, Klezmer, Scrape Away), with lyrics by Chaim Tauber, is a brief reflection on parental devotion, followed by a frenzied exhortation to the band (the *klezmerim*) to bring accelerated joy to a wedding celebration. It was introduced in Sholom Secunda’s musical show *A freylekhe mishpokhe* (A Happy Family), with a book by William Siegel. The production, characterized in the press as “a mixture of operetta, comedy, melodrama, farce, and even some burlesque,” was the opening musical attraction of the 1934–35 season at the Public Theater in New York. With a star-studded cast that included Aaron Lebedeff, Lucy Levin, Vera Lubov, Menachem Rubin, Yetta Zwerling, and Itzik [Yitzkhok/Isadore] Feld—who sang this song in the production—*A freylekhe mishpokhe* enjoyed both considerable public success and, unusual for Yiddish musicals of that era, a measure of respectable critical acceptance for its realistic character portrayals and plausible plot situations. As his first full-length

show for an actual Second Avenue area house, it also marked a personal triumph and milestone in Secunda’s career.

The show was conceived and produced primarily as entertainment—with a variety of ethnic music and dance elements (including a Spanish carioca dance tune that Secunda borrowed from the 1933 Fred Astaire–Ginger Rogers film *Flying Down to Rio* for a comic Yiddish duet), in addition to an abundance of music with perceived “Jewish flavor” and even some English lyrics. Still, underlying and threaded through its action is the question of whether parenthood is properly defined by biological ancestry on its own merits, or by rearing, nurture, and love—a pervasive theme that also informs the opening lyrics of this song. The show was also saluted in the press for its absence of vulgarity and avoidance of off-color humor, which reminds us of that general reputation among Second Avenue Yiddish comedies.

Lily, who was abandoned in infancy by her father and then adopted and reared by an uncle, Kopel Kieve, becomes engaged to a young lawyer, Sidney, who—clandestinely beguiled by Eva, an unsavory and ambitious woman with no love or fidelity to him—avoids the actual marriage. Meanwhile, Lily’s biological father surfaces in the person of Misha, a past “victim” of Eva’s, who is now an alcoholic derelict. Kopel persuades him, for her sake, never to reveal his identity, and through a clever, stage-worthy trick in which Sidney, with Misha as a silent ally, is made to witness Eva’s perfidious falseness, Sidney realizes Lily’s worth as a bride, and the wedding takes place.

It is likely that *Skríp, klezmerl, skrípe* was sung more or less in its present form by Kopel in connection with the wedding. It appears to be a composite of songs or parts of songs from earlier numbers within the play, but from the content of the lyrics, from the nature of the tune, and from what we know of established theatrical conventions that attended

such Yiddish musicals, it is logical to place the song in its entirety at the wedding scene—as a sort of reprise. Indeed, in keeping with the pattern of conventions attached by then to Second Avenue, one can also imagine that the chorus might have enjoyed yet another reprise during the curtain calls. It is also possible, however, that Secunda fashioned the present composite expressly for its subsequent publication.

—Neil W. Levin

NOTE: BIOGRAPHIES AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PERFORMERS FEATURED ON THIS RECORDING CAN BE FOUND ON THE MILKEN ARCHIVE WEB SITE [www.milkenarchive.org](http://www.milkenarchive.org)



Sholom Secunda (right) with Hymie Jacobson, 1923

## Translations

*Translations by Eliyahu Mishulovin  
Preliminary preparation by Adam J. Levitin*

(Note: Yiddish translations of the following texts can be retrieved at the Milken Archive Web site: [www.milkenarchive.org](http://www.milkenarchive.org))

### 1. *BAY MIR BISTU SHEYN*

Sholom Secunda  
Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

Even if you had a Tatar complexion,  
even if you had tomcat eyes,  
and even if you had a little limp,  
or had wooden legs,  
I would say, "It doesn't bother me."

Even if you had a foolish smile,  
or were an utter simpleton,  
even if you were as unrefined as a wild Indian,  
even if you were as common as a coarse Galician Jew,  
I'd say, "It doesn't bother me."

"Tell me, how do you explain it?"  
Okay, I'll tell you why:

Because to me you're beautiful,  
to me you have grace,  
to me you're one of a kind.  
To me you're great,  
to me you have "it,"  
to me you're more precious than riches.  
Many beautiful girls have wanted me,  
and from all of them I chose only you.  
Because to me you're beautiful ...

### 2. *IKH HOB DIKH TSUFIL LIB*

Alexander Olshanetsky  
Lyrics: Chaim Tauber

Now I am left alone  
with my longings, with my pain.  
I have picked the cards,  
and I seek my good fortune in them.  
He has replaced me with another.  
He cannot understand my great love.

He's going off to marry the other one,  
while I remain forlorn and alone.

Oh, who needs these cards.  
For naught have I waited and yearned.  
My youth is already buried.  
Fortune has made a fool of me.

I love you too much.  
I do not bear any hatred for you.  
I love you too much  
To be at all angry with you.  
They say I'm a fool,  
I know. I love you.  
I gave my life away to you,  
My heart and my soul.  
I am sick, but my thoughts  
Turn not to revenge.  
I love you too much ...

### 3. EYN KUK AF DIR

Alexander Olshanetsky  
Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

#### General Vitalin:

Ever since I first noticed you,  
something strange has happened.  
What it is I stand here and contemplate.  
I'll tell you simply:  
Everybody knows that because of you,  
I'm a changed man.  
You have thrown a spark into me, and it glows.  
You have now utterly disrupted my spirit.

#### Esther:

I cannot understand it,  
how it could happen.  
And it amazes me without end  
that I, a poor Jewish girl  
with an old, ragged dress,  
should make such an impression on you.  
You always keep company only  
with rich, beautiful ladies.  
How is it you suddenly think of me?

#### Both:

Just one look at you,  
is enough, my dear!  
You have already won my true love,  
and you will remain the crown of my heart.  
I know, my dear, that they  
will separate the two of us.  
But still the moment I first met you  
will remain sacred to me.  
Just one look at you ...

### 4. A MALKE AF PEYSEKH

Louis Gilrod

Passover is a joyous time;  
the Jew is then a king.  
He sits with his queen all adorned.  
At the seder table along with the *kharoysies*  
[sweet ritual condiment]  
and the four cups of wine.  
The queen lifts the washbasin to him in his "royal" chair.  
This king is so happy with his world.  
He smiles at his queen, and he beams.

He who has a queen on Passover,  
is happy and joyful, that I know.  
A queen like a doll,  
with her little princesses  
in their holyday finery,  
with *matza* cakes and with *matza* balls—  
a queen on Passover is the best thing.

Listen to this story—to what happened  
to a cousin of mine.  
Hear just what kind of luck he had;  
Oy, what a mess.

He'd had enough of being single,  
so he bought a wedding ring  
and married a beautiful girl.  
He fixed up a flat  
with a bed and a table, and prepared a luncheon.  
And this happened just before Passover.  
The next day after the wedding, listen to this,  
she shows up with twins from her first husband.



Oy, now he has a queen on Passover, all right.  
He's suffering and is in pain, that much I know.  
A queen like a doll  
with her little princesses!  
Now he has a problem with her,  
and he asks her, "What's going on here?"  
A queen on Passover, now, what do you think of that?

#### 5. GLIK

Alexander Olshanetsky  
Lyrics: Bella Meisel

Now I stand and think:  
What a strong power  
fate holds over everyone.  
One moment it makes a joke;  
then it quickly turns to rage.  
It can damn you and also bless you.

If it was up to me,  
if only I could  
change your strange fate,  
I would set you free,  
renew your life as well,  
and for your happiness I would pray.

Happiness, you've come to me,  
but a bit too late.  
Good fortune, you have arrived  
and filled my heart with such joy.  
I do not want to think now  
what fate will bring me tomorrow,  
so long as I have at least one moment  
when fortune is in my hands,  
and I get to dance the last dance with you.

#### 6. LEBN ZOL KOLUMBUS

Arnold Perlmutter and Herman Wohl  
Lyrics: Boris Thomashevsky

America is a *shtetl*!  
Where, I swear, life is great.  
The Divine rests on her; we should all get to live so.  
Wars, guns, or bloodshed  
we need like a hole in the head.  
Who needs an [imperial] ruler?  
The hell with kings.

Ay, it's great,  
everyone sing along:  
Long live Columbus!  
Brothers, drink a toast to life—*l'hayyim!*  
Oh, long live Columbus  
for discovering this new land!  
Be merry!  
Pay no heed to the grumblers.  
Jews, shout:

Long live Columbus!

For girls, America  
is a great place, a paradise,  
for boys here are plentiful like the sands of the sea,  
a pleasure, Oh, what a life.  
You don't need a dowry,  
The hell with matchmakers.  
And if a chump wants to marry for money,  
he's liable to wind up with a wife no one else would marry.  
Oh, it's good,  
girls sing along:

Long live Columbus!...

#### 7. A GUTE HEYM

Alexander Olshanetsky  
Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

I have written many songs,  
but in my heart  
only the song of the old country remains.  
It is full of soul, and it brings me great solace  
whenever I remember it.  
A home is love, as everyone knows.  
And one who has never had a home  
feels a deep longing and realizes  
that only he who has a home is happy.

A good home is a blessing from God.  
A good home, whatever kind a person has.  
What can be lovelier  
than being in your own home  
together with your mother and father?  
Life can be all right elsewhere,  
but it's nothing like home.  
Only life at home  
with father and mother  
is truly good.

## 8. NU, ZOG MIR SHOYN VEN

Alexander Olshanetsky  
Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

### Misha:

You can trust me,  
I will build a future for you.

### Tootsie:

Tell me when, tell me when.

### Misha:

You are my beloved, and you are precious to me.  
I would walk through fire for you.

### Tootsie:

Tell me when, tell me when.

### Misha:

There is no other woman in the world  
who would interest me,  
even if she should give me  
millions of dollars and diamonds.  
If ever I should even come close to being  
unfaithful to you, may I drop dead.

### Tootsie:

So tell me already, when will my heart will be quieted?

### Misha:

So tell me already, when will my happiness be complete?

### Tootsie:

In the middle of the night I often abruptly awake.

### Misha:

For hours I ponder what will become of me.

### Both:

So tell me already when; answer me already and say it.  
Just tell me when the date will be set,  
when I will live to see myself standing  
under the wedding canopy with you.  
So just tell me when, just tell me when, just say it.

## 9. DOS YIDISHE LID

Sholom Secunda  
Lyrics: Anshel Schorr  
*Translation of prayers by Rabbi Morton M. Leifman*

The Jew might be poor; still he's very wealthy,  
for he's rich with spiritual treasures.  
The Jew is patient; his faith in God is great.  
Even the inferno doesn't consume him.  
He is considered a descendant of kings, of honored lineage  
and wealth,  
yet every country slams the door in his face.

He laments and he weeps; he can't take any more.  
Even his laughter, oy, is mixed with a tear.  
When it sometimes happens that things go well for him,  
the world soon reminds him that he is a Jew,  
and they again hand him his "wandering stick,"  
and he must search for a new home.

When their New Year arrives, all other people  
sing and dance until they drop from exhaustion.  
But the Jew on Rosh Hashana sits in the synagogue with  
pious intent  
and hears the cantor sing a different kind of song:  
"Standing in the presence of Him who dwells in the midst  
of the glorious praises of the  
people of Israel, I become more and more aware of the  
poverty of my deeds and abilities  
and am overwhelmingly frightened and humbled.  
Nevertheless, I am here before You  
pleading on behalf of Your people Israel, for it is they who  
have sent me."

Enter the synagogue on Yom Kippur eve  
and you will hear the cantor sing  
with great emotion:  
"We declare that any and all personal vows, oaths,  
obligations, undertakings, or pledges  
that we might make as a commitment to God and involving  
only our relationship to  
Him—that if subsequently the oath be forgotten or is not  
able to be fulfilled, then let it be  
that beginning on this Yom Kippur and extending to next  
year's Yom Kippur, these vows  
are abandoned and made null and void."

But it also happens at times  
that Israel is merry  
and sings joyously, with abandon,  
as it happens on the holy day of Simhat Torah:  
“Celebrate, be happy on Simhat Torah.  
Torah is our treasure, our honor.  
Its value is beyond any reckoning.  
Its precious worth is more than can be perceived.  
So exult over this, our Torah.  
It is our strength and our light.”

#### **10. MIT DIR IN EYNEM**

Ilia Trilling  
Lyrics: Isidore Lillian

What was, was;  
now wipe away your tears  
and look toward the future.

Over bygone days  
I continue to brood,  
which causes me great pain.  
I was missing a life partner  
until I met you.

Believe me that  
I would give my life for you.

You make me truly happy now.  
I will sweeten your life.  
My love, I want you to know that.

Together with you—  
and other than you I need no one.  
It's my greatest joy  
When I take a look at you.  
Together with you  
in a fine little love nest.  
You are like sweet wine  
right here in my heart.  
Your face shines and glows like the moon.  
You are a gift sent from God, my love.  
Together with you,  
as with my father with my mother.  
Say it, my heart and soul, say that you will always be  
with me.

#### **11. MAYN YIDISHE MEYDLE**

Sholom Secunda  
Lyrics: Anshel Schorr

I have seen many women;  
among every people they are different.  
But none is as beautiful  
as a Jewish woman.  
A Jewish girl immediately enchants you  
with her glance.  
And if you just take a peek at her,  
you feel that “Jewish feeling” inside of you.

My Jewish girl, she is so pretty.  
My Jewish girl, she has a certain Jewish charm.  
Her golden hair, her teeth like pearls—  
only a Jewish girl could be so beautiful.  
A million dollars won't help you find among other  
peoples  
a girl with that Jewish charm.

#### **12. SLUTSK**

Herman Wohl  
Lyrics: Aaron Lebedeff

I recall now my little town:  
Where I first glimpsed the light of day—  
where I was born and where I grew up,  
and how as a child I would go to school there.

Slutsk, oh Slutsk, my *shtetl*, how I long for you.  
Deep in my heart you lie, my home,  
a cradle suspended on a string, and a broken bed,  
yet you're still dear to me,  
Slutsk, oh Slutsk, my *shtetl*.

On Friday night Mother used to light the  
Sabbath candles.  
Father would go to the synagogue  
and return with Sabbath guests,  
and they would sing beautiful table hymns.  
Slutsk, oh Slutsk, my *shtetl* ...

### 13. SAMET UN ZAYD

Herman Wohl

Lyrics: Louis Gilrod

A pretty, innocent girl from a poor family  
blossoms like a pretty flower.  
She gives herself to a wealthy man,  
for she longs for glamour and grandeur.  
The rich man buys her innocence for a velvet dress  
and her love for a silk blouse.  
He breaks her spirit  
and satisfies his passions;  
then he deserts her.

Velvet and silk cannot heal  
the pain and suffering of tormented souls.  
How terrible to sell virtue,  
to lose one's youth for velvet and silk.  
What good are silks that bring suffering?  
They utterly destroy innocence.  
A cheap dress and a virtuous girl,  
people admire more  
than velvet and silk.

The ambulance is at the hospital  
late at night  
carrying a girl elegantly adorned.  
Her fate drove her to drink poison,  
for a rich man had seduced her.  
She was dressed in velvet and silk.  
Her face, however, was as pale as chalk.  
When the night glimpsed the break of day,  
she was already dead—  
falling prey to velvet and silk.

### 14. HUDL MITN SHTRUDL

Anonymous

"Oh Hudl, Hudl, Hudl,  
What's up with your strudel?  
It's delicious; I really love it.  
I don't need any meat or stew,  
for I've had enough of them.  
Oh Hudl, Hudl, serve the strudel.  
Serve it."

I have a *landsman* named Dudl,  
who has a wife named Hudl,  
and Hudl-Dudl live together really well.  
And Dudl's pretty wife Hudl  
bakes an outstanding strudel.  
What a great pleasure as it melts in your mouth.  
Every Friday, when Dudl has a bit of time,  
he comes home to his wife and he shouts:

"Oh Hudl, Hudl, Hudl ..."

My *landsman* Dudl has a boarder,  
who's in love with his Hudl,  
for she cooks him a very good supper.  
And the boarder, as should be,  
delights in the supper,  
and he truly devours Hudl with his eyes.  
And when this Hudl serves the tea,  
he smiles and says to her:

"Oh Hudl, Hudl, Hudl,  
bring your strudel to the table.  
It's delicious; I love it so much.  
It's quite a delicacy,  
as it goes down so smoothly.  
Oh Hudl, Hudl, Hudl, give the strudel,  
give it already!"

### 15. UNTER BEYMER

Alexander Olshanetsky

Lyrics: Moishe Oysher

Beneath the trees the grass grows,  
Ay-lu-lu-lu-lu ...  
And the harsh winds blow.  
Sleep, my little son.

Do not sit beside the window, my child,  
for you can feel the draft there,  
and I do not want you, my beautiful one,  
to catch a cold, God forbid.

Dark clouds already fill the sky,  
just as here in my heart.

Ay-lu-lu, ay-lu-lu ...  
Sleep, my child, oh my heart.  
Ay-lu-lu, ay-lu-lu ...  
Stay healthy and be well.

## 16. IKH BIN FARLIBT

Alexander Olshanetsky

Lyrics: Jacob Jacobs

### Fanitshke:

You evoke for me an idyllic scene,  
I now have in my heart such a longing for home.  
I long for those meadows there, with their green grass.  
Oh, what I would give to gaze at them again.

### Leybke:

How the ducks on their bellies would swim in the streams,  
catch crumbs and not tire.  
We both used to sit in the summer heat,  
cuddled together, singing this song:

### Both:

"I'm in love with a pretty, lovely, sweet little girl.  
I'm in love, for you are really so refined.  
Every smile and every glance of yours  
bring my heart much happiness and joy.  
I'm in love, I'm in love  
with such a pretty girl."

Just tell me, my Fanitshke, do you still remember  
how beautifully  
the sun would reflect on the river when it set?  
How a beautiful, sweet sound used to emanate from  
the woods?  
That was a divine song from the birds.

### Fanitshke:

The nightingale used to trill and delight in us,  
and he used to sing his sweet tones without end.  
He would listen to the two of us with much joy  
and then sing, perfectly mimicking us.

## 17. SKRIP, KLEZMERL, SKRIPE

Sholom Secunda

Lyrics: Chaim Tauber

Rearing children, now that is a wonder,  
much more so than just giving birth.  
Neither day nor night  
did I rest my eyes,  
until I lived to see you all grown up.

Now I will drink like a fish  
and dance by the wedding canopy.  
I say it plain and clear,  
I will jump up onto the table  
and celebrate wildly like  
the closest relation.

Fiddle, klezmer, scrape away.  
Play a *freylekh* [cheerful tune] for the wedding.  
The faces of all the  
relatives are shining;  
let's go to the *hupa* [wedding canopy].

Drummer, strike the cymbals.  
Fiddler, let the strings split.  
Everyone is merry.  
Just look at the bride.  
She is so full of grace.  
Oy, oy, more, livelier.  
Make the circle bigger.

Oy, oy, bring the bride into the dance.  
Oy, look at Aunt Leah;  
she's telling everyone what to do.  
And Aunt Masha,  
who doesn't let herself be pushed around,  
is pushing to the head of the table.  
*Mazel tov!*

- 1. Bay mir bistu sheyn (Secunda)**  
Publisher: Warner Bros./Cahn Music Co.  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Jon Kull
- 2. Ikh hob dikh tsufil lib (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Universal MCA  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Paul Henning
- 3. Eyn kuk af dir (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Anita Olshanetsky Willens  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen
- 4. A malke af peysek (Gilrod)**  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
- 5. Glik (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
- 6. Lebn zol kolumbus (Perlmutter & Wohl)**  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Harvey Cohen
- 7. A gute heym (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Anita Olshanetsky Willens  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
- 8. Nu, zog mir shoyen ven (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Music Sales/Metro Music  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen
- 9. Dos yidishe lid (Secunda)**  
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Elli Jaffe
- 10. Mit dir in eynem (Trilling)**  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen
- 11. Mayn yidishe meydle (Secunda)**  
Publisher: Music Sales Corp.  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Patrick Russ

- 12. Slutsk (Wohl)**  
Publisher: Music Sales/Ethnic Music/Joeneil Music Catalogs  
Arrangement: Frank Bennett with Zalmen Mlotek  
Orchestration: Frank Bennett
- 13. Samet un zayd (Wohl)**  
Arrangement: Patrick Russ with Zalmen Mlotek  
Orchestration: Frank Bennett
- 14. Hudl mitn shtrudl (Unknown)**  
Arrangement: Jon Kull with Zalmen Mlotek  
Orchestration: Jon Kull
- 15. Unter beymer (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Music Sales/Metro Music  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Michael Willens
- 16. Ikh bin farlibt (Olshanetsky)**  
Publisher: Anita Olshanetsky Willens  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Patrick Russ
- 17. Skrip klezmerl, skripe (Secunda)**  
Publisher: EMI Publishing  
Arranger/Orchestrator: Ira Hearshen

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Recording: Baumgartner Casino (tracks 1–3, 5, 6, 8, 10–13, 15–17), Sofiensaele (track 7), Vienna, Austria, October/ May 2001  
Recording: Sala Sinfonica del Auditori (tracks 4, 14), Barcelona, Spain, June 2001  
Recording: Centre Cultural de Sant Cugat (track 9), Barcelona, May 2000  
Recording Producer: Simon Weir  
Recording Engineers: Campbell Hughes, Bertram Kornacher (track 9)  
Assistant Recording Engineers: Andreas Hamza (tracks 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17), Bertram Kornacher (tracks 4, 14)  
Technical Facilities: The Classical Recording Company Ltd., London  
Recording Product Manager: Paul Schwendener

PHOTO CREDITS: Cover, Kessler's Second Avenue Theatre program cover, from the show *The American Rebbetzin* (1924), courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York. Page 5, photo by Sheldon Secunda, courtesy of Shel and Gene Secunda, from the estate of Sholom Secunda. Pages 6, 23, photos from Sholom Secunda Papers, MSS 54, courtesy of the Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University. Page 7, courtesy of the International Centre and Archives for Jewish Music.

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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, Sonia Baro, Anja Beusterien, Paul Bliese, Johnny Cho, Cammie Cohen, Doris Cohen, Jacob Garchik, Ben Gerstein, Jeff Gust, Scott Horton, Jeffrey Ignarro, Ernst-Dieter Janotka, Brenda Koplin, Joshua Lesser, Adam J. Levitin, Tom Magallanes, Eliyahu Mishulovin, Shmuel Nemanov, Gary Panas, Nikki Parker, Jesse Perez, Armin Rafiee, Jill Riseborough, Jonathan Romeo, Maria Rossi, Victoria, Sheldon, and Eugene Secunda, Judith Sievers, Carol Starr, Matthew Stork, Brad Sytten, Boaz Tarsi, Anita Yarbery, Jessica Yingling, YIVO, Moshe Zeilngold, Julie Zorn; and Marty Jacobs and Marguerite Lavin of the Museum of the City of New York.

Special recognition: Eliyahu Mishulovin—for his indefatigable and in-depth research on the historic context of these songs and productions. Zalman 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. Michael Isaacson—a catalyst to the Archive's creation, who collaborated with the Milken Family Foundation in its work during the Archive's early years.

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