



**For Release:** March 4, 2014  
Video/Photos/Tracks available

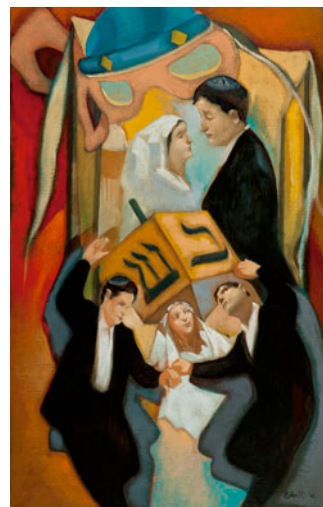
**Contact:** Bonnie Somers  
310-570-4770 or [bsomers@mff.org](mailto:bsomers@mff.org)

## **Milken Archive of Jewish Music Virtual Museum Introduces Volume 4, Part 2**

### ***Prayers and Celebrations Throughout the Jewish Year: Weddings, Funerals, and Memorial Services***

If you're in the midst of planning a wedding you've probably already started thinking about one of the occasion's most important components: music. And not just the klezmer band to kick off the party after the crushing of the glass, but music during the ceremony to accompany the processions and the lighting of candles, to segue between different parts of the ceremony. The *freylakhs* and *bulgars*—and, of course, the *hora*—are a lot of fun and should by no means be dismissed, but often it's the music that transpires during the ceremony that lends the occasion the most gravitas and cultural context—that imbues it with the aura of a major event in the cycle of life.

Such music for Jewish weddings comprises one of two new releases available from the Milken Archive of Jewish Music. As part of the multi-album [Volume 4: Cycle of Life in Synagogue and Home](#), these albums are the latest installment in a series of releases featuring music of Jewish ritual and life-cycle events. And with a composer roster that reads like a who's who of Jewish music, it is music that serves its “functional” purpose without sacrificing artistic expression.



Need a wedding march? This album has three by [Ernest Bloch](#), the Swiss-born émigré many consider to be history's greatest “Jewish” composer. Like other famous émigrés,

Bloch left Europe to avoid persecution and found great success in America—serving posts at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Mannes College of Music, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and UC Berkeley. Bloch’s wedding marches, performed here by organist and composer Barbara Harbach, are brief and functional, yet easy to appreciate for their lilting rhythms and simple melodies.

Got *sheva b’rakhot*? The “seven blessings” that constitute the second part of a traditional Jewish wedding, which are recited after the exchange of vows and rings and the reading of the *ketuba* (marriage contract), are featured here in three settings. [Simon Spiro's arrangement](#) pays homage to the Eastern European choral-cantorial (*khorev shul*) style and draws on previous compositions by Sholom Kalib and Meyer Machtenberg. In Spiro's hands, and with his backup choir (the all-male cantorial choir Coro Hebraico) singing like a well-oiled machine, the performance is by turns festive, joyous, somber, and deeply emotional.

Settings of the [sheva b’rakhot by Meir Finkelstein](#) and Morris Barash occur in the context of larger wedding services that include other obligatory liturgical texts as well. A more straightforward approach (compared to Kalib’s) and Finkelstein’s silky-smooth tenor are among the highlights of this service, but listeners will also delight in the tastefully adapted Hollywood melodies in his settings of *Ma y’didot mishk’notekha* or How Lovely Are Your Tabernacles (Flashdance’s *What A Feeling*) and *Halleluya* (*Superman*’s main theme) that bracket the *sheva b’rakhot* and lend the otherwise dignified service a tinge of pop catchiness.

The [wedding service by Morris Barash](#) (who cut his teeth singing in Zeidl Rovner’s chorus and later studied with Roger Sessions) features the dark baritone cantillations of Cantor Raphael Frieder and compliments the organ-choral accompaniment with a chamber ensemble. The three versions of the *sheva b’rakhot* are a study in contrasts, both in terms of cantorial delivery and musical approach. But listen briefly to any version and it is easy to understand why these sung blessings serve to instill solemnity into the completion of the nuptials.

Equally lovely, but divergent in mood and feeling, are several art song settings featuring Portland's noted cantor Ida Rae Cahana. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco ([\*V'erastikh li\*](#)) and Charles Davidson ([\*Ani l'dodi\*](#)) play with minor scales and exotic (to our ears) modes to achieve a sound that is both romantic and slightly haunting. [\*Samuel Adler's I Will Betroth Thee Unto Me\*](#) (featuring cantor Rosalyn Jhunever Barak) substitutes organ for piano and features a more forceful vocal delivery, while Max Helfman opts for an open accompaniment and flashy vocal melismas on "[\*Voice of My Beloved\*](#)." When juxtaposed as they are here, the contrast of the larger, more formal services with the intimate art songs seems to mirror the dual nature of marriage as an endeavor that is both private and public, communal and individual—a bond forged between two people but within the context of family and community.

### **Funerals and Memorial Services**

Of course, the cycle of life involves more than betrothal and dancing, which is where the second release comes in. Featuring music for funerals and memorial services, it's a not-too-somber-yet-poignant counterpoint to the wedding music. And with multiple settings of several different texts, it too is a study in contrasts.

Compare Michael Isaacson's settings of [\*Enosh\*](#) and [\*Shiviti\*](#) with [\*Aminidav Aloni's Ma adam\*](#) (see also Aloni's setting of *Shiviti*). Isaacson's settings are mournful and evocative but also have the air of a Broadway solo number, while Aloni's showcase more complex choral writing and textbook techniques. These are particularly effective in instances such as *Ma adam*, where the music and text mimic the evanescence of earthly existence: *We are like whiffs of breath/Our days are like a passing shadow/Our days are like a passing shadow/A passing shadow/Shadow*. Born in Tel Aviv to *halutzim* (pioneers) parents, Aloni came to the U.S. in 1945 and studied in Los Angeles and New York, composed for television and musical comedy and became a fixture on the LA jazz scene. Cantorial figure Samuel Fordis recruited Aloni to become organist at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, CA, then commissioned him to compose a Sabbath eve service, which ignited in

Aloni a passion for Jewish liturgical music that continued to burn throughout his life. Aloni's settings featured on this album offer a glimpse into his expansive body of Jewish liturgical music.

The Psalm *Adonai ro'i*, ("The Lord is My Shepherd"), conveys an aura of comfort, calmness, and faith in God to "restore the soul." Thus, it's no wonder that it has become commonplace in funerals within Jewish tradition and beyond. Volume 4 has four takes on the famous verse. [Herbert Fromm](#) utilizes solo flute lines interspersed between choral verses to evoke the pastoral setting implied by the shepherd theme, while the solo voice and sparse organ accompaniment of [Michael Isaacson's version](#) suggest the vacant emptiness felt by those left behind. Shatin's setting for unaccompanied chorus has a similar patina, while [Martin Kalmanoff's composition](#) for cantor and full orchestral accompaniment—sung entirely in English by Alberto Mizrahi—conveys the magnificence of the Psalm's closing line: "And I shall dwell forever in the house of the Lord." Kalmanoff was as versatile as he was adept, having composed operas, musicals, and popular songs sung by the likes of Elvis and Dean Martin. That skill and adroitness is more than apparent in this four-minute setting, which starts out melancholy but absolutely soars. If there is an afterlife, one can only hope it's as good as Kalmanoff and Mizrahi make it sound.

Taken together, these two albums emphasize how music enhances our consciousness as it guides us through life's liminal moments, whether it be the food of love at a wedding or the sustenance of a soul in mourning.

Founded in 1990 by philanthropist Lowell Milken, the Milken Archive of Jewish Music reflects the scope and variety of Jewish life in America. The Archive's virtual museum [www.milkenarchive.org](http://www.milkenarchive.org) is an interactive guide to music, videos, oral histories, photos and essays.

***For information or interviews, contact [media@milkenarchive.org](mailto:media@milkenarchive.org).***

Connect with us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/MilkenArchive](http://www.facebook.com/MilkenArchive) and on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/milkenarchive](http://www.twitter.com/milkenarchive).